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Hinduism Basics – Traditional Overview

- The Most Organized Eternal Way Of Life



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|| tanno hamsa prachodayāt ||

|| jnānadev tu kaivalyam ||

An article by [Indiaspirituality Blog](#) (Amrut)

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॥ ॐ ॥
॥ hari OM ॥
॥ shrI guru sharaNam ॥
॥ shrI Adi Sankara sharaNam ॥
॥ shrI rAmakriShNaarpaNamastu ॥

1. Release Notes

For latest updated article, please visit [HTML](#) version. If you find any typo and wish to contribute by suggesting a correction, please visit [Google Docs](#) version.

Note: This article contains sanskrit words in itrans or IAST format. Firefox recognises 'a' and 'ā' as different characters while Chrome and it's derivatives like Opera using webkit rendering engine considers letter 'a' and 'ā' as same. i.e. if you search for 'shāstra', FF will not highlight 'shAstra' while chrome will highlight both 'shāstra' and 'shAstra'. **Using chrome browser is recommended.** Please read [Transliteration key](#) for further details.

Skip to [Table Of Contents](#) | Start reading 1st article: [What are shAstra-s](#)

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Google Docs does not support large files and sometimes crashes while loading long article. Longer the article, longer it takes time to load article and more are chances of browser crashing, which is irritating, especially when you are in between your work This article is 255 pages long. Hence no new content will be added to this article unless it is necessary.

Happy to Release on Sri Adi Shankaracharya ji's Jayanti

On the holy occasion of Shri Adi Shankaracharya Jayanti, which is on 23rd April 2015, we have made an attempt to share basic information on Hindu Dharma. We will try to improve this article as much as possible.

Version Number Coding

Unlike Traditional Publishing where the article is typed offline, proofread and edited before it is published, the author directly types it online on Google Docs.

Since this article is constantly updated, its version number is updated in following way.

Version number is written in the format - x.y.z

x = New Heading 1

y = New Heading 2 or 3

z = Minor corrections, addition in an existing article and correcting typos.

Date of latest update is mentioned along with latest version.

Suggesting Corrections is welcome

Please note that this is not a complete article. Beginning of incomplete section is marked as **[under construction]** and end is marked as **[/under construction]**

There are some typos and inconsistencies. If and when time permits, we will add more information.

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Please help proofreading this article.

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2. Credits and Acknowledgements

Too Close to revere, No amount of reverence and gratitude enough

Guru and Self are not different, still we must all approach to Guru with reverential attitude and as a servant. Same is the case with God. God is the Self, rules our heart and is too close to be considered as a separate from us.

On the other hand, no amount of glory, reverence or worship can repay the debt of the grace of Guru and God.

While they are too close to speak about them 'formally', we are not worthy enough to pay tribute to them. This servant will always remain indebted finding not enough words to sing their glory.

Whatever good you find in this work is the grace of my Guru and God, all errors are mine.

It would not be possible to acknowledge all those whose independent contribution towards sanAtana dharma is invaluable. The author, Amrut, would extend gratitude and thank online sources, spiritual websites for publishing gigantic works like Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, vedas, purāṇa-s and various other texts on the world wide web. Amrut would also like to thank owner of discussion group Advaita-L mailing list Shri Vidyasankar Sundaresan ji and owner of forum HDF (Hindu Dharma Forums) known by screen name @satay who encourages healthy discussion on sanAtana dharma.

Amrut would also take this opportunity to extend thanks to members of these two groups especially members of Advaita-L namely Acharya Shri K. Sadananda ji and Shri V. Subramanian ji among others who are traditionally well versed in sanAtana dharma.

Indebted to Kanchi Paramacharya

Amrut indebted to Kanchi Paramacharya, Jagadguru Sri Chandrashekharendra Sarasvati Mahaswami, as Amrut has got much knowledge about traditional Hindu Dharma from the book, [Hindu Dharma - Eternal Way of Life](#), which is the collection of teachings of Kanchi Paramahcharya. Kanchi Paramacharya was called as the 'Living God'.

Indebted to Sringeri Shankaracharyas Abhinav Vidyatheertha Mahaswami and Sri Bharathi Tirtha Mahaswami

Amrut is also indebted to Sringeri Shankaracharyas as Amrut has been immensely benefitted from the Divine Life of Jagadguru Sri Abhinav Vidyatheertha Mahaswami, who is

a living example of a saint who has not only experienced the Supreme Truth of Advaita Sthiti, but had practiced many disciplines like Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga and Bhakti as means to Final Emancipation. His divine life are recorded by Jagadguru Sri Bharathi Tirtha Mahaswami and published in a book, 'Yoga, Enlightenment and Perfection of Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Mahaswami (AV)'.

A [brief intro](#) of the above mentioned book is given by advaita academy. Hard copy is available in bookstores managed by Sringeri Matha. Soft copy in PDF and EPUB format are available for free down on [Official Website](#) dedicated to Sri Abhinav Vidyatheertha Mahaswami.

This book contains a detailed account of His intense spiritual practices that culminated in His Enlightenment and Jivanmukti at a very young age. Swami ji practised many spiritual disciplines and realized truth by various ways like -

- Hatha Yoga
- Bhakti & Karma Yoga
- Kundalini Yoga
- Nada Anusandhana
- Meditation on Divine forms
- Intense reflection on Brahman and Nikvikalp Samadhi
- Nirvikalpa Samadhi by Grace of Guru
- Final Enlightenment, permanent rooting in it and Jivanmukti

Indebted to Puri Paramacharya

Amrut is also indebted to Puri Shankaracharya Jagadguru Srī Bhārati Kṛṣṇa Tirtha for his contribution in decoding hidden mathematical formulas in the holy vedas.

Gratitude to Shri Santosh ji

Amrut would also like to thank a brotherly friend Shri Santosh Kumar Ayalasangamajula, the author of [Mahapashupatastra Blog](#) who has contributed to the article '[Women and Sanātana Dharma](#)'. Santosh ji has contributed to some wonderful articles like explaining the origin of universe from varṇamālā by Śiva and Śakti. The creation occurs from sound i.e. sanskrit vowels. He has also contributed to establishing glory of Śiva and Śakti as supreme Brahman. He has also decoded the encrypted hidden meaning of vedic verses and hymns like Mahākāla Suktam and Skambha Suktam. Santosh ji has also refuted the left hand interpretation of our scriptures. Amrut is influenced by Santosh ji's works and it might be reflected in taking yogic stand to explain inner meaning of some vedic and purāṇic hymns, stories and riddles. Indeed Yoga is one of the best way to explain certain rules and regulations for living life as a Hindu.

Thankful to Josué MOËNS

Thankful to [Josué MOËNS @LumApps](#) for giving free addon TOC (Table of Contents), which appears in Sidebar on Google Docs and Correctly Auto Numbers Headings and Sub-Headings with up to 6 levels. Upon Refresh, this addon correctly rennumbers headings in entire article thus saving a lot of work and human error while numbering headings manually. You do not need to delete old heading number. It just gets autocorrected upon refresh.

Big Thanks to Google and it's Team

This work would not have been possible without free services like Google Docs by Google.

3. Preface

Purpose of writing this article ...

There are many books and articles written to explain Hindu Dharma. This is just another attempt to share basic information about Hindu Dharma from Traditional Point of View.

Unlike Abrahamic religions which preaches 'One God, One Book' theory and asks one to pledge his/her belief to one particular person for their salvation, the philosophy which is applicable to all mankind, Hindu Dharma, is distinctive in many ways. Topics are discussed in brief.

This article is not supposed to be taken as an authority but as a rough guide. It aims to make people aware of Hindu Dharma from traditional Point of View (POV). There are some reasons for presenting traditional viewpoint. There are three types of people in every society.

1. Theists
2. Atheists
3. Anti-theists

While theists believe in God, atheism is 'lack of belief in God'. Anti-theism is to hate the word 'God' and anything related to it. They revolt against anything related to God, do not believe in 'dogmas', rejects them and ironically they openly 'preach' their 'set of beliefs' i.e. their 'dogmas'.

There are fourth kind of people who are called as 'critics'. Some prefer to call themselves as 'fact finder' or 'explorer of truth'. Such people are generally cannot develop 100 % faith in God because of doubting nature. There are many fact finders who have genuine urge to find the truth. Such analytical minds are respected by Hindus even though they might be critical of some part of system traditionally followed. They are often needed and are praised as dharma is not to be accepted with a blind eye.

Since Britishers invaded India, the history has been changed by them and later on by Historians of Maoist-Nehruvian Ideology. There are many forces often well organized than theists who leave no opportunity to denounce Hindu Dharma and thereby create a sense of 'inferiority complex' in hearts of Hindus. Sometimes Hindus in foreign land hesitate to call themselves as 'Proud Hindu'. Reformers often denounce caste system and some anti-hindu forces try to cash on these reformers. On the other hand, there are many Hindus who hardly know about their own religion. Initially, the author had in mind to quote each and everything that is said. However due to limited knowledge and time constraints it was decided to drop scriptural references for most sections. Another reason to drop scriptural references was that articles written in scholarly way, are many times not easy to

understand. They become more and more complex and the author has to presume that the reader has some level of basic understanding about traditional Hinduism.

This article is aimed at the beginners and hence attempts are made to write in simple way. Knowledgeable readers may find references from Hindu scriptures.

One more important reason for writing this article is that modern people and kids may not practice religion devoutly, they may chose to ignore it but atleast they should not hate our religion. They should understand that whatever is or was practiced was the best that suited at that time. Saints preach keeping time, place and present circumstances in mind.

A Positive way of writing an article ...

Āchārya-s of advaita order like Madhusudan Sarasvatī and Vidyāraṇya Svāmī in their works like 'Advaita Siddhi' and 'Panchdaśī' (Panchdashī) have adopted a positive way of expressing their thoughts. Though they have defended their sampradāya by refuting opponent's objections, it is done so in such a way that many times an average reader not well versed in polemical debates and not aware of the objections raised by rival sects or religions will never know that such an objection was ever raised. The reader may feel that the author has either raised a hypothetical question or the author has just removed misconception or sometimes reader won't realise the a particular section is refuting objections. Inspired by these great āchārya-s, the author has also tried to write things in a positive way trying to spread positive thoughts, vibrations and emotions in the hearts of readers.

Practical Implementation is important than Dry Philosophy ...

What is more important is practical implementation. Wise say that *an ounce of practice is better than tonnes of theory*. Dry philosophy is of *no use*. It does not change the way we live. Here attempts are made to give basic information about Traditional Hinduism, clear some doubts and create interest in readers so that they take up study of Hindu dharma, the Hindu way of Life.

Article written as a 'Hindu'

General trend which is accepted and appreciated by many writers is to write as a 'neutral' third person. Articles written on wikipedia are written in such a format.

Views which are writer's personal views are written in such a way that the writer successfully expresses his views without sounding biased. A writer is generally not unbiased as we are not free from likes and dislikes.

However the author 'Amrut' does not adhere to such a views. Amrut does not wish to shy away from Hindu background. Amrut is a proud practising Hindu, who has poured heart and soul in his efforts to progress spiritually and understand his own dharma. Moreover this article is not written with commercial mindset hence sounding neutral to sell work is not

the motto. There is also a mindset among certain writers (and readers) that writing as a Hindu might not be a good idea. Amrut does not agree with them.

Amrut uses 'we' to collective speak for general Hindus or uses to word 'author' or at times 'Amrut' instead of writing 'I'. Amrut does not shy from writing, 'We Hindus ...' This is another purpose of writing this article to make fellow Hindus understand that we do not need to 'sound neutral' in order to 'be neutral'. There is no need to shy away from our identity. While fellow Hindus will feel Amrut as their very own, Non-Hindus might find this style unusual, but as Swami Chinmayananda has said, 'First Let Hindus be Hindus'. Primary intention is to share information on Hindu Dharma with Fellow Hindus. Non-Hindus are also welcome to read, share and adapt this work.

A positive mind will always see positive in dharma and try to apply as much as s/he can in practical life. Things that cannot be understood or digested are ignored for personal spiritual progress until one finds an explanation.

Maybe due to writing as third person, readers may feel that they are reading 'Forward' instead of 'Preface'.

Article written as a Third Person

'M', (Mahendranath Gupt), the author of Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita), has never used the word 'I' for himself in the entire book. He always referred himself as third person as 'M' or 'Master' as he was a headmaster of school so people used to call him 'Masterji'. 'M' chose to write in such a way so that the biography and discourses are always centered around Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna is always in the center stage in the entire book. The author remains unnoticed. I have not seen such a humility by any other writer. Inspired by Shri 'M', Amrut has also avoided to use the 'I' word. Amrut has attempted to write articles with this approach with humility and reverence in heart for his Guru and God. Article is written with positive intention to show Hindu Dharma in a positive way from Traditional Point of View.

4. Introduction

Some info about article ...

|| Hari OM ||

Namaste,

Dear Divine Souls, this article is a humble attempt to share some basic info about the eternal dharma, Sanatan Dharma from Traditional POV.

The article covers wide range of topics including

- Importance of Guru
- What is shāstra
- What is dharma
- Concept of Īśṭa devatā
- Mantra: Meaning and Importance
- 14 abodes of knowledge (vedas, puranas, etc)
- Status of women in sanātana dharma
- 8 types of marriages,
- Different types of Yoga
- Varṇāshram dharma (caste system)
- Why a dharma should be eternal
- Religious Tolerance
- Vegetarianism and Nonviolence
- Idol worship and beyond
- *and many [more](#) ...*

The article also explains why Hindu Dharma is the most organized, integrated spiritual and practical way of life.

There are many sects and sub-sects in Hinduism. They have different philosophies each claiming itself to be the ultimate truth and the true essence of vedAnta. The author belongs to advaita school of thought. Hence one may find tilting towards advaita in some places. Though the author practices advaita at personal level author respects all traditional philosophies.

There are two types of works

1. Polemical
2. Informative

1. Works of Polemical nature are often filled with logic and scriptural reference, refuting objections of opponent(s) and raise objections to rival sects or religion under discussion.
2. Another approach is to write in an informative way where all complexities are avoided and concepts are explained in simple way.

Present work is of informative nature. As explained earlier, the author has tried to speak positively about Hindu Dharma than trying to be critical of other religions. Though at times concepts of other religions are briefly touched for the sake of comparisons, the author has not tried to denigrate any religion or philosophy.

There are three ways to interpret any verse or a story

1. Literal
 2. Symbolic - connected with mind
 3. An encrypted form of Yogic process
- Literal meaning are useful for instilling faith and devotion in God.
 - Symbolic interpretations are indirect pointers in which any story or incident or verse is interpreted with our inner qualities or for pointing out a particular approach for the benefit of meditator. Moral of the story is important than the story itself. This approach is directly connected with workings of mind - both conscious and sub-conscious.
 - Yogic Interpretation is concerned about exploring the inner universe, dealing with subtle bodies. It is encrypted way of describing inner universe called as pinḍāṇḍa.

Attempts are made to make one understand that one must not always try to interpret scriptures in literal sense. Symbolic and yogic interpretations are also very useful for spiritual progress.

|| Hari OM ||

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6. Transliteration Key

The "Indian languages TRANSliteration" (ITRANS) is an ASCII transliteration scheme for Indic scripts, particularly, but not exclusively, for Devanagari (used for the Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit, Nepali, Sindhi and other languages).

The ITRANS computer package also enables automatic conversion of the Roman script to the Indic. It was used to compile the Hindi Song Book on the internet. This became an invaluable source for the words of movie and other popular lyrics of Hindi and some related languages. It also helped popularize the ITRANS romanization scheme for storing and sharing material in the Indic languages, particularly Hindi and Sanskrit, in the electronic media where the English-keyboard Roman script is a very convenient input medium.

Following [transliteration key](#) is adapted. There can be inconsistencies. We request interested readers to suggest corrections. Another scheme or keyboard is called as IAST keyboard. It contains diacritical marks above or below letters. Some characters in both sanskrit and roman script which are frequently used are displayed below.

अ = a

आ = A or aa or ā

स = sa

श = Sa or sha or śa, hence शास्त्र is written as shAstra or SAstra

ष = Sha or ṣa

च = ca or cha

छ = chha or Cha

सीता = sItA or sītā

न = na

ण = Na or ṇa

सरस्वती = sarasvatī (notice capital 'I') or sarasvatī

मणि = maNi (notice small 'i')

ॐ = OM (both letters upper case)

anusvAra (◌̣) i.e. dot above word is either written as 'n' or '.n' or 'M' or '.m'

visarga (◌̣:) is written as 'H'

कृष्ण = kRRISHNa or kriShNa or kRShNa or krShNa or kruShNa or kṛṣṇa

Plural sanskrit words are written with '-s' e.g. veda-s and not vedas. SAstra-s and not SAstras.

For full unicode chart, please visit [this](#) link, scroll down and look for the file *itrans code 120108 final.pdf* to either view or download file in pdf format.

Since we are primarily using itrans scheme, hence we do not follow the basic English convention of starting a new line with capital letter when it comes to writing sanskrit words. e.g. Dharma is written as dharma (without capital D).

'da' (द),
'Da' (ड),
'dha' (ध) and
'Dha' (ढ)

are four different characters.

The correct spelling is 'dharma' (धर्म). If we type capital 'D' instead of small 'd' then the word would become ढर्म (notice the difference between 'ध' and 'ढ'). Again just typing capital 'D' and omitting 'h' i.e. Darma would result into 'डर्म'.

If new line starts with English word then capital letter is used. However in some instances, when IAST keyboard is used, sanskrit with first capital letter might be used. The word must contain a diacritical mark so that reader will understand that it is a sanskrit word. While using IAST keyboard, 'sa' and 'Sa' mean same word 'स' while 'sa', 'śa' and 'ṣa' mean 'स', 'श' and 'ष' respectively.

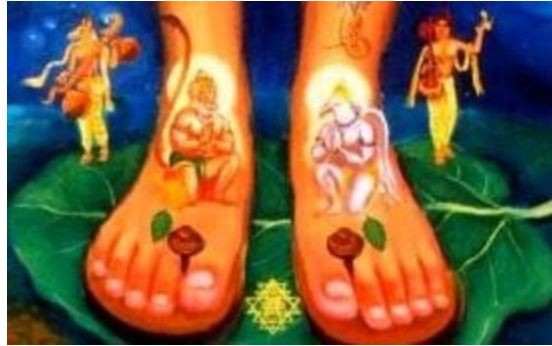
Initially reader may find it difficult to read words written in ITRANS as it may not appear pleasing to eye since we are not accustomed to read capital letters in the middle of a word. The idea is to convey the pronunciation of saMskrit (sanskrit). Typing 'ā' instead of capital 'A' is a better option as it is more pleasing to eye. In books, this approach is used. The author was not earlier acquitted with IAST keyboard, hence initially itrans scheme is used. If time permits, we will add diacritics to sanskrit words like SAstra and shAstra would be changed to śāstra. IAST has a little problem. In MS word or Writer (document editor) or in pdf viewer and in Chrome (webkit based browser), letters with diacritical marks are recognised as different characte

There are inconsistencies in syntax. Some words are very popular in English like *sanskrit* and *upanishads*. In this case, they may or may not be written as *saMskrit* and *upanishad-s*. Some words like *vedic*, *Atmic* wellbeing are a mixture of both languages. It is expected from readers to interpret them correctly. Sometimes SAstra is written as shAstra. Both are correct. The reason for using both is that while typing in word or writer or any document editor, it generally autocorrects correctly spelled *SAstra* to wrongly spelled *Sastra*. (Capital 'S', 'sh' and 'ś' mean the same sanskrit character 'श'. To avoid this unforced error *shAstra* is used.

If time permits, we will try to change attributes of *saMskrit* / devanagri words from regular to *italics* so that they can be easily spotted.

7. Dedication

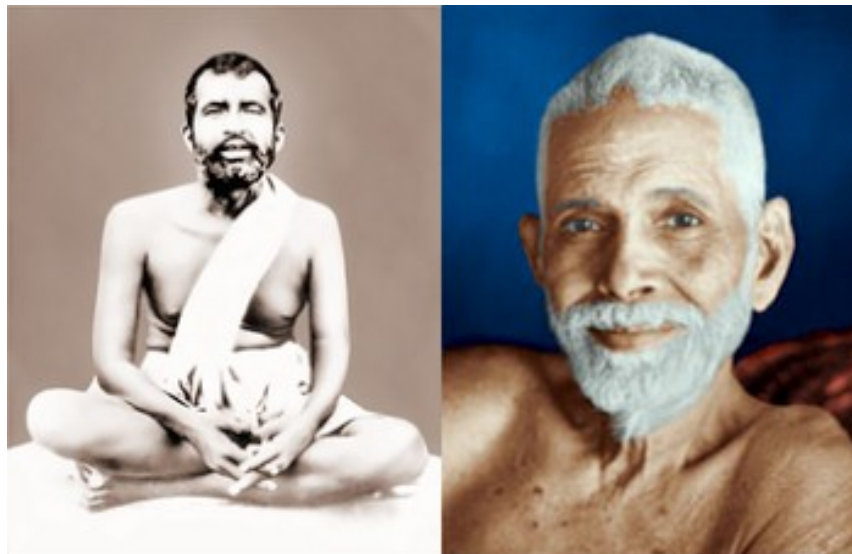
This article is dedicated to Lotus feet of Guru Λ (As it was my guru who introduced this ignorant soul to vedAnta and the great lineage of *Adi SankarAcArya*)



Jagadguru Shri Adi SankarAcArya ji the revivalist of vedic dharma.



Dedicated to Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Shri Ramana Maharshi whose teachings have deep impact on Amrut's life.



I would also like to dedicate this article to the lotus feet of all the acharyas and Gurus who have kept the holy tradition of Guru-Shishya Parampara alive.



Whatever is good is my Guru's, all errors are mine.

How can Dedication to Brahman, the Supreme Self, substratum of entire universe be forgotten!!!

Lets begins our journey. Let us try to understand what Hindu Dharma (HD) is, it's uniqueness and know the reason why and how HD is best organized approach of living a harmonious life.

The basic texts which are referred by Hindus are called as shAstra-s.

8. What are shAstra-s?

As per Kanchi Paramacharya, *SAstra* (also spelled as *shAstra* or *śāstra*) is an order or commandment. Wise say that a *SAstra* covers all aspects of life. Hindu Dharma is the most organized way of life where each and every aspect of life be it spirituality or day-2-day activities are coded and organized in a proper and systematic structure. Topics covered include,

- karma kANDa - vedic and Agamic - pUrva mimAmsA (rites and rituals, priestly duties, balancing forces of nature, staying in harmony with nature for good of all living beings mankind, animal, plant and mineral kingdom)

- vedAnta and other spiritual texts for progressing spiritually and experiencing highest truth by various ways and methods. Realising essence of vedAnta means to achieve moksha, be liberated from cycle of birth and death.
- dharma smriti-s for civil laws and rAja-dharma (dharma of king, art of administration, Judiciary system)
- Grihya sUtra-s (Guidelines for day-2-day living)
- dhanurvedyA (art of warfare)
- gandharva veda (art of music and singing)
- kauTilya artha shAstra (art of financial management)
- chANakya niti, vidur niti, etc (art of politics)
- ayurveda, charak samhita, suShruta samhita, etc (art of healing, medical practice, surgery, blood transmutation, etc)
- nATya shAstra (art of drama, acting)
- nritya kalA like bhAratnATyam, kathaka, kathakali, kuchipuDi, etc (art of dancing, expressing devotion by dancing, used in paurANika dramas)
- Art of codifying secret messages like mathematical formulas, secrets of subtle bodies) in riddles
- Devotional hymns and independent compositions for devotional purpose and instilling devotion in hearts of all.
- varNa vyavasthA (Division of work by dedicating particular work to particular community)
- haTha yoga (haTha yoga pradipikA, Siva samhita, gherANDa samhita) and other forms of yoga and tantra like patanjali yoga sUtra-s, dattAtraya yoga sUtra-s, Goraksha banI, Thirumandiram, etc (keep body fit, rise above body consciousness and merge in Brahman i.e. God, supreme consciousness)
- nyAya shAstra / tarka shAstra / vaiseshikhA (school of logic and reasoning)
- vyakaraNa like pANiNi sUtra-s, aShTAdhyAyi and it's commentary, maheshvara sUtra-s, etc (grammar)
- *and many more ...*

Covering all walks of life in a systematic way shows the intelligence, organization, management power and deep thinking ability of our ancestors. SAstra touches all walks of life.

Discussing matters related to dharma is called as 'shAstrArtha'. This is especially done when establishing or objecting a siddhAnta (philosophy). In order to prove his/her point, one needs to quote shAstra-s in support of his/her claim. shAstra is one of the six pramANa-s (proofs or testimony) called as shabda pramANa accepted for argument. Other pramANa-s are mentioned later. All shAstra-s are not considered equal in authority. veda-s and vedAnta (upanishads) are considered as top-most authority. These points are discussed in later sections.

According to upanishads, we are not physical body but pure consciousness. The ultimate goal of shAstra is to be know our true nature, be one with Brahman and attain moksha, the freedom from cycle of birth and death and attain immortality.

shAstra-s are not just dry philosophies. They can be practically applied in our life. The purport of shAstra-s, which is Self Realisation, is experienced by great saints.

Great rishi-s intuitively heard or saw verses with divine eyes and ears or they realised them as a flash in heart (realisation of truth by experience). They digested their meaning and explained to others in the way they have understood, but without compromising the core teachings. Hence one concept may be explained in different ways and all explanations are correct. In this sense, we can say that shAstra-s are collection of experience of innumerable saints since time immemorial.

Any SAstra i.e. Hindu spiritual doctrine, begins and ends with peace chant called as shAnti Mantra (shAnti mantra). Even independent works start with worshipping either God or Guru or both as in case of viveka chudAmaNi. This shows that concern for universal well-being and respect to God and Guru is deeply rooted within Hinduism.

Lets start our article with one such peace chant found in yajurveda.

Opening Invocation

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु
मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Nir-Aamayaah |
Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu
Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet |
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||*

Meaning:

- 1: Om, May All become Happy,
- 2: May All be Free from Illness.
- 3: May All See what is Auspicious,
- 4: May no one Suffer.
- 5: Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

Above shAnti mantra adapted from a verse of brihadAraNayaka upanishad of yajurveda. Please note that this mantra is not seen in the beginning of upanishad, but similar verse is found in Br. Up. 1.4.14

Another shAnti mantra from taitariya and mANDukya upanishad of atharveda is

ॐ सह नावतु /
सह नौ भुनक्तु /
सह वीर्यं करवावहै /
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*Om saha nāvavatu
saha nau bhunaktu
saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai
tejasvi nāvadhītamastu
mā vidviṣāvahai |
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||*

*Aum! May He protect us both together; may He nourish us both together;
May we work conjointly with great energy,
May our study be vigorous and effective;
May we not mutually dispute (or may we not hate any).
Aum! Let there be peace in me!
Let there be peace in my environment!
Let there be peace in the forces that act on me!*

More shAnti mantra-s can be found [here](#). Many Indian States have their own mottos. Indian Navy, Air force and Army also have their mottos. These mottos are taken from our SAstra-s.

Please find the link [here](#). It shows the richness of our culture. Every Indian must take pride in our rich culture. Indian Law also has many elements adapted from our dharma smriti-s. Though the repentance given in smriti- may not be practical today, but they show how well our forefathers thought of intensity of crime and gave equivalent punishments. Smriti-s show us that our forefathers thought in many directions. Having more than 36 dharma smriti-s (including 18 major and 18 minor) are proofs of showing deep thinking ability, structural and organizational ability of our ancestors. Infact there is more than one text found in almost all walks of life be it vedAnta, veda-s (karma kANDa), or any other topic listed above.

Lets now study what is Hindu Dharma.

9. An Introduction to Hindu Dharma

A dharma without any name, often called as sanAtana dharma, popularly known as Hindu Dharma, is the most ancient dharma of the world. Whenever we are being asked the question – What is Hindu dharma, we find it difficult to answer the question, as what to include and what to omit to explain in brief. Lets try to understand our dharma in brief.

9.1. What is Hindu Dharma?

Put in simple words in one line, Hindu Dharma is a way of Life.

Hindu dharma is a dharma which covers all aspects of life from spiritual to practical. Even day-to-day mundane activities are connected with inner purity and Atmic well-being. Hindu dharma takes into account, the well being, peace and harmony of individual, family, society and universe as a whole. Every action as described in Hindu scriptures is not only beneficial to the individual practicing it, but it is connected to the universal well being. Like other dharma-s, Hindu Dharma (HD) is also based on divine revelations, which are called as Shruti-s. The pillars of HD are veda-s, which are considered as the supreme authority.

9.2. Final Goal of Hindu Dharma

Every human being, whether theist or atheist or anti-theist wants happiness and strives for it. We all try to make arrangements as such that we do not have to face any trouble in future. In case of any negative incident that may possibly happen in future, we make preparations in advance to face trouble. For example we earn and save money, invest it or deposit in bank so that it can be useful in the time of trouble. Every man, whether one believes in God or not is striving to remain happy forever and to avoid sorrow. In other

words, men makes effort to avoid sorrow. If there is no sorrow, then there is happiness. Hence removal of sorrow is happiness which shines forth by itself without any effort.

It is nature of mind to avoid sorrow and search for happiness. Men searches for happiness in material object or in person. Spiritual path is also similar. There is nothing wrong to desire for happiness. However, the approach of laymen is not correct. A person is looking for happiness outside him, but in reality it is inside us says shAstra-s. Our mind has become extrovert and tries to find happiness in external objects through five senses. In Hinduism, we train our mind to turn inside and restrain itself from hankering behind sense objects. Spiritual path is the reverse journey of mind from extrovert to introvert. Hindu dharma enquires into the root cause of sorrow and comes to a conclusion that forgetting our true nature, which is eternal, is the true cause of suffering. Hence a systematic effort to realise our true nature is necessary.

The final goal of HD is eternal, everlasting peace and bliss. Since death is inevitable, this is possible only when one becomes free from the cycle of birth and death.

Since men cannot idle and our spiritual journey starts with doing karma (action). Since all actions first originate in mind and intention behind action is more important than action itself, HD teaches us with what intention (bhAva), any karma is to be done. HD teaches us how to remain satisfied and happy, how our actions affect others, how our actions (mental, verbal and with body) could be used for the well-being of all and in spreading peace and harmony. By doing actions, as prescribed in our scriptures (shAstra-s), one not only purifies internally, but also does good for others. The very action of doing good for others purifies us internally.

bhagavAn in gltA (BG 3.3) says that “there are 2 paths – path of action (karma yoga) and path of renunciation (GYAna yoga). Among both, path of knowledge is superior.” After doing works or vocations as prescribed by shAstra-s for some time, one attains sufficient inner purity to renounce the very actions (karma) that brought them inner purity and adopt the path of renunciation to finally attain Liberation. Liberation or Moksha means to realize our true nature, that we are not body but eternal Atman, which is pure consciousness and to merge with Brahman, the eternal God consciousness, dissolving our individual identity as incarnated soul.

10. Hindu Dharma, the eternal religion.

Hindu Dharma (HD) or sanAtana dharma (SD) is the oldest dharma. There was a time when there was no other dharma practiced. History does not dare to investigate into the origin of our dharma as in ancient days, oral traditions prevailed. Since HD was the only dharma, hence it does not need to have a name. Since the only religion practiced during ancient times was Hindu dharma, hence there is no process of conversion to Hinduism. 'Conversion'

is not a requirement in Hinduism nor is there any 'conversion' ceremony where you pledge to a belief in a particular savior, nor you will find a claim that your sins gets washed away the moment you convert to the 'right' religion claiming to be the only truth.

After other religions were established, in order to separate itself from other religions, Hindus started to call themselves as practitioners of sanAtana dharma. The word Hinduism is not found in scriptures.

10.1. Few words about the word 'Hindu'

The word 'Hindu' was coined with foreigners. 'Hindu' is derived from River Indu also known as River Sindhu. People living in the vicinity of Indus river (Sindhu river) i.e. in the Indus valley were collectively referred to as 'Hindus'. This civilization also extended to River Gangā. When Gangā is involved, we cannot forget River Sarasvatī and River Yamunā, also known as Jamunā. (There is another river originating from River Brahmapūtra known as Jamunā in Bangladesh). Indus (Sindhu), Gangā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī shared common civilisation. Our civilisation is called as Indus-Sarasvatī civilisation where Sarasvatī collectively refers to Sarasvatī, Gangā and Yamunā.

Hinduism and sanātana dharma are newly created terms. 'sanātana' means 'eternal', 'dharma' means 'religion'. Hence, HD is called as 'The Eternal Religion'.

10.2. Why dharma should be eternal?

The word 'dharma' is being mistaken to be limited to external rites and rituals and putting on external marks that identify you with a particular religion or a sect. However, the word 'dharma' is very vast.

Let understand what the word dharma covers.

10.2.1. What is dharma

sAyanAcArya and vArtikakAra (Sri sureshvarAcharya) while commenting on Sri Adi Sankara's commentary on taittiriya upanishad Tai. Up. 1.11 '*satyam vada, dharamam chara*' has given one of the definitions of 'dharma' as '*agnihotra*'. This definition is from vedic POV, since vedas and upanishads talk about path of karma (vedic rituals, karma kANDa)) and path of renunciation of karma kANDa (GYAna mArga), hence IMHO, the AcArya-s have given definition in context to the verse under explanation. Acharya-s point out that practising vedic rituals like agnihotra just once is not enough to make us inwardly pure. Practising

rituals just once do not qualify one to practice GYana mArga. They should be diligently practised until one attains sufficient inner purity.

The word 'dharma' is very vast. It includes body functions. dharma of eye is to see. dharma of mind is to think. dharma also includes a predefined or expected way of life. dharma of a teacher (AcArya) is to teach and so on.

'dharma' could mean, virtue, character, mark, quality, nature, custom (tradition), justice, way of life, law (natural or manmade), duty (includes all kinds of duties like duty towards society, family, nation, etc), 'that which is established', a particular condition, right (rites and rituals), morality, customary actions, practice, observance, religion, etc. Please check more meanings on spokensanskrit.de. In short, dharma covers all aspects of life.

maharShi manu has described 10 qualities under the word 'dharma' in manu smriti 6.92

धृतिः क्षमा दमोस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियग्रहः ।
धीविद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् । ।
- मनुस्मृति ६।९२

Ten principles to be daily applied are

1. dhruiti - courage / Self Command
2. xamA (kshamA) - Forgiveness
3. dama - Control over mind
4. asteya - Non-stealing
5. shauca - internal and external cleanliness
6. indriya-nigraha - control over senses
7. dhi (buddhi) - to understand rightly by logical thinking
8. vidyA - knowledge discrimination between right and wrong (AtmA-anAtmA-viveka, nitya-anitya vastu-viveka). Scriptural knowledge of AtmA is expected.
9. satya - Truth
10. a-krodha - Absence of anger

mahAbhArata in anushAshaNika parva 116.28-29 describes ahimsA as 'param dharma', the supreme dharma or the best dharma

(ahinsA is correctly spelled as 'ahiMsA' or sometimes typed as 'ahi.nSA' and pronounced as 'ahinsA')

ahiMsA is best or foremost dharma (parama dharma), ahiMsA is the best restrain (sayyam), ahiMsA is the best donation (dAna) and ahiMsA is the best meditation (tapasyA)

अहिंसा परमो धर्मस्तथाहिंसा परो दमः । अहिंसा परमं दानमहिंसा परमं रतपः । ।
 अहिंसा परमो यज्ञस्तथाहिंसा परं फलम् । अहिंसा परमं मित्रमहिंसा परमं सुखम् । ।
 -महाभा. अनु. पर्व. ११६ । २८-२९

ahiMsA is the best ritual (yaGYa), ahiMsA is the best fruit (of actions and yaGYa), ahiMsA is the best friend (mitra) and ahiMsA is the foremost happiness

- mahAbhArata Anu. Parva. 116.28-29

From the above definitions of dharma, one can easily understand that ‘practising’ dharma ‘makes’ one ‘human’. dharma induces human qualities, hence the false conception that humanity is the best religion or humanity is above all religions is not true. It is dharma that makes one human. dharma simply does not mean ‘rites and rituals’ or ‘dos and donts’, as evident from the quality *dhi* indicating contemplative nature of human beings and not blindly accepting anything yet staying within the vedic dictums. Whatever shAstra-s say *does not* override basic human values. Hence we must follow ‘the law of the land’ in a way that basic human values are kept intact and justice is upheld.

For convenience, we will divide dharma into two parts, changing and unchanging. Way of life, means of earning, etc come under changing part. Reflexes, emotional response, likes and dislikes, etc are unchanging. Even in ancient days a person would get angry, feel hurt, had likes and dislikes.

10.2.1.1. Mind

bhagavAn in gltA says that each and every desire (vAsanA) is in the mind. Adi Sankara says that mind is that which ‘keeps thinking’ or in Sri Ramana Maharshi’s words, ‘Mind is nothing but continuous flow of thoughts’. Mind does not die with death of body and stays alive until one is liberated. Mind is very important in spirituality. All kinds of thoughts, emotions, and desires are within mind. Mind is also interchangeably used with *jlva*, and *antakaraNa*. Spirituality is direct dealing with the mind. Since mind is ancient, the old ways of controlling mind are also valid and does not become obsolete. It is said in *viveka chuDAmaNi* that destruction of desires are nothing but liberation. Connecting all the dots, we can conclude

that veda-s are a systematic and guaranteed approach to control mind, train it, give it proper direction and finally get liberated. It is the dharma (foremost duty and birth right) of each and every soul to get liberated (achieve moksha)

10.2.1.2. Logical approach

After understanding the meaning of dharma and what it covers, let's understand why dharma has to be eternal. Here, we do not talk about the 'changing' part, but the 'unchanging part'. Infact, it is our duty to change the 'way of life' and 'civil laws' to suit present circumstances. The only care to be taken is to make sure that the new law does not oppose to veda-s which are eternal, unchanging.

While other religions were founded or claim to be purified form of previous corrupted religions at a particular time, the topmost canonical text i.e. veda-s are said to be present eternally without beginning or end. Western world believes that earlier humans were living like barbarians with no spiritual law and after some time a messenger of God appeared and taught them the purpose of Life. However, we believe the reason for veda-s being eternal is due to the fact when God creates universe and life, God also makes available all the resources necessary for living. So it is not that after a man becomes thirsty, God created water to quench thirst. Water already existed before humans came into existence or as the wise say, the soul was bound in flesh and bones and in the 5 bodies made up of combinations of 5 great elements (panca-mahAbhUta-s – earth, water, fire, air and space) and 3 guNa-s - sattva, rajasa and tamasa.

Since God has created Food for us, God must also give us knowledge on how to eat food i.e. eat raw or cooked, store it and regenerate food. This comes under dharma. Each organ has it's own dharma i.e. it's function.

Wise say that **knowledge** is already present, it is just waiting to be discovered.

Since God has created this world, we have to live in harmony with nature. Going opposite to nature is unwise and is disaster waiting to happen. Take modern example of pollution.

If we go on higher plane, we all know that one day we are all going to die and this world will come to an end as whatever is born has to face death.

Philosophically speaking, in the beginning, there was nothing but God, then God created the universe and human beings. It is also believed that one day God will also destroy his creation and we will all merge in him and the next creation will follow and the cycle will go on. The only way to escape is to be with God in this life itself. Once we got separated from God. Our spiritual journey is to return back to our creator. We are not body. Our real nature

is Brahman which is eternal. Hence God must have also taught us the way to know our true nature. Compassionate, All loving God cannot simply leave us without giving us a path to realize our true nature. Hence in SD, it is strongly believed that no one created veda-s. They were revealed to great rishi-s intuitively. As long as the world exists and we live in duality, there has to be a way to reach and merge within our creator. Wise say that whatever thoughts are given are given to us by God only. In this sense too the knowledge about other walks of life is a result of grace of God via medium. dharma has to be eternal.

10.3. Myth of Aryan Invasion Theory

There is a popular belief that the original teachings of veda-s were brought to India by foreigners of German origin. These people were of superior race known by the name 'Āryan'. It is they who taught us veda-s. In other words, we are not descendents of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa but belong to a foreign land. This land does not belong to us. There is also another inferior race predominantly in our South India known by the name 'Draviḍa'. However this is not true.

The word 'Āryan' is not sanskrit word. The actual word is 'Ārya' (without 'n'). It is an honorific title like 'Sir' in English. Max Muller has himself clarified that he had referred to 'ārya' as a honorific group of people and not as a race 'Āryan'. It were Britishers who for instilling inferior complex in the hearts of Indians and creating rift between the North and South India spread the lies so that they can break our culture and spread their own. When one comes to know that you do not belong to the land you live in i.e. India, we will not feel proud of our country and culture. When one accepts that whatever is western is superior, then the slave mentality will naturally develop amongst Indians. It will become easy to rule. Britishers realised that without breaking the existing Gurukul system and Indian culture, they will find it difficult to rule India. Hence they adopted such wicked politics.

The word 'draviḍa' i.e. draviDa refers to collective name for people from Andhra, Telengana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. Word 'drāviḍa' i.e. drAviDa refers to collective region. 'drāviḍaḥ' (drAviDaH) means 'Dravidian Languages'. Five primary Dravidian Languages are - Tamil, Telugu , Kannada , Malayalam and Tulu. Since Tamil is widely spoken in Tamilnadu state, it is also included as a 'drāviḍa-desam' i.e. Land of Dravid (drāviḍa) speaking people. In general, South Indian languages which have originated from five primary languages like Malyalam are also included as draviḍa language. Alternatively draviḍa can be split into two words - 'dra' and 'vid' which when translated means 'the place where three oceans meet'. In Adi Sankara's biography, during debate with maNDaNa mishra, we find use of the word 'draviDa-shishu' which means residing in a place where three rivers meet, a place near

Varanasi. shishu is taken as 'son'. Hence it means 'son of a place where three rivers meet'.
[citation needed]

Britishers advocated that Rāma was an āryan while Rāvaṇa was a drāviḍa. It is a fact that Rāvaṇa was a rishi-pUtra and a Brāhmin. According to their theory, Rāvaṇa cannot be a Brāhmin as only āryans (north Indians) were Brāhmins, the knower of veda-s. They contradicted themselves and exposed their bigotry.

Main stream archeology does not support Aryan Invasion theory. The topic of Aryan Invasion is in itself a separate topic and beyond the scope of this work, however, we will put forth few points here. In Mahābhārata, many places all around India are mentioned. When these places were identified and an excavation was carried out, the artifacts found in all mentioned places were dating to nearly same period with similar design, use of raw materials and manufacturing methodology. There are claims that original Dwārka city of Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa is found submerged. There were planned cities that flourished even 12,000 years ago.

It has been proved from scientific studies that DNA of North and South Indians are same.

Ours is an ancient civilisation which is unparalleled. Another fake claim by westerners is that Ṛg veda is the oldest of all veda-s and was brought by Aryans. Ṛg veda originated in India in Sindhu-Sarasvatī civilisation (Indus-Sarasvati Civilisation). There is another claim that atharva veda was composed much later and is newest of all 4 veda-s. This is not true either. Kanchi Paramacharya says that we find reference to atharva veda in 10th maNDala of rig veda. All veda-s existed in oral form in memory of brahmins and rishi-s. In order to preserve veda-s, they need to be remembered orally. This is explained later in appropriate section.

11. Is humanity the greatest religion?

In recent times, so-called seculars and revisionists often say that 'Humanity' is above all religions, humanity is greatest of all religions, etc. However they miss the basic point and the purport of vedAnta. This only shows the ignorance about what Hindu Dharma is, specially what the word 'shAstra' means or covers. shAstra does not simply mean parroting verses or doing rituals and rigidly holding onto obscure, outdated and orthodox beliefs. Adi Sankara (Shri Adi SankarAcArya ji, one of the greatest saint who revived our eternal vedic tradition) says that if there were no shAstra-s (canonical scriptures) then there would be no difference between humans and animals i.e. humans would be living animal-like life without shAstra-s. Contradictory to popular belief that 'humanity' is the greatest religion, it is the scriptures that makes us live like humans. Humanity is just one aspect of scriptures, it is not

the end of road. Abiding in peace & bliss and in non-dual state of consciousness is the supreme goal of Life. The unborn supreme reality of SD is called as brahman, which is sat (truth), chit (pure consciousness) and Anand (eternal bliss). Corrupt practices, rigidity, misunderstanding of shAstra-s and committing crimes in the name of SD does not make SD the religion of forest dwellers. The very path of advaita is such that violence will automatically drop from the heart of meditator. bhagavAn in gltA asks us to stay neutral to likes and dislikes, develop 6 qualities like restrain and control of mind, have patience, have faith, etc, and develop fourfold qualities like

1. discrimination (viveka),
2. dispassion (vairAGYa),
3. six qualities (shaTsampatti) and
4. mumukshatva (burning desire for liberation).

(shaTsampatti) six qualities as mentioned in viveka chuDAmaNI are

1. shama (control over senses),
2. dama (control over mind),
3. uparati (saturation, patience)
4. titikshA (staying neutral to likes and dislikes)
5. shraddhA (faith in guru, God, scriptures and yourself. You must keep faith in your decision to progress spiritually)
6. samAdhAna (to stay in a focused state of samAdhi or to stayed focused on goal)

An vedAntin detaches himself / herself from external and internal (mental) objects and desires. It is an established fact that as sattva guNa (mode of goodness) increases, divine qualities like compassion, forgiveness, unconditional love, peace, etc) increases and becomes predominant guNa while lower animal qualities gradually fades away. Hence there is no question of a vedAntin practicing or preaching violence. Here the word 'violence' means to act or think with the intention of hurting or destroying others. 'Violence' is the destructive approach of life. We must not take words literally and argue that even breathing is violence as it kills microorganisms. This is explained in detail in later section '[Nonviolence and Vegetarianism](#)'. To understand in a better way, one has to live vedAntic life under proper guidance of a guru or an AchArya. What matters is how much is implemented in our practical life and not what is parrotted.

Now let us try to understand what are the core philosophies of Hinduism

12. Core Philosophical Beliefs of Hinduism

There are many sects in Hinduism. Core Beliefs can change with the philosophies that sects adhere. The author, Amrut, will explain the core philosophy from advaita viewpoint.

Core beliefs of Hinduism are:

1. One Supreme Godhead - Brahman

- a. Brahman is attributeless, formless, unchanging, unmanifested, eternal, unborn supreme reality
 - b. Brahman is sat-chit-Ananda i.e. Truth-Existence-Bliss or Truth-Consciousness-Eternal Bliss
2. Brahman is indescribable. It is beyond the reach of 5 senses. Hence from absolute viewpoint, Brahman cannot be described.
3. Brahman is non-dual in nature. Anyone who realizes the true nature of Brahman, merges in it, losing his/her individuality identity.
4. Brahman is pure consciousness. Anyone who has raised his/her consciousness to this level enters into nirvikalp samAdhi, the highest state that consciousness can ever ascend. Hence it is said that the knower of Brahman is Brahman itself, as the process of observer (experiencer), object of observation and process of observation dissolves into oneness. In other words duality of observer (meditator, devotee) and object of observation (God) dissolves into Non-dual consciousness.
5. Brahman's potency is mAyA - the dynamic power
6. Brahman and mAyA are inseparable and unborn
7. Brahman can exist without mAyA, but mAyA cannot exist without Brahman. Brahman can stay in inert state. Brahman is like canvas and mAyA is like paint brush, colours and painting. Canvas can exist without any painting, but in order to paint something, canvas is needed.
8. Though unborn, mAyA is not experienced in the state of nirvikalp samAdhi, which is a state of realising our true nature as Brahman, a state which transcends mAyA and it's three guNA-s - satva, rajas and tamas
9. mAyA is called as garbha (womb) or prakRti as it creates the world with it's three guNa-s.
10. There are two types of unmanifested Brahman - Higher and Lower - refer BG 8.18-20. Higher Brahman is nirguNa brahman which is attributeless and remains untouched by mAyA and it's creation. Lower Brahman can be referred to as formless Ishvara, omnipresent, all powerful, who is mAyA pati, the lord of mAyA. For sake of simplicity, Brahman two types of Brahman are not taught.
11. Brahman takes the form of trinity brahmA-viShNu-rudra for creation, preservation and destruction.
12. Whenever any form of Ishvara is worshipped, formless Brahman is worshipped.
13. Whenever any form of Ishvara is eulogized as sole creator, preserver and destroyer, then it is the eulogization of Brahman only.
14. Brahman is inside all creation (as a cause) and is also not in the creation at the same time (as Brahman remains untouched it creation).
15. Creation is inside Brahman, but Brahman is not touched by it.

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16. From absolute viewpoint, neither creation (in reality) is inside Brahman, nor Brahman (in reality) is inside creation. This is because, the creation is not absolute reality. When creation is absent nor there is mAyA (because mAyA is introvertedly merged into Brahman i.e. is in inert state and does no activity) then one and only Brahman exists as said in nAsadiya sUkta, bhagavad gItA BG 9.4-6 and chatusloki bhAgavat, a part of bhagavAt purANa BP 2.9.30-36.
17. Truth (realilty) never dies, and untruth (unreal) never exists (BG 2.16). An example of untruth / false is Rabbit's horn. A rabbit does not have a horn.
18. The inbetween state, which is experienced yet is not eternal is called as mithyA (Mithyā, मिथ्या). Though mithyA is translated as 'illusion', at times, it gives wrong impression. Sri vidyAraNya svAmI in panchadashI has said that mithyA is 'that which is neither real nor unreal'. Madhusudan sarasvatI in his scholarly composition 'advaita siddhi' has cleared many doubts about the word 'mithyA' and has given five definitions of 'mithyA'. mithyA is often translated as 'unreal', which again gives wrong impression while explaining certain concepts like creation, solid experience of the world as live in, etc. There is no perfect word for mithyA. We may translate mithyA as 'relative reality'.
19. Two levels of reality (truth) - relative and absolute. The state of nirvikalp samAdhi is said to be absolute truth. Relative reality is not eternal truth. It is dual in nature It needs or is dependent upon the witness or experiencer. Relative reality is further split into empirical reality and dream reality. So three types of realities are -
- Empirical reality or vyavahArika satya - True in waking state, is continuous i.e. next day the reality is experienced as continuity of yesterday. Absent in deep sleep and dream world.
 - Dream reality or prAtibhAsika satya - True in dream state. Is abstract, disconnected with previous night or dream. Absent in deep sleep and practical world.
 - Absolute reality pArmArthika satya - Eternally present in all three states of consciousness (as the cause of all). World exist because Brahman exists and not vice versa. Exist independently even when all three states are absent i.e. one rises beyond three states of consciousness. Hence this state is called as 'super consciousness' or 'God consciousness'.
20. Creation is 1/4th part of Brahman as mentioned in purusha sUkta
21. Mind is not destroyed until all desires (vAsanA-s) are uprooted by contemplation on Brahman and being steadfast in it.
22. During rebirth, mind along with 5 senses transmigrates into another body. CAusal body or kArANa sharIra is said to be indestructible until moksha.

13. Is Hinduism Pantheistic, Panentheistic, Polytheistic, monotheistic or henotheistic?

Pantheism is the belief that the Universe (or nature as the totality of everything) is identical with divinity, or that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent god. **Pantheists** thus do not believe in a distinct personal or anthropomorphic god.

Panentheism meaning "all-in-God", also known as Monistic Monotheism, is a belief system which posits that the **divine – whether as a single God, number of gods, or other form of "cosmic animating force" – interpenetrates every part of the universe and extends, timelessly (and, presumably, spacelessly) beyond it.** Unlike pantheism, which holds that the divine and the universe are identical, panentheism maintains a distinction between the divine and non-divine and the significance of both.

In pantheism, the universe and everything included in it is equal to the Divine, but in panentheism, the universe and the divine are not ontologically equivalent. God is viewed as the soul of the universe, the universal spirit present everywhere, in everything and everyone, at all times. Some versions suggest that the universe is nothing more than the manifest part of God. In some forms of panentheism, the cosmos exists within God, who in turn "transcends", "pervades" or is "in" the cosmos.

Polytheism refers to the worship of or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals. In most religions which accept polytheism, the different gods and goddesses are representations of forces of nature or ancestral principles, and can be viewed either as autonomous or as aspects or emanations of a creator God or transcendental absolute principle (monistic theologies), which manifests immanently in nature (panentheistic and pantheistic theologies).

Henotheism is the belief in and worship of a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities that may also be served.

Monotheism is the belief in a single all-powerful god, as opposed to religions that believe in multiple gods.

Note: Here, in monotheism, it is not necessary for God to be impersonal. God can have form or without form, but he is the sole almighty worthy of worship.

There is a lot of confusion as what is the exact philosophy that fits Hinduism, as more than one definition fits well in Hinduism. It looks like Hinduism is the fusion of all philosophies. The confusion arises because we either take only absolute reality or relative reality.

Acceptance of more than one form of God is true from relative or empirical reality, however, from absolute reality, there is just one God - Brahman. In real sense, no one philosophy can be exclusively applied to Hinduism.

After clearing this confusion, on the basis of two realities and various states of consciousness and taking additional factors into consideration, we explain the presence of other philosophies in Hinduism.

But before we move ahead, we will take certain factors into account.

- Since Brahman created universe from itself, universe is a part of it. It is his divine expression through his mAyA (energy).
- Brahman is independent of his creation, but his creation and jIva-s (souls) are dependent upon him for their existence.
- Creation (jagat) and jIva-s (souls) are part (anSha) of Brahman. Brahman is whole (complete in itself).
- Since both jIva and jagat are created from Brahman, they are qualitatively same, but quantitatively different. Jagat is created from 1/4th part of Brahman, jIva is infinitesimally small.
- jIva does not have any gender. In one birth it can be masculine, in next feminine.

- Mind is not destroyed until moksha. jIva when associated with mind creates unique personality built on personal interpretation and unique perception of experiences it passes through. In this sense, each one of us are unique. No two souls are equal. Demi-gods are highly evolved souls than us. King of demi-gods bhagavAn Indra is highly evolved soul than demi-gods and experiences 100 times more bliss than them.
- For inner purification, worshipping many Gods and demi-gods is encouraged, however, upon getting sufficiently inwardly pure, rites and rituals, worshipping only one God is practiced.
- Siva and shakti are Identical and different only for name sake. They are inseparable just like fire and it's heat. They both interpenetrate each other and are interdependent. This experience of union is called as sAmrasya.

This along with the points explained in the 'Core Beliefs of Hinduism', let's continue to understand how other philosophies can find support in Hinduism. We will again take definitions one by one.

***Pantheism** is the belief that the Universe (or nature as the totality of everything) is identical with divinity, or that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent god.*

Pantheists thus do not believe in a distinct personal or anthropomorphic god.

sanAtana dharma accepts the concept of avatAra and wholeheartedly accepts capability of Isvara to exist and manifest in different forms, which need not necessarily be only human. Hence sanAtana dharma or Hinduism does not fit into the definition of pantheism as Hindus have sung glories of personal God since time immemorial.

Pantheism rejects personal God, hence cannot be accepted.

Panentheism meaning "all-in-God", also known as Monistic Monotheism, is a belief system which posits that the **divine – whether as a single God, number of gods, or other form of "cosmic animating force" – interpenetrates every part of the universe and extends, timelessly (and, presumably, spacelessly) beyond it.** Unlike pantheism, which holds that the divine and the universe are identical, panentheism maintains a distinction between the divine and non-divine and the significance of both.

In pantheism, the universe and everything included in it is equal to the Divine, but in panentheism, the universe and the divine are not ontologically equivalent. God is viewed as the soul of the universe, the universal spirit present everywhere, in everything and everyone, at all times. Some versions suggest that the universe is nothing more than the manifest part of God. In some forms of panentheism, the cosmos exists within God, who in turn "transcends", "pervades" or is "in" the cosmos.

Panentheism can find support in some vaiShNava and Saiva philosophies, but it's allowance that *more than one form of God that can penetrate the whole universe and extends beyond it* is not acceptable as it only makes other Gods at par with their chosen deity. Saiva philosophies like Kashmir Shaivism, Siva-advaita, siddha-siddhAnta-paddhati accept Siva as supreme, who has form and is also formless. Same is the case with shakta-s. Siva is replaced by shakti. Some Saiva philosophies consider viShNu as God without compromising the superiority of Siva. This is because unlike vaiShNava-s who only accept Brahman as personal God, Saiva-s accept that Siva, who is Brahman, has both form and is formless. Hence viShNu and Siva are same or equal in their formless aspect. Here the two, does not remain two, but are one. In other words, no two Gods can be considered as supreme while still retaining their individual personality. This rejects panentheism based upon above definition adopted from wikipedia.

Polytheism refers to the worship of or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals. In most religions which accept polytheism, the different gods and goddesses are representations of forces of nature or ancestral principles, and can be viewed either as autonomous or as aspects or emanations of a creator God or transcendental absolute principle (monistic theologies), which manifests immanently in nature (pantheistic and pantheistic theologies).

Polytheism can find support in Hinduism in the veda-s in the samhita and brahmaNa sections. Vedic ritualists known as mimamsaka-s believe that different Gods exist independently and are not controlled by a supreme Godhead. veda-s themselves give the fruits of incantations and vedic rituals and not the supreme Godhead. Hardcore mimamsaka-s do not believe in Godhead and reject the theory of one God as central and sole controlling authority. Verses explaining one Supreme Godhead as the sole controlling power are considered as arthavAda (exaggeration). They reject vedAnta on this basis. This attitude has been rejected by Sri Adi SankarAchArya jI. Though SankarAchArya jI accepted vedic rituals, AchArya has limited its use to 'chitta-shuddi' (inner purification). After purifying heart and mind, vedic rituals are to be rejected and one enters into purely monotheistic philosophy which is contemplation on *formless undivided* Brahman. Once one starts practising this philosophy, the devotee stops daily worshipping of personal Gods.

Again, **polytheism though is defined here in wikipedia has different definition amongst Abrahamic religions. They consider it to be 'idol worship of more than one deity'**. Hindus never worship Idols. Idols are useless stone images until and unless they are consecrated. So if idols are Gods then why are they consecrated? And who is invoked or called in to reside in Idol. It is the power or shakti of God that is invoked and requested to reside in Idol, thus making idol worthy of worship. Idol worship is not just 'idol worship' it is 'ideal worship'. We worship the ideals behind the divine personality of Godhead. Resurrecting glories of God, his divine deeds and divine play naturally cultivates and deepens bhAva (spiritual emotion and attachment) towards personal God, thereby purifying mind and steadying it, making it ready for meditation. Alternatively *we Hindus do not independently worship nature spirits who work autonomously and are not under anyone's sway. Hence we are not pagans in context with the definition of polytheism as maintained by Abrahamic faiths.*

In order to explain creation, preservation and destruction, veda-s and purāṇa-s sing glory of many forms of Gods. However, it is mentioned in both veda-s and purāṇa-s that there is only one God and that one God becomes many. This multiplicity is based on the work done by Brahman through his Māyā. Whenever any form of God is glorified as Supreme Brahman, it is the glory of formless Brahman only. Form is added for the convenience of devotees. In every religion, one needs a medium to reach God. In Abrahamic faiths, it is their divinely chosen saviour through which one reaches heaven. In Hinduism, it is done by worshipping a form of God under the guidance of a guru or āchārya. Hinduism is unique as it does not ask us to pledge in belief of one particular saviour. We do have great respect for Guru-s, however, they are not worshipped as God but are highly revered as they are chosen medium of God and hence are God-like to us.

Gods or Demi-gods are also worshiped to gain material objects or achieve objectives or for siddhi-s or to increase qualities. Yet all Hindus believe in concept of One supreme Godhead - Brahman. Sometimes to gain certain qualities a particular form of God is worshipped. For example, to increase intelligence gaNesha is worshipped, for heroism (shaurya), kartikeya (skanda, murugan), who is leader of army of devatA-s (demi-gods) is worshipped, for brahmachArya (celibacy), one-pointed devotion, courage and valour we have hanumAn. Sometimes female forms are worshipped by men for removing lust inside them.

Polytheism can be rejected on above basis, as it accepts that one than one form of personal God are supreme. As said earlier, either only one personal God is considered as supreme by one sect or the formless God is considered as supreme. Hence polytheism can be rejected as sole philosophy of Hinduism.

***Henotheism** is the belief in and worship of a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities that may also be served.*

Since **Henotheism** does not describe its philosophy in detail like that in case of panentheism or on the nature of God, whether God can be formless or has to have a form, **Henotheism** seems to be one of the best definition that describes Hinduism.

However if we think of the combined culture practiced by whole hinduism, Henotheism seems to fit into the religious belief along with elements of panentheism. If idol worship is exclusively connected to polytheism, then we will have to add polytheism as well. Though one God is worshipped as 'Brahman', the supreme Godhead, other forms of God or his emanations or parts like visvaksheNa (gaNesha equivalent of vaiShNava-s) is worshipped. In vedic karma kANDa and in daily sandhyAvandanam ritual of brahmins, navagrah tarpaNa is done (worship of nine planetary demi-gods). vaiShNava brahmin skips navagrah tarpaNa so as to make everything that is worshipped to be either viShNu or part of him. Though viShNu and it's avatAra-s are worshipped, they are treated different representations of him and hence not different from him or they are parts emanated from him. In either case viShNu is the only God that vaiShNava-s worshipped. In addition to this male-female pair like viShNu-laxmi, viShNu-tulsi, Siva-pArvatI or Siva-shakti, etc are also worshipped. So one God is worshipped, but other forms are considered worthy of worship. Hence henotheism can be said to be the philosophy of part of Hinduism. ***As mind purifies and is intoxicated with Ishvara bhakti, only one God as Brahman is worshipped. Idol worship also drops, as God resides in our heart. If we strictly say that No God except one true God is to be***

worshipped, then even henotheism can be accepted upto certain point and then it has to be rejected.

***Monotheism** is the belief in a single all-powerful god, as opposed to religions that believe in multiple gods.*

Note: Here, in monotheism, it is not necessary for God to be impersonal. God can have form or be without form, but he is the sole almighty worthy of worship.

Monotheism is said to be the topmost philosophy as preached by Adi SankarAchArya. No other God, either for material benefits or as a supreme Brahman is worshipped. Idol worship is also not practised. No parts or emanations of God are worshipped. Hence monotheism also fits into a part of hindu philosophy.

Hinduism as a collective culture of many philosophies is henotheist-panentheistic-polytheistic from viewpoint of relative reality. Hinduism is monotheistic from Point Of View of absolute reality. It is monotheist from relative reality for some sects who are of the opinion that God can be experienced separately and devotee can be in eternal company of his unconditional, infinite love and infinite grace.

Though there are many God in Hinduism, for an individual, only one God as Brahman is preferred to be worshipped as Supreme God. This chosen deity is called as Īśṭa devatā. There are reasons for preference of worship of one God. One of the reasons is one-pointedness. Let's understand the concept of Īśṭa devatā.

13.1. Concept of Īśṭa devatā

The is a common misconception that Hindus are Idol worshippers. No Hindu is an Idol worshiper. Idol worship is the worship other than God. It's not 'Idol worship', it is 'Ideal worship'. We worship the ideals behind the personality of God.

When one worships and chants holy name of Īśṭa devatā, say Bhagavān Rāma, with faith and dedication, then the qualities of Īśṭa devatā begins to manifest in the devotee. In this case, the qualities of Bhagavān Rāma like Truthfulness, compassion and love for all living beings,

etc begins to manifest. This is because, the stuti-s, stotra-s and other material that we read creates a divine character of our Īṣṭa devatā in our mind. When any incident like Rāma-Rāvaṇa-yuddha is narrated or recalled, the whole incident is erected in our mind and mind stays absorbed in it. When one chants mantra of Īṣṭa devatā, or gazes at his picture, seeds of divine qualities of Īṣṭa devatā are sowed in heart. When 'ghee' of devotion is constantly poured into our hearts, these divine qualities are cultivated and gradually begin to blossom in our hearts. One pointed devotion to one Īṣṭa devatā as Supreme Brahman is important for divine transformation of heart.

Sects like Vaishnavism believe in Viṣṇu, having a definite form, to be a Supreme Brahman. They worship none other than Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) or Rāma. All other forms of Īshvara are inferior to Viṣṇu and subordinate to him. Though other forms of Īshvara are revered, they are not worshipped as Supreme Brahman as one-pointedness is necessary. Just like one country can have only one Prime Minister (PM), there can be only one Supreme Brahman. One person will worship only one form of God. Worshipper of Rāma will not worship Kṛṣṇa.

Śaiva-s believe in Śiva as supreme Brahman. For them, Śiva is both with form and formless. Initially, devotee worships Śiva with form. After they have sufficiently purified themselves inwardly, they begin to worship Śiva-tatvam which is formless. The journey is from 'OM namaḥ Śivāya' i.e. 'I (humbly) bow to Lord Śiva' to 'Śivoham' meaning 'I am Śiva'. Here Śiva is not a person but formless aspect, Śiva tatvam, i.e. pure consciousness.

Smārta-s worship five forms of God - Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Śakti, Viṣṇu and Sūrya. Though they do have a form, their real form is formless. In other words one brahman have many rūpa-s (forms) but it's svarūpa (True form) is formless only. There is a tradition to worship natural stones which are round or oval shaped in place of idols to remind us that true nature is formless. Even in Viṣṇu temples there is supposed to be a round stone called as Śāligrāma which is considered as formless representation of Viṣṇu, which is Brahman. In Smārta tradition, one God (Īṣṭa-devatā) is placed in center and four are placed in four corners. Deity in center is the main God for a devotee i.e. his Īṣṭa devatā and all other forms are secondary and support him in his spiritual quest. All five are worshipped with an understanding that all are manifestations of Brahman and are equally potent. Different family members can have their own Īṣṭa devatā and can swipe their Īṣṭa devatā in center for worship. After attaining sufficient purity, a smārta will renounce temple worship and will contemplate on formless aspect of God. In the in-between state, many chose to do mental worship of their Īṣṭa devatā.

Similar is the way of worship of Ganapatya-s and Saura-s, the worshippers of Gaṇapatī and Sūrya deva. They may keep other deities in their home temple, but they consider their Īśṭa devatā to have form and also be formless.

Some following tantra will activate kuṇḍalinī and will worship their deities mentally by extrapolating the image of their devatā from forehead (ājñā chakra) or from heart (anāhat chakra) or deities residing in chakra-s via energy based process. For them devatā-s are energy centers within our subtle body i.e. prāṇamaya kośa (energy body, bioplasmic body, etheric body) and their bīja mantra-s are vibrations resonating in chakra-s. They are activated by chanting particular sound which resonates in the similar frequency as that of the chakra to be activated. This is altogether a different way of worship. Details of subtle bodies and chakra-s are given later.

We Hindus believe that *no one can limit the power of God*. God cannot just be only formless nor is it true that he cannot have any form. God can incarnate or manifest in any form he wishes to and in a way he likes, be it human birth or Rāma and Kṛṣṇa or direct manifestation like in case of Dakṣiṇāmurtī. His formless aspect is considered to be absolute reality which is unborn and beyond space and time.

Mind has habit of holding on to names and forms. Hence it is easy to focus on a form of God having definite personality. Recalling on his divine deeds will re-create the events in our mind and mind will remain occupied in it. As concentration and inner purity is attained, depending upon temperament, devotee is gradually shifted to worship formless God or he may be asked to continue to worship his beloved God, chant his name, and sing his glories until he is graced by divine vision of his beloved God. Such a fortunate devotee has purified his heart to great extent. God himself shows his true nature to such devotee who has 'unconditionally' surrendered to God at appropriate time. In either case, this birth is his last birth as Ishvara is capable of bestowing moksha and showing his true nature.

13.2. Reason for worshipping only one form of God

Worshipping one form of God is necessary for developing one pointedness. One may respect any many forms of God as one wishes to or can visit and take prasādam of more

than one form of God worshipped as Brahman. However, s/he must chant the name of only one God. Chanting beeja mantra of one God is important.

13.2.1. Mantra: meaning and importance

Mantra is that which protects the one who chants it when it is repeated uninterruptedly for a particular time. It cleans mind of any unwanted thoughts, keeps it focused and does not allow any thoughts to enter into the mind as mind remains engaged in chanting mantra.

Yogī-s say that one needs to chant mantra continuously for 3 hours so that it can continue by itself throughout the day in subconscious mind. One is expected to at least meditate i.e. do japa for 45 minutes so as to have any prolonged effect of mantra.

While one is busy in day-2-day activities and fully concentrated in any particular work and even during sleep, mantra continues by itself in the subconscious mind. When mind frees itself from work, mantra automatically pops-up in the conscious mind without making any conscious effort to chant it. While we find this phenomenon odd, we all experience this fact. Imagine that just before leaving house for work we listen to any favourite song. This song keeps popping up in our mind and we keep singing it without making any conscious effort on our part. When mind is highly influenced by anything, it keeps recalling it on its own. In the same way, mantra when chanted with calm mind with no distracting thoughts, with utmost devotion, unconditional surrender to almighty and with strong faith in God, ready to renounce everything for the sake of God, then mantra will definitely have its effect. Slowly *bhāva* (spiritual emotion) cultivates in us i.e. attraction towards God cultivates in us. Along with *bhāva*, divine qualities like faith, surrender, etc blossoms in our heart. Animal qualities like hatred, anger, frustration, tension, etc fades away unnoticed. The change is gradual and so natural that the meditator hardly notices how and when this change has taken place. S/he only knows that s/he has changed, but not when and how s/he has changed.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "*He who is described in the Vedas is also described in the Tantras and the Puranas. All of them speak about the one Satchidananda.*" P. 490, Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

Thus we understand that there is only one Supreme God and why only one God needs to be worshipped. Scriptures recognize only one God as supreme Brahman. (For more details, please visit [here](#).)

13.3. Then why are Demi-Gods worshipped?

Here we must point out that unlike Abrahamic religions, worshipping demi-gods is not forbidden. They are worshipped for the good of all. Just like a Chairman and M.D. of a company has appointed many officers in various fields like marketing, production, etc, and given them certain powers in decision making, so has God created demi-gods (devatā-s) for specific tasks necessary for the functioning of the universe. They are considered as partial manifestations of Brahman and are created by him. As one attains sufficient inner purity, vedic karma kāṇḍa i.e. vedic rites and rituals drop. Many Gods are the forces of nature like Wind God, God of Fire, etc. There are several reasons for worshipping demi-gods.

13.3.1. We all have desires and Path of Renunciation is difficult

In the path of Jnana (renunciation), the formless God, Brahman, is contemplated from the beginning of advaitic sādhanā. Contemplation on formless Brahman very difficult. The mind should be sufficiently inwardly pure to walk on this path. It is like walking on razor's edge. Staying constantly one-pointed in one form of God and keep chanting his name day and night is difficult too. Both Jnāna and Bhakti are for few handful pure souls. Mind of average person cannot hold onto one thought for long. It needs to change the topic, else it will produce stress and the task will be more of a burden. Wise say that anything in excess is poison. Mind would not cooperate the intellect to stay focused only on God. We are born with many dissatisfied desires. One of the purpose of birth is to get them fulfilled. If they are not fulfilled then mind begins to revolt and will not be ready to meditate and stay focussed on one form of God and renounce everything else for the sake of God.

Only a pure mind can do it as a pure mind does not demand anything except moksha. Purified mind has little or no material desires to be fulfilled. Dissatisfied desires are uprooted by God in Meditation. Mind should be strong enough to renounce worldly desires. If mind is not prepared to renounce desires but wishes to fulfil them, then one cannot walk on the path of advaita i.e. Jnana as God tries devotee to rise above Māyā and for this to happen devotee must stop giving importance to anything except God. Devotee cannot

demand for anything of material nature to formless God, which is nirguṇa i.e. beyond attributes. Having such pure mind is very rare. Hence in most cases a form of God is worshipped. Even in case of worshipping God with form, sooner or later one has to change the perception about this material world and has to select between God and world.

Though primary intention to chant God's name is to have his divine vision or to be one with God, not many have desire to be one with God. Though the supreme God is capable of fulfilling all kinds of desires, still, mind of a neophyte is not stable enough and patient enough to remain focused on one form of God. demi-gods fulfil our wishes faster if we worship them. They are capable to bestow blessings, ward off evils, reduce hardships and give clarity in life. Average mind is weak and it wants to get rid of hardships and obstacles in fulfilling dis-satisfied desires very fast by removing the malice effects of the heavenly planets. Though we may be sitting in a closed room, still Saturn and other planets influence us by influencing our subtle bodies and our thoughts. Each and everything in this universe is interconnected and has influence on each other. Subtle world spreads far and wide. Worshipping demi-gods to ward off malice effects or fulfil desires is prescribed by sages with a sole purpose of developing divine qualities like faith in higher power, one-pointed devotion, control over body and mind, control over desires and impulses i.e. desires, discipline and diligent effort. These divine qualities will help a spiritual aspirant in his inner journey. If demi-God can fulfil our desires so can God. After our wishes are fulfilled, mind becomes calm. Calm mind is necessary for meditation. When there are no obstacles, mind is at peace and hence can easily contemplate on God for spiritual progress. When desires are fulfilled, faith in deity increases. Calm mind will think of the source from where demigods receive their powers, which is obviously the Supreme God. After attaining sufficient purification, vedic rites and rituals are renounced and the sole objective of chanting God's name is to abide in him, known his true nature.

However, this is not the only reason for worshipping demigods.

13.3.2. Celestials and mortals help each other

Celestials and mortals help each other. While celestials bestow their grace and maintain peace and harmony in nature and in our minds, chanting of mantra-s nourishes them. It is their food. Hence celestials and mortals help each other. Since demigod is a higher race than ours, it is we who worship them. Demigods are also devoted to God and great Gods like Īndra (King of heaven known as svarga) and Agni (God of fire) have realised their true

nature says Kena Upanishad (Kena Up 3.12). Hence they too can bestow hidden secrets of veda-s onto devotees. Vedic karma-kāṇḍa is not just rituals to fulfill our needs. Vibrations generated from chanting mantra-s spread far and wide and purify the atmosphere. Since plants and animals are a lifeform and they have sentiments, they too are positively affected by chanting of holy mantra-s which are special vibrations which purify atmosphere. Chanting vedic mantra-s will bring harmony in the world.

There is one more reason for performing vedic rites and rituals, tāntrika one.

13.3.3. Piṇḍāṇaḍa and Brahmaṇḍa (Microcosm i.e. and Macrocosm) - The inner science of Yoga

(microcosm is inner universe, while macrocosm is outer universe)

Though there is heaven and hell outside us in a particular place in different dimension, there is heaven and hell within us too. Thoughts and emotions of divine nature are symbolically represented by demigods while negative qualities are represented by asura-s or demons. Similarly, as earlier explained, demigods are the definite energy centers within our subtle bodies. Chanting a mantra will activate these psychic nerve centers i.e. chakra-s, cleanse psychic nerves called as nāḍī-s raise the kuṇḍalinī to get enlightenment.

Whatever is inside is reflected in the outside worldly more or less similarly. Many riddles in the veda-s which do not make sense like Rāhu and Ketu engulfing Chandra and Sūrya appear as unscientific from outward observation, as Rāhu and kētu are planets and covering Moon and Sun is a natural process of eclipse. However, Rāhu and Kētu represents prāṇa-s. Moon (chandra) and Sun (sūrya) are nāḍī-s known as īḍā and pingalā which are located on left and right side of Suṣumṇā respectively. They start from just above Mulādhāra chakra and end on tip of nostrils. īḍā ends on left side and pingalā ends on right side. Eclipse is the yogic process of in-breath from īḍā towards the inverted energy triangle called yonī, where kuṇḍalinī hides. In-breath covers yonī and kuṇḍalinī with prāṇa. Out-breath rises from yonī without activating kuṇḍalinī. Breathing simultaneously from both nāḍī-s (nostrils) has its advantages and merits, but it blocks the rising of kuṇḍalinī through suṣumṇā thereby creating an eclipse. The process repeats with pingalā nāḍī. In other words, the inner breath, covers or eclipses kuṇḍalinī. When kuṇḍalinī is struck and awakened, it initially rises from īḍā and pingalā and later from suṣumṇā. When kuṇḍalinī rises from suṣumṇā, it pulls all the types of prāṇa-s from all nāḍī-s including īḍā and pingalā. prāṇa-s merge with kuṇḍalinī in

suṣumṇā and kuṇḍalinī takes them along with her, rising upto sahasrāra chakra and gently rising out of sahasrāra, merging in infinity. When this divine phenomenon happens, one gets enlightenment. But this outward rising of kuṇḍalinī is not easy. nāḍī-s, chakra-s, prāṇa-s and mind needs to be highly purified. They get purified by chanting of mantra-s.

Mantra-s are formulated in such a way so as to resonate with certain energy centers (chakra-s) and nāḍī-s, thereby purifying and activating them for spiritual progress.

Likewise, Īndra is often represented as intellect. In veda-s and purāṇā-s, there is a legend of Īndra winning over Vriṭrā. Vriṭrā, the demon, represents ignorance or dullness which blocks the mind. Īndra, the awakened intellect, slays Vriṭrā and frees all the blocked rivers. Rivers represent nāḍī-s. We also find in rig veda that it is Devī Sarasvatī who slays Vriṭrā. Sarasvatī represents knowledge. In this case, both Īndra and Sarasvatī represent 'awakened mind' or 'awakened intellect'. Hence it does not matter whether who killed Vriṭrā. It is ignorance getting uprooted by knowledge.

The story of slaying of Vriṭrā is a yogic process of an awakened intellect destroying ignorance and cleansing nāḍī-s thereby progressing spiritually. Playing with kuṇḍalinī and chakra-s must be done under the care and guidance of a competent guru else it will do more harm and help. It is not possible for laymen to experience subtle bodies and find exact location of chakra-s and nāḍī-s by ourselves. **Vedic and purāṇic stories are encrypted riddles in order to protect them from being misused or wrongly used. For an individual or a Yogī, stories are encrypted way of explaining inner yogic process and inner universe and it an encrypted process of evolution of consciousness.**

Hence Vedic rites and rituals are not just polytheistic worship of demigods.

Lets summarize the worship of demigods

1. Average mind is weak always trying to run away from hardships. Worshipping demigods wards off malice effects and increases faith in higher power. Mind becomes peaceful and can focus on chanting God's name.
2. Chanting vedic mantra-s purify environment and influence all life forms be it animals or plants and nourishes them with spiritual energy.

3. Celestials and mortals help each other. While Celestials bestow their grace and sustain ecology, maintain peace and harmony of nature and purify our mind, vedic chants nourishes them thereby making them stronger.
4. Demi-gods are energy centers within our body which needs to be activated in order to purify energy body. Pure body is necessary for contemplating on Brahman.
5. Mantra-s are formulated in such a way so as to resonate with certain energy centers thereby purifying and activating them for spiritual progress.
6. Many vedic and purāṇic stories are symbolic representation of yogic process. veda-s are encrypted to protect them from being misused or wrongly used. Activating chakras and kuṇḍalinī without the guidance of a competent guru may be a disaster waiting to happen. It will do more harm and help.

14. Advantages of having Multiple Gods

As we have seen earlier, there are various reasons why many Gods exists in Hinduism. In sanAtana dharma, there is deep study of the workings and nature of mind and on subtle bodies. Mind is very important to study as we all live by our mind. Spirituality is direct dealing with mind. It is said that mind is the reason for bondage (bandhan) and mind alone is the cause of liberation (mukti). Both bandhan and mukti are within mind. Happiness and sorrow are both states of mind. Sanyāsa is a state of mind and not a way of living. Whatever form we want to see is visualized or imagined by mind alone. Different forms of Gods, their expressions and body language seen in idols and statues depend upon the mindset of mind of artist. No one has actually seen either Viṣṇu or Śiva.

Mind does not remain steady in one state. It keeps changing it's moods. Form and character of Rāma may suit one person, while form of Kṛṣṇa another, form of Śiva or shakti (Śakti) to another. In some cases it happens that due to changing nature of mind, mind may get saturated with repetitive tasks and reading same stories again and again and focusing on one way of living, worshipping one form of God. S/he can shift his/her attention to another God, say from Kṛṣṇa to Śiva. Both have different characteristics and different ways of worships. Śiva has very different character than Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. Mind might just get change that it needed. Compassion, guilelessness, peaceful nature, accepting all be it downtrodden, demons or even ghosts as devotees shows Śiva's big heart. One can now cultivate these qualities by worshipping Śiva. S/he has already acquired certain qualities by worshipping Kṛṣṇa like surrender, faith in God, devotion and longing for God. Longing for the unconditional Love (of spiritual nature) is well connected with Kṛṣṇa. Longing for God is very important state of mind.

A man should practice spiritual discipline and pray to God with a longing heart for love at his lotus feet. - Sri Ramakrishna

Longing is like a rosy dawn. after the dawn, out comes Sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God. - Sri Ramakrishna

Longing is the means of Realising Ātman. - Kathā Upanishad

Rāma stands for obedience, and ideal king, son, brother, husband, disciple and guru. But his most important quality is awareness. Rāma is never shown without his bow and arrow. They represent alertness. Rāma represents 'wakefulness'. You must always remain alert that no negative thought ever influence you.

We will discuss meanings of names in details in a later article, ['Detailed description of meaning of names of Popular Gods'](#)

After understanding few popular names, let us continue to understand the benefits of contemplating on personal God.

When contemplating or gazing or chanting mantra whatever is our intention we get.

Suppose we listen to stuti of Bhagavān Rāma which eulogize his quality of 'obedience' and then we chant his name, our mind will be long for the quality of obedience since it is impressed by this quality. As and when we listen to stuti-s glorifying one or other quality, our mind will tend to remember it. They get itched in our heart and mind. Now when we chant his name, these qualities will gradually begin to manifest in us. Rāma, who is already residing in our heart will make these qualities manifest within us.

We will now discuss importance of multiple Gods with respect of vibrations and energy centers.

Depending upon mindset and depending upon the basic predominant qualities, mind is attracted to a greater extent towards one form of God than another. Based on vibrations of subtle body (prāṇamaya kosha, energy body), one beej mantra suits or is more effective than other mantra. This true where more than one mantra is attributed to one form of God. For example, 'Śrī Rāma Jai Rāma Jai Jai Rāma', 'Śrī Rāma rāmāya namaḥ' and 'Śrī

Rāmachandrāya namaḥ' all have different effects. (the real name of maryādā puruṣottama Prabhu Śrī Rāma is Śrī Rāmachandra'. 'Rāma is the birth name of 'Bhagavān Paraśurāma' and 'Bhagavān Balarāma'. 'Śrī Kṛṣṇa śaraṇam namaḥ' and 'OM namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya' also have different effects on mind and subtle bodies as they generate different unique vibrations.

In this sense, different forms of Gods, their bīja mantra-s (beej mantra-s), their divine character, their divine life and incidents related to them, predominant qualities exhibited by them each have unique effect on our mind and hence on our personality. Hence in ancient days, children were imparted moral and ethical values by mothers singing stories from purāṇa-s glorifying different Gods. Divine qualities like valour, strength, respecting others views, respecting elders, respecting wisdom of even enemies, importance of adhering to truth, etc are cultivated in hearts of innocent kids, which will form a solid foundation of their character and the way they think.

Alas this tradition is fading away as morally and ethics have taken a backseat in our life, since we are busy blindly emulating the west even at the cost of degrading our morality and ethics. Whatever has to be good has to be adopted, but why become so much materialistic so as to become uncaring for others or for society by neglecting moral and ethical values. Everyone is busy focusing on IQ (Intelligence Quotient), but not many seem to be focusing on EQ (Emotional Quotient), which is very important to bind family and society. Mind is derived from nurturing to the fullest. Our Inner voice, our conscience should not be let to die out of starvation. It should not be neglected. We must trust our inner voice and act accordingly. We must keep feeding it by giving it importance in our life and let it remain alive and vibrant. It is there to help us and not harm us or to make us superstitious. Let's return back to the topic.

It is said that each one of us is born with some pre-dominant qualities and that we have some pre-determined destiny that we must pass through. Here the question arises that if we are born with a particular nature, what is the need to cultivate qualities. The answer is, what we perceive depends upon who we think and how we interpret any situation. It is not said that new saṃskāra-s cannot be embedded in our hearts. Qualities are like fire. It can be used for both constructive and destructive purpose. Fire can cook food and hence gives us life. Fire is life saver, yet fire can burn us. Suppose a child is born with violent tendency. We can impart qualities like adhering to truth, justice and fighting for the oppressed. Such a child is expected to pick up arms. But picking up arms is not in itself a destructive act. One can either become an underworld Don or an encounter specialist. There is violence in both

of them, but one's violence is triggered by destructive intention, while that of other, violence is triggered as a result of revolt against injustice and necessity to punish the wicked.

Simple explanation of certain concepts in purāṇa-s can be easily explained to kids. Later on deeper meaning, alternate meanings are explained as they mature spirituality. Multiple Gods helps us cultivate emotions, ethical, moral values and spiritual values. They shape they way we think. Wide variety of stories having same moral of the story help us embed certain qualities without making them boring. They our identity. They shape our future. These so-called mythological stories are what makes 'us'.

Due to the above reasons, **though each one of us has one Īshṭa devatā or one family deity, we are not forbidden to worship or eulogize other forms of Gods until one reaches sufficient inner purity.** After certain qualities are sufficiently developed in an individual, one's mind becomes stable. Now one can focus only on one God who is his/her Īṣṭa devatā or chosen deity that is suitable to his/her psychic.

For beginners who have wavering mind, worshipping multiple Gods helps one keep boredom away and keeps the weak and restless mind connected to spirituality.

In addition to shaping our mind, multiple Gods opens doors of artists, giving them many ways to express their arts, be it sculptures or paintings or be it composing dance, songs, poems, novels and other literature not of spiritual nature. Qualities express themselves through the works of artists and in this process they blossom more and more in the heart of an artist as artist constantly thinks of God and his qualities throughout composition of his work or his art. Due to above stated reasons, we have a rich and diverse culture not found anywhere in the world. We have freedom to express our views in multiple ways.

Though there is cultural diversity, we are united by our common source of knowledge - our shāstra-s.

Diversity is our strength. It allows us to express ourselves in different ways. Mind itched with divine qualities via stories of great characters in our shāstra-s, expresses the beauty of

these qualities in the form of various works of social nature like dramas, plays, songs and stories, thereby making spirituality and culture interwoven and inseparable.

15. Detailed description of meaning of names of Popular Gods

Note: This article focuses on names as explained in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Śankara Bhāshya. Hence it is technical. Please read it slowly and patiently.

For the sake of simplicity earlier, names were discussed in brief. Śiva and Viṣṇu are two primary Gods. Viṣṇu's avatāra-s Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are very popular. We will now share more details about them for interested readers. We will also discuss meaning of names of these Gods as explained in Śankara bhāshya on Viṣṇu Sahasranāma stotra of Mahābhārata. Better understanding gives us clarity and helps one contemplate on their beloved deity.

There are three reasons for giving detailed description.

1. Since most of authors get inspiration from original sources like Viṣṇu Sahasranāma and commentaries written on them by great āchārya-s who are authority in their own way, we must directly visit source material and try to understand it ourselves. It will also help us cross check if there is any bias in deducing meanings. If found contradictory, they can be rejected and explanation given by vaidika āchārya-s are adopted as they considered as supreme authority. Here we have taken meanings as explained by Śrī Ādi Śankara bhagavadpāda.
2. It will encourage readers to take an extra step and understand deeper meaning which are not generally found to be promoted by regular kathākāra-s (storytellers) and paurāṇika-s (those spreading teachings of purāṇa-s). It also helps us to imbibe their meaning in our heart and then meditate on our beloved deity. Knowing what you are doing is also important.
3. Readers will also get to know the writing style and deep thinking ability of our āchārya Ādi Śankara Bhagavadpāda.

In each sahasranāma there are names which are repeated like Śiva is repeated twice as 27th and 600th name. In general, there are names which

1. Glorify characteristics or nature or qualities
2. Describe Appearance
3. Describes Lordship
4. Describes his grace
5. Glorifies his deeds / Leelas (līlā-s)
6. Describes as cause of all i.e. Brahman - the sole creator, preserver and destroyer of universe
7. Most Gods are invariably connected with OM or prāṇava.

Let's discuss popular names of our Gods.

15.1. Kṛṣṇa

Wise say, 'ākaraṣaṇam iti Kṛṣṇa'. "The one who attracts is known as Kṛṣṇa'. In other words Kṛṣṇa means 'attraction'. Jīva-s are attracted towards their source and take refuge in Kṛṣṇa. Since Kṛṣṇa is the refuge (resting place) of devotees i.e. jīva-s (nāra) he is called as Nārāyaṇa. Since jīva-s reside (vāsa) in Kṛṣṇa he is also known as Vāsudeva'.

(Vasudeva is the name of Kṛṣṇa's father. Notice difference between two words - Vāsudeva (वासुदेव) is Kṛṣṇa and Vasudeva (वसुदेव) is Kṛṣṇa's earthy father. A famous stuti of Kṛṣṇa is Śrī Kṛṣṇāśtakam.

वसुदेव सुतं देवं कंस चाणूर मर्दनम् ।

देवकी परमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥ १ ॥

vasudeva sutam devam kamsa canuramardanam |

devaki paramanandam krishnam vande jagadgurum || 1 ||

'Vasudeva sutam' means 'son of Vasudeva'

Kṛṣṇa is also represented as a 'lahiri' i.e. a wave. Kṛṣṇa represents three types of waves.

- ānada lahiri (wave of Bliss),
- prem lahiri (wave of unconditional spiritual love) and
- saundarya lahiri (wave of Beauty)

While Śiva represents three types of shakti-s (energies)

- Icchā shakti (will power)
- Kriyā shakti (power of action)
- Jnāna shakti or Vidyā shakti (power of knowledge)

Name Kṛṣṇa appears as #57th and #550th name of Viṣṇu in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma stotra found in anushāshānika parva of Mahābhārata. Ādi Śankara in his bhāshya on Viṣṇu Sahasranāma stotra (called as Śankara Bhāshya) on #57 Kṛṣṇa explains it as -

57 कृष्ण Kṛṣṇa (kRShNa. Krishna)

Kṛṣ (कृष्) means (sattā) 'power' or 'existence'. 'Ṇa' (ण) means 'ānanda' (Bliss). Since Bhagavān Viṣṇu has both bhāva-s (spiritual emotions), [Viṣṇu] is always known as 'Kṛṣṇa' - This is said by Bhagavān Vyāsa jī [in Mahābhārata udyoga parva 70.2]. By this statement [of Vyāsa jī], Kṛṣṇa is sachchidānanda bhagavān.

550 कृष्ण Kṛṣṇa (kRShNa. Krishna)

In 550th name, Kṛṣṇa is taken as addressing to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, often called as Veda Vyāsa as he split one veda-s into 4 and further divided them or organized them into various shākhā-s. This Veda Vyāsa is then connected with Bhagavān Viṣṇu by saying that 'Who else other than Viṣṇu can split veda-s. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana is Viṣṇu'.

Other popular names including Kṛṣṇa are,

23 केशव Keśava (keshava)

24 पुरुषोत्तम Puruṣottama (puruShottama)

57 कृष्ण Kṛṣṇa (kRShNa, Krishna)

72 माधव Mādhava (mAdhava)

73 मधुसूदन Madhusūdana (madhusUdan)

187 गोवीन्दः Govīndaḥ (govIndaḥ)

188 गोवीन्दा पतिः Govīndā patiḥ (govIndA patiH)

550 कृष्ण Kṛṣṇa (kRShNa, Krishna)

We have already discussed #57 and #550. Let's discuss other names in detail.

23 केशव keSava (Keshava)

Adi Shankara in his bhASya explains the meaning of the word KeSava in three different ways.

- The one whose keSa (hair) is called as keSava
- Under whose sway, brahmA, viShNu and mahesha work. (Ref. Pāṇiṇi sūtra 5.2.109)
- The killer or slayer of demon keSika is called as keSava. Further acharya cites Ref of viShNu purANa 5.16.23

We will further understand second definition as explained by our AchArya Sankara BhagavadpAda on the basis of pANiNi sUtra 5.2.109:

keSava is made up of 4 words

'ka', 'a', 'isa', 'va'

ka = Brahma

a = Vishnu

isa = Mahadev / Shiva / Shankara / Mahesha / Rudra

va = That which one has in one's possession, what is under one's sway. i.e. One who contains in himself - Lord of Creation, Preservation and Dissolution is keSava.

Kanchi Paramacharya upon explaining this statement says: He must be ParamAtmAn

Kanchi Paramacharya also says that in Veda-s and PurANa-s Brahma and Vishnu are referred to as such (ka & a) at many places.

Source:

1. Page: 192, Part 6, *The Guru Tradition, Kanchi Paramacharya*

2. *Vishnu Sahasranama Shankara BhASya, Hindi Translation, Gita Press, Page 75-76*

We can connect the word KeSava with a famous SubhAshita-s which forms the essence of veda-s

(not in iTrans or IAST)

"Ruchinam vaichitryad rijukutil nana path jusham;

nrinam ekogamyastvamasi pyasamarnavmiti"

"Due to the differences in individual dispositions, people follow different paths, but you are the only destination of all of them, just as the sea is the destination of all the waters"

Akashat patitam toyam sagaram prati gacchati,

sarva deva namaskaram Keshavam prati gacchati"

"All the water fallen from the sky goes to the sea,
salutations to all the gods reaches to the KeSava"

There are few more names like #24 puruShottama, #72 Mādhava and #73 Madhusudan often associated with Kṛṣṇa

24 पुरुषोत्तम puruShottama

Being best among purusha is called as 'puruShottama'. Here by pANiNi sUtra 2.2.10 - 'na nirdhAraNe' - 'न निर्धारणे' (a grammatical rule meaning 'cannot be ascertained'), this word [puruShottama] does not talk about jAtI (caste), guNA (qualities) and kriyA (action). Hence it cannot be applied in relation to any community or in comparison with anyone or anything. When any quality or action of person stands out from the average mass or group or a particular community, it is called as 'the best amongst community'.

For example, among men, kshatriya (warrior varNa) is most heroic (valiant or brave); amongst [different breeds of] cows, 'KrShNa cow' gives most sweet tasting milk; amongst travellers, the ones running are [considered as] best; similarly, bhagavAn [in gltA 15.18] says, 'I am beyond (transcendental) 'xara' {kshara} mutable and better than 'axara' {akshara} immutable, hence I am well known amongst various loka-s (words) and veda-s as 'purushottama'

Note: In simple words, the word 'purushottama' does not imply any comparison with anyone. It is beyond comparison and the only one that is needed to be known. Here purushottama is not the person i.e. not murlidhara krShNa, but formless Brahman, who is the Self of all.

Since this concept is important to understand, we have adopted commentaries on verses 18-20 of chapter 15 i.e. BG 15.18-20

BG 15.18 Since I am transcendental to the mutable and above even the immutable, hence I am well known in the world and in the Vedas as the supreme Person.

Adi Sankara's commentary on BG 15.18 which is purushottama yoga is

15.18 Since I am transcendental to the mutable (xara) -I am beyond the Tree of Maya, called the Peepul Tree, which this worldly existence is and above most excellent or the highest; as compared with even immutable (akshara), which is the seed of the

Tree of worldly existence, hence, by virtue of being the most excellent as compared with the mutable and the immutable, I am well known in the world and in the Vedas as purusottamah, the supreme Person. Devoted persons know Me thus, and poets also use this name 'Purusottama' in their poetry etc.; they extol Me with this name. Thereafter, now is stated this result attained by one who knows the Self as described:

BG 15.19 O scion of the Bharata dynasty, he who, being free from delusion, knows Me the supreme Person thus, he is all-knowing and adores Me with his whole being.

Adi Sankara's commentary on BG 15.19

BG 15.19 Bharata, O scion of the Bharata dynasty, he who being free from delusion knows Me, God, having the aforesaid alifications; purusottamam, the supreme Person thus, in the way described, as 'I am this One'; he is all-knowing - he knows everything through self-identification with all -, i.e. (he becomes) omniscient and adores (worships) Me, existing in all things, with his whole being, i.e. with his mind fixed on Me as the Self of all. Now then, having stated in this chapter the knowledge of the real nature of the Lord, which has Liberation as its fruit, it is being eulogized:

BG 15.20 O sinless one, this most secret scripture has thus been uttered by Me. Understanding this, one becomes wise and has his duties fulfilled, O scion of the Bharata dynasty.

Adi Sankara's commentary on BG 15.20

BG 15.20 This *guhya* *tamam*, most secret, i.e. most mystical - what is that scripture?. Although the Gita as a whole is spoken of as the scripture, still this chapter itself is here referred to as such, and this for eulogy as is evident from the context. For, not only has the entire meaning of the scripture Gita been stated here in brief, but the whole purport of the Vedas also has been comprehended here. And it has been said, 'He who realizes it is a knower of the Vedas' (1), 'I alone am the object to be known through all the Vedas' (15). (Thus, this most secret scripture) has thus been uttered by Me O sinless one. O scion of the Bharata dynasty, buddhva, understanding this,

the scripture which has the purport as has been revealed one becomes wise and has his duties fulfilled, but not otherwise. The meaning is that what-ever a Brahmana has to do as a consequence of his special birth (as a Brahmana), all that becomes accomplished when the reality of the Lord is known. The idea is that nobody's duties become fulfilled in any other way. And it has been said, 'O son of Prtha, all actions in their totality culminate in Knowledge' (4.33). There is also a saying from Manu: 'This, verily, is the fulfilment of a Brahmana in particular. For, by getting this, a twice-born has his duties fulfilled; not otherwise' (Ma. Sm. 12.93). Since you have heard from Me this truth about the supreme Reality, therefore, O scion of the Bharata dynasty, you have achieved your Goal!

72 माधव Mādhava

Name Mādhava has three meanings:

1. 'Mā' means 'Laxmi' (Lakshmi) and 'dhana' means 'husband'. Being Husband of Lakshmi, Bhagavān is known as 'Mādhava' or
2. [as said in Br. Up.], he who is cognised through 'Madhuvidyā' is known as 'Mādhava'.
or
3. 'Vyāsa in Mahā. udyoga. 70.4 says 'O Bhārata! Know Mādhava by 'Silence' (maun), Meditation (Dhyāna) and by 'Yōga'

73 मधुसूदन Madhusūdana

By act of slaying demon Madhu, Bhagavān is called as 'Madhusūdan'. Mahābhārata (Bhīṣma parva 67.14-16), says, ' Śrī Purusottam [Bhagavān Viṣṇu] by honoring the request of Brahmā jī slayed Demon Madhu who had originated from the ear-dirt. Due to an act of slaying {demon} Madhu, demi-gods, demons, humans and rishi-s honour Śrī Janārdana by calling him 'madhusūdan'.

Another name found in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma is #187 Govīnda

187 गोवीन्दः Govīndaḥ

There are three meanings given for the name Govīnda

1. The Mahābhārata, Mokshadharmā (Mahā. Shānti 342.70) says: "I first knew (vinda) the Earth (go) which was carried away and hidden in a cave by an Asura, hence I am praised by the appellation 'Govīnda' by Gods and Scriptures."
2. The Harivamsha (2.19.45) says: "I am Indra (Lord) over the Devas, thou art lord over the cows, hence the world will ever praise Thee as , 'Govīnda' "
3. Speech is known as 'Go,' and since thou conferest speech {knowledge}*, O Lord, the Sages call you 'Govīnda'.

*Words in curved brackets {} are added by the author. They are not found in original translation.

Notes: Sri Anantkrishna Shastry in his English Translation of Śankara Bhāshya, with Vyākhyā (commentary) by a Sanyāsī and Kārīkā by unknown Author explains that Words 'Go' + 'Vid' has many meanings. 'Go' has ten meanings:

Gloss (Kārīkā): 'Vid' means 'to know'.

'Go' 'गो' means:

1. Svarga (Heaven). Govīnda means 'He transcends the Heaven'.
2. Arrows. Govīnda means, 'He knows all the weapons'.
3. Cattle. He is the leader of the ignorant ones.
4. Speech. He is to be known by the Vedas.
5. Thunderbolt; He has the Vajra marks on his feet.
6. Quarters; He is known in all quarters.
7. Eyes; He is in the person residing in the eyes.
8. The sun ; He is in the form of the Sun.
9. Earth; He recovered the Earth from the Titans.
10. Waters; His seat is in the waters.

Sri Anantakrishna Shastri also explains the next word #188 Govīndā patiḥ as:

188 गोवीन्दा पतिः Govīndā patiḥ

Śankara Bhāshya: 'Go' means 'speech'. Those who know this [speech] is called as 'Govīnda'. Due to specifically being the Lord (Svāmī) of them (the knowers of speech i.e. knowledge), Bhagavān is known as Govindā patiḥ

Simple meaning of word Govīndā patiḥ: He is the Lord of those that know speech.

Govīndā patiḥ is Lord of the wise.

Commentary (Vyākhyāna): He is the Lord of the knowers of the Vedas in the form of "Hamsa" (the swan).

15.2. Rāma

Rāma has many qualities like obedience, righteousness, an ideal son, brother, husband, disciple and king. But one quality of Rāma is Unique. It is quality of alertness. Kṛṣṇa can be imagined without his weapons playing flute, but not Rāma. Rāma is always shown with bow and arrows. It shows his alertness. Rāma is always alert and ready to fight. He Rāma represents constant alertness of a disciple. We must also be alert of negative thoughts which will hinder our spiritual progress. It also represents 'remaining awake' to all three guṇa-s. Anyone who contemplates on him keeping this quality in mind will gradually develop unbroken awareness and a sense of separateness from sense objects and from one's own thoughts and emotions.

Name Rāma appears as #394th name of Viṣṇu in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma stotra found in anushāshanika parva of Mahābhārata. In Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Śankara Bhāshya, Ādi Śankara has gives two meanings. One of them is 'One who has assumed a beautiful form is called as Dasharatha-nandan Rāma'. Another meaning is 'Highest state of consciousness where Yogī-s abide is called as parabrahma Rāma'.

Please find Śankara Bhāshya -

394 राम Rāma

1. Where Yogī-s abide [1] in Bhagavān's nityānanda [2] svarūpa [3], hence he [Viṣṇu] is called as 'Rāma'. In padmapurāṇa it is said - 'In the state of consciousness (pada) where Yogī-s abide in nityānanda [2] svarūpa [3] chidātmā [4], is said to be 'parabrahma Rāma'.
2. Or Assuming the beautiful form [5] by his own wish is [known as] Dasharatha-nandan Rāma (is the son of Dasharatha, Rāma)

Notes:

[1] abide: Word used is ramāṇa or ramāṇīyam

[2] nityānanda: Nitya means eternal. Ānanda means happiness or Bliss. Nityānanda means 'eternal internal happiness'. Happiness as a result of viveka-yukta-vairāgya. Viveka means discrimination. Discrimination between truth and untruth (ātmā-anātmā-viveka). Vairāgya means dispassion. In other words, Vairāgya means 'absence of desires in mind' Yukta means 'associated with'. We can translate the statement 'Viveka-yukta-vairāgya' as absence of desires in mind via correct and clear understanding.

When mind is free of desires, it experiences deep peace and Bliss. Mind is calm, peaceful and focused on Brahman. This state is called as nijānanda. 'Nija' means 'internal'. Since this happiness is not a result of achieving sense objects but by dissociation with sense objects and getting closer to sat-chit-ānanda Brahman, it is eternal Bliss.

[3] svarūpa: 'rūpa' means 'form'. Form of Gods and Goddesses. Rūpa or form is different than Bhagavān. Sva-rūpa means the true form which is formless Brahman.

[4] chidātmā: ātmā means 'Self' or 'I' {not ego}. Chidātmā means 'pure consciousness which is 'I''

[5] Beautiful form: Word used is ramāṇa or ramāṇīyarūpa

15.3. Viṣṇu

Viṣṇu appears as #2 and #258 in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Stotra. There is a long Śankara Bhāshya on #2, we will try to put essential parts in points. Please note that this is not word-by-word translation.

#2 विष्णु Viṣṇu

From 'Who is the one deva?' to 'By chanting whose name does not get liberated?' Reply to these questions is, 'From whom everything has originated' etc - in such question-answers that Brahman which is described, is known by the name 'vishva' – in such a way it has be defined.

Now, if out of curiosity one questions, 'Who is this vishva?', the reply is 'Viṣṇu'. In ṛg veda (2.2.26) too the essence of verse is- it is Viṣṇu who should be worshipped.

The essence is - get true knowledge of Brahman by worshipping (chanting his name, nāma saṃkīrtan) Viṣṇu. By knowing Viṣṇu, who is eldest or first of deva-s, one can end this mortal life i.e. get freed from bondage and merge in him.

The one who is spread everywhere (veveṣṭi, वेवेष्टि) is called as 'Viṣṇu'.

'Viṣṇu' formed from the root word 'viṣ, विष्'

The essence is that time-space-distance are absent in it (Viṣṇu) i.e. Viṣṇu is beyond desha-kāla-vastu

In Mahābhārata is is said – 'O pārtha, I pervade both earth and space and I expand beyond them too', 'O pārtha, Because of this [i.e pervading everything and spreading beyond it], is am called as 'Viṣṇu'

In Bṛhannārāyaṇopaniṣad it is said, 'shrī Nārāyaṇa pervades inside and outside of whatever saṃsāra we see (perceive)'

In Ātmabodhopaniṣad it is said – 'Who is present in everything (bhūta-s), who is one (non-dual), the cause of all, is Nārāyaṇa, the cause of purusha, parabrahman, free from likes and dislikes (joy and sorrow); one must meditate on him who is Viṣṇu

Or Viṣṇu is formed from root word 'viṣ, विष्', as said in Viṣṇu purāṇa (3.1.45) – 'Entire world is pervaded by this mahāpurusha's energy (shakti), hence is called as Viṣṇu, because the meaning of the root word, viṣ, विष्, is 'to pervade'

#258 विष्णु Viṣṇu

'Is known as Viṣṇu because it spreads everywhere' – according to this statement made by Vyāsa jī (Mahā. Udyoga. 70.13).

15.4. Śiva

We already know some characteristics of Bhagavān Śiva. We will understand the meaning of the word Śiva from Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Śankara bhāshya, from Bhāgavat Purāṇa and other sources like unādī sūtra. We also have Śiva Sahasranāma found in Mahābhārata. Here we will take the common names that are shared by both Viṣṇu and Śiva in Vīṣṇu Sahasranāma.

We will first explain the meaning of word 'Śiva' in brief

Śiva means 'auspiciousness', 'one who is beyond three guṇa-s', 'One who transcends three guṇa-s is called as Śiva'. Śiva is not a person but tatvam, a cosmic principle or Brahman, which is formless. According to unādi sūtra, word Śiva is rōted in the word 'Śi' meaning 'in which everything lies' i.e. 'In which the whole universe lies'.

Śiva has many names like Pashupati, Īshāna, rudra, shāntam, kamesa, Mahādeva, etc. There are names which glorify his deeds like tripurāntaka and rudra, while some describe his appearance like Nilakanṭha, which in turn reminds us of the episode of samudra manthan. Some other names describe qualities like shāntam, sarva, some describe his lordship like Kameshvara and Pashupati. Śiva is 'skambha' i.e. pillar, meaning 'pillar of consciousness'. In each sahasranāma there are names which are repeated. Viṣṇu Sahasranāma has many names of Śiva. 'Śiva' is repeated twice as #27 and #600th name in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma.

In general, there are names which glorify characteristics or nature or qualities (sāntam, etc)

- Describe Appearance (Mahā Jaṭādhārī (having matted locks, hair), Trayakshāya (having thrē eyes), etc)

- Describes Lordship (Pashupati, Kameshvara, Hara, Mahādeva, Kapālī (Lord of universe called Kapāla)
- Describes his grace (Shambhu, Śiva)
- Glorifies his deeds (Tripurāntaka, rudra)
- Describes as cause of all i.e. Brahman - the sole creator, preserver and destroyer of universe (Rudra, Pitāmah)
- Śiva is connected with OM (ॐ) or prāṇava.

Adi Śankara Bhagavadpāda in his VS Bhāshya explains the name #27 Śiva as - 'One who is pure (untouched, untainted) because of transcending three guṇa-s is called as Śiva' OR 'One who is pure (untouched, untainted) because of absence three guṇa-s is called as Śiva'.

Full Translation for interested readers:

'The one who is pure because of absence of three guNa-s (in him) is called as Shiva. 'He is Brahma, He is Shiva', in this way, by showing non-difference (अभेद) between them (all three), by praising the name of Shiva, etc, it is the praise of Hari (Vishnu)

Or

The one who is pure because of transcending three guNa-s is called as Shiva....

In name #600 Śiva, Ādi Śankara explains, 'Śiva' as the one who purifies.

Full verse:

'Due to purifying (devotees) by mere repetition of his name (viShNu), [he] (viShNu) is Śiva.

Śiva also means 'auspiciousness'.

A well known name of Bhagavān Śiva is paśupati (Pashupati). Paśu generally means 'prāṇī' or 'animal'. Here it means 'jīva' or 'soul'. Words like 'pati', 'svāmī' and 'nātha' mean 'Lordship'. Hence Paśupati means 'Lord of souls'.

Another name is #491 Mahādeva. Mahā means 'great'. Hence Śiva is the 'Great God' or 'God of Gods'.

#491 mahādevaḥ is explained by Ādi Śankara as - 'By renouncing all bhāva-s (all kinds of manifestations, 3 guṇa-s) and being established in his own Jnānayōga, and is glorified by his aishvarya (prosperity, supreme power), he is called as mahādeva'

#64 Īshāna means 'the Lord' or 'the ruler'. Īśāna also means 'Śiva in the form of Sun'

Śiva is also popularly known as #38 shambhu (Śambhu'. It means, the one who brings auspiciousness'

Full verse as explained by Ādi Śankara is #38 Śambhu -

Since the Lord creates spiritual emotion भावना (bhAvanA) of happiness सुख (sukha) in (the heart of devotees) [2] devotees [the Lord] is called as Sambhuh

#114 Rudra means 'the one who cries'. Or as Ādi Śankara explains is - 'cause of sorrows' or 'remover of sorrows' and 'cause of everything'

VS Śankara Bhāśya (Bhāshya) #114 rudra -

One who makes all people weep, At the time of death or during the total dissolution, the One who makes all weep is Rudrah. From a devotee's standpoint the same term is interpreted as the One who liquidated all sorrows is Rudrah. Or it may mean that The cause of sorrow (cry) and driving it away is called as Rudra. Siva Purāṇa says that, 'The name Rudra is the cause of Dukha (sorrow) i.e. dukhaha, because, the Lord removes [1] the sorrow or the cause (hetu)[2] of sorrow, that is why, the cause of everything (परमकारण (Paramkāraṇa) Lord Shiva is called as Rudra.

Notes:

[1] Here 'the Lord removes' can be taken as 'the Lord uproots'

[2] हेतु (hetu) means intention, motive, reason, purpose or even an object. Here it has to be taken as cause

#651 name is kāmadeva. Ādi Śankara explains -

By being prayed to fulfil dharma etc purushārtha-s [i.e. dharma, artha, kāma, moksha] is called as kāmadeva. Is kāma and deva also hence is called as kāmadeva.

Note: Bhagavān Śiva is called as kāmेशvara meaning the Lord of desire. Here 'kāma' means 'desire' or 'wish' and not 'sexual desire' as many interpret it to be. This interpretation is supported in the interpretation of the name #kāmī

#653 kāmī - By naturally being fully satisfied, [the lord] is called as kāmī

Note: Here, 'being fully satisfied' means the one who is beyond desires. This interpretation can be explained. Ours is a demanding mind, the more it's desires are fulfilled, the more it demands. The satisfaction is only temporary. By fulfilling the desires, the desires are not uprooted. Only the one who has renounced the desire, that mind can become satisfied with what it has. No further demand arises in mind. Such pure mind turns inwards towards its source and allows consciousness to merge in this source.

Another meaning of being satisfied would indicate Lordship.

15.5. Hari and Hara

In Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Sankara bhAshya or āchārya has quoted Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Hari vamsha purāṇa and other purāṇa establishing non-differences between Hari and Hara.

VP 5.33.47-49: [Sri krShNacandra says to mahAdeva ji-] The abhayadAna (boon of being fearless or invincible) given by you implies that it is given by me too. He Sankara! [please] do not see yourself as different from me. That which I am [i.e. that which is my true nature] is also you [your true nature] and so are other devatA-s [true nature of other devatA-s], asuras (demons) and this whole universe including humans. Only those humans whose citta (mind, heart) is influenced by ignorance, they see duality (see everything with bhedabhAva)

Similarly in bhaviSyottara purANa mahadeva ji says - those who sees me, or brahmA ji different than viShNu, those kutarka-buddhi muDhajana (those ignorant fools having bad logical reasoning) fall below in naraka (hell) and suffer sorrow. And those with duShTa-buddhi (corrupted-intellect / defective intellect), those ignorant fools see I and brahmA ji different from viShNu, they incur sin equivalent to brahma-hatyA (killing of a brAhmaNa, a priest)

Similarly, in harivanSa [purANa] 3.88.51, maheSavara ji says - you [viShNu] are in the beginning, middle and end of all bhAva (beings). This whole universe has originated from you only and also ends in you only.

(AcArya ji continues to quote harivamSa purANa 3.88.60-64)

he janArdana! O [omnipresent deva!](#) I am you [and](#) you are me. In all three worlds, there is no different (bheda) between us either by Sabda (word) or by artha (meaning).

he govinda! in this world whatever great names are yours are mine too - there is no need to think on this (i.e. there is no doubt about this).

he gopate! (kruShNa), he jagannAtha!, let the worship of yours be mine

he deva! [it goes without saying that] [those who dislike / hate you also dislike / hate me](#). There is no doubt about it.

Source: viShNu sahasranAma, Sankara bhASya, pages 31-35, Gita press, Gorakhpur, Hindi translation.

The names 'Hari' and 'Hara' both have their origin from the root word 'hru', which means 'to withdraw or deliver'. Therefore both the names Hari and Hara mean withdrawal/deliverance. What do they withdraw? Hara withdraws all your sins, your ignorance of true nature of Brahman and also the entire creation at the end of the time. That's why Rudra is called as Hara. Vishnu delivers you of all your sins therefore he is Hari. Both remove ignorance and grant moksha. A popular saying in Yoga tārāvalī (a gloss by Ādi Śankara on Patanjali Yoga Sūtra-s) is that Siva gives knowledge and Viṣṇu grants moksha. Knowledge about true self and process or method of realizing true nature (which is Brahman) is given by Ādi guru Śiva. Śiva in Dakṣiṇāmurtī form is called as 'Jñāna mūrtī'. Dakṣiṇā means 'intellect'. Here it represents 'awakened intellect'. Hence Dakṣiṇāmurtī means 'manifestation of awakened intellect' or 'manifestation of Knowledge. Kṛṣṇa in Gītā B.G. 18.66 declares he bestows moksha on his devotees those who renounce everything and comes at his refuge.

Credits: Śrī Santosh of Mahāpāshupātastra Blog.

15.6. Nārāyaṇa (nArAyaNa)

Word 'nArAyaNa' is made up of two words, nAra+ayana.

नारायण = नार + अयन

nAryANa = nAra + ayana

Notice here that in the word 'ayana', 'na' is small 'na' (न) and not 'Na' (ण)

(This is because of maharShi pANiNi's grammar rule. This is explained later at the end of article)

Word 'nArAyaNa' has four meanings.

1) nArAyaNa = [nAra + Ayana], where, nAra = waters and Ayana = resting place. 'nArAyaNa' means 'That being whose resting place is waters'. We know that viShNu bhagavAn sleeps on ocean of milk. Hence nArAyaNa is bhagavAn viShNu

2) nArAyaNa = [nAra + Ayana], where, nAra = living entities (jIva-s) and Ayana = resting place. Here, 'nArAyaNa' means 'Resting place is jIva-s', or 'where jIva-s reside'. All jIva-s reside inside of nArAyaNa. Here nArAyaNa can be formless Brahman.

3) nArAyaNa = [nara + Ayana], where, nara = purusha (man) and Ayana = Son. In this system of splitting a word, the name of son is derived from that of Father.

For example Son of yaGYavalkya (Yajñavalkya, यज्ञवल्क्य) is yAGYavalkya (Yājñavalkya, याज्ञवल्क्य).

Notice the difference: Son's name has extra mAtra 'a' ya + aa = yaa (yA, yā), य + आ = या. It is 'yA, yā, या) and in case of father it is 'ya, य'.

Another example is

maitrAyaNa is "the son of mitra"

Here, 'nArAyaNa' means "Son of nara / purusha", which is "Hiranyagarbha (prajapati)" because the first born entity from the supreme Purusha was Hiranyagarbha. Therefore, in this context, 'nArAyaNa', is the name of "brahmA" because he is the first born.

4) nArAyaNa = [nAra + Ayana], where,

“nAra” is derived from the root “nru”, which means man (like nru-simha, the man-lion god; nrupa which means king) and

“Ayana” is derived from the root “Ay” which means “to go / goal / direction of movement”.

So, this gives the meaning of ‘nArAyaNa’ as “That being / entity whose direction is towards nara (purusha)” or “That being / entity whose goal is to move towards nara (and reach him as final destination)”. Here one has to take yogic process of rise or ascent of kuNDalini from mulAdhAra (where Adi shakti UmA pArvatI resides) to sahasrAra (where Siva resides). Here Siva is to be considered as purusha. So Adi shakti rises upto Siva to merge in it. This yogic process is also called as nArAyaNa.

Article shifted to website - [Meaning of names in Vishnu Sahasranama Sankara bhashya](#)

15.7. Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu and Śiva means the same

Nārāyaṇa means 'that in which everything lie'

Nārāyaṇa means 'the one resting on waters' - this one when used can be mapped to viShNu

Vīṣṇu means 'all-pervading'

Śiva according to Uṇādi-sūtra i, 153, means 'in which all things lie'

Hari and hara both means 'remover of sorrows' or 'remover of ignorance'

Rudra also means, 'remover of sorrows'. Ignorance is the biggest sorrow.

Nārāyaṇa, Vīṣṇu and Śiva mean same as they are one as formless Brahman.

Let us now understand different theories of creation.

16. Theories of creation

There are four theories of creation.

1. Ārambha vāda (आरंभ वाद)
2. Pariṇāma vāda (परिणाम वाद)
3. Vivarta vāda (विवर्त वाद)
4. Ajāti vāda / ajāta vāda (अजाति वाद / अजात वाद)

Two explanations are very popular - Pariṇāma vāda (परिणाम वाद) and Vivarta vāda (विवर्त वाद). We will understand these two first.

A simple explanation explaining theory of creation is that Non-dual, eternal Brahman itself became many. Hence the creator Brahman has 'transformed' 1/4th part of itself into universe. Hence all the creation (jagat) and the living entities ie souls (jīva-s) are his parts or are his partial manifestations. In this way Brahman, nara, being the cause of universe, is present in it and also pervades it. This cause-effect theory is called as '**pariṇāma vāda**'. An example is 'milk turning into curd'. Curd cannot be re-converted back into Milk. Hence this process is irreversible. Hence Jīva and jagat cannot in reality lose itself and merge into Brahman. Hence all three - Jīva, jagat and Īshvara (Brahman) are eternal. This is the philosophy that Vaiṣṇava-s (Vaishnavas) adhere too. Śaiva-s too consider jagat as a divine expression of Śiva which is created through his potency 'Ādi Shakti'.

Another popular view adopted by Ādi Śankara Bhagavadpāda is '**vivarta vāda**'. Before we understand this view, lets understand the definitions of reality and unreality.

Definitions of Real and Unreal

As per advaitic interpretation of 'reality' as found in BG 2.16, and BG 2.27, the definition of real and unreal (false) is given. Please note that the definition of mithyā is not given but will

be devised on the basis of logic. Other verses like BG 2.17-25, 2.62, 2.27, 6.30, etc gives more explanation of the nature of Brahman (Self). They are quoted later under notes so that only interested readers can read it. Rest can skip that section to maintain flow of reading.

In BG 2.16, Bhagavān says, that which is Real is eternal and Unreal does not exist at any time.

In BG 2.27, Bhagavān says, Anyone born has to die and anything that dies is reborn ...

This means that Reality does not suffer from birth, transformation, delay and death. That which does not have beginning does not have an end.

Unreal or false does not exist at any time. An example is rabbit's horn or a Child of Barren Women. They never exist and hence cannot be discussed.

The important definition of Self or Brahman as adopted from BG is *undecaying, immovable and unchangeable*. These three are very important qualities of Self or Brahman.

mithyā

On this basis, we can say that only Brahman is truth, everything else is false. However don't we experience this world? How can we question our own existence? Well, the answer to this is that there is an in-between state which is called as mithyā. That which is neither real nor unreal is called as mithyā. In other words, that which is experienced, but is not of eternal nature i.e. is temporary is mithyā. Hence this world is called as mithyā. Examples of mithyā are three states of consciousness, waking, dream and deep sleep. Another example is sea shell appearing as silver and mirage of appearance of water in desert sand.

Please note that there are views that consider this world as real. Sanātana dharma accepts all kinds of logical explanations that find support in śāshtra-s. Different views are suitable for people with different temperaments and mental make-up. In order to avoid complications, we will only stick to Ādi Śankara's interpretations.

Notes:

bhagavAn in gltA says:

BG 2.27 For death of anyone born, is certain, and of the dead (re-) birth is a certainly...

This means that anything that is born dies. The definition of real and unreal is

- BG 2.16 **Of the unreal there is no being; the real has no non-existence.** But the nature of both these, indeed, has been realized by the seers of Truth.

Definition of Self is

- BG 2.17 But know That to be indestructible **by which all this is pervaded (omnipresent / all pervading).** None can bring about the destruction of this **Immutable.**
- BG 2.18 These destructible bodies are said to belong to the everlasting, indestructible, indeterminable, embodied One.
- BG 2.20 **Never is this One born, and never does It die; nor is it that having come to exist, It will again cease to be.** This One is birthless, eternal, undecaying, ancient; It is not killed when the body is killed.
- BG 2.21 O Partha, **he who knows this One as indestructible, eternal, birthless and undecaying ...**
- BG 2.24 This Self cannot be cut, burnt, wetted, nor dried up. **It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, immovable and ancient.**
- BG 2.25 It is said that **This is unmanifest (avyakta); This is inconceivable; This is unchangeable.**
- BG 2.72 O Partha, **this is the state of being established in Brahman. One does not become deluded after attaining this. One attains identification with Brahman by being established in this state** even in the closing years of one's life.
- BG 6.30 **He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, he never becomes separated from Me, nor do I become separated from him.**

Hence we can conclude that

That which has beginning has an end. shruti-s explain that in the beginning there was only one brahman. Then brahman created the universe. Universe, jiva-s were created. Hence they suffer from prior non-existence (i.e. this universe was non-existence before it's birth - creation). bhagavAn says that Self does not die, when established in brahman becomes immortal. Self is unmanifested and unborn.

The important definition of Self or Brahman is undecaying, immovable and unchangeable. these three are very important qualities of Self or Brahman.

With this in mind, let's continue to discuss vivarta vāda.

An example that aptly describes this view is the very popular 'snake and rope analogy' or 'rajju-sarpa-vāda' which is also found in Bhāgavat purāṇa 10.14.28. Entire philosophy of advaita can be explained by this example. Delving deep would fill pages and is a separate topic for practising advaitins well versed in basics of advaita. Here, we will briefly understand this example. In a dark room, a rope is (wrongly) perceived as snake. Reacting to this snake, either one is afraid of it as tries to run away from it or one tries to catch it to earn something out of it. The game (reaction) of 'run-and-chase' continues as long as snake is perceived. The reason for this behaviour is our ignorance i.e. absence of the knowledge of truth. When we switch on the light, snake simply disappears and rope manifests itself without any effort on our part. Snake simply vanishes leaving no trace of itself. Snake was superimposed on Rope. Wrong perception made it look real. Snake 'veiled' the rope. Snake was real only until darkness prevailed. In the same way, this world is experienced as separate object due to veiling power of māyā. Once this veil, the root cause of ignorance is removed, Self, the Brahman, shines by itself. This world is true only until the truth is veiled. The world talked here is better understood if we take it as 'mental world' or 'Jīva śrīṣṭi'. What we perceive need not be true. We can be deluded. It is our mind that values one object over another. Object does not value itself. For example, 'Gold' is valuable than 'rock'. But Gold itself does not say so. It is our mind that makes such distinction. This is called as *Jīva śrīṣṭi* or *mano śrīṣṭi*. When in samadhi, mind is melts into oneness and merges into Non-dual Brahman. In this state, since mind loses its individual existence, just like a drop loses its existence when it merges into ocean, does not experiences anything separately. Jīva becomes Śiva (Brahman). No world is experienced in this state. This final state is called as '*advaita-sthiti*' or '*nirvikalp samādhi*'.

A philosophy specifically dealing with this state is called as '**ajāti-vāda**' or '**ajāt-vāda**'. '*ja*' means 'birth'. '*aja*' or '*a-jāta*' means 'unborn'. In this theory, nothing is born. The world was never created. Ādi Śankara's paramguru (guru's guru) Śrī Gauḍapāda or Śrī Gauḍpadāchārya jī advocated this philosophy as highest truth, which is reflected on his kārikā on Māṇḍukya Upanishad. (Kārikā is a type of commentary which explains inner meaning of verses.)

Theory of indeterminability - That which cannot be explained (anirvachanīya)

Hence in this explanation, the world and jīvahood are temporary, only Brahman is unchanging, eternal, unborn reality. Since we do not know when the world or jīva-s were first created, we consider them as 'unborn'. But since they merge in Brahman in samādhi, i.e. they are destroyed, they are not unborn in real sense. Nobody known when the world was created or when jīva-s came into existence. If Brahman is immovable, or beyond guṇa-s when how did māyā create this universe by herself? Was māyā created by Brahman or is it ever existent? How can māyā whose birth is not known by anyone merge into Brahman in samādhi? Many questions arise which cannot be answered conclusively. Answering one question may contradict another theory which says māyā is absent in brahman. This phenomenon of 'indeterminability' is called as '*anirvachanīya*' (अनिर्वचनीय) i.e. 'unexplainable, indescribable'. All this is due to the power of the Lord's Māyā. Hence Māyā is called as '*anirvachanīya*'.

There is one more theory, '**ārambha vāda**', thus making four 'theories of creation'. In ārambha vāda, God is the kartā (doer) and he created this universe. This vāda suits those who believe in karma and cannot believe that God does not do any karma. They believe that without karma nothing is possible. Like potter creating pot. Pot cannot be created by itself. Potter (Brahman) acts. His action creates pot (world). Nyāya-vaisheshikā adopt this vāda. In parināma vāda, God does not in reality work (act), but everything happens by itself. For example, Sun which does not do any work but under its influence we find transformations like water vapourizing into steam, plants growing, etc. Pariṇāma vāda is for subtle intellect as is adopted by sāṅkhya philosophy. It also finds support in śāstra-s. Subtler than Pariṇāma vāda is vivarta vāda. Ādi Śankara adopted this vedic philosophy to explain mithyā nature of māyā. Mithyā means of temporary and of changing nature. Subtlest of all is the philosophy of ajāti-vāda. It is only for selected few purified souls who are very near to experiencing 'enlightenment'. Aṣṭāvakra Gītā, Yōga Vāsiṣṭha and Maṇḍukya kārikā explain this philosophy.

Note: Further explanation for those well versed with basics of vedānta - **can be skipped.**

Those adhering to ārambha vāda believe that God can only be realised by karma, whereas Ādi Śankara says that 'There is no liberation without Knowledge of Self'. No action can earn Self-realisation. Mental efforts gives us inner purity, but not knowledge. Action always has its limits. Self Realisation is limitless. It is immortal and eternal state. Limited effort cannot yield unlimited results. 'Earning' Self Realisation means it was not present in past but was achieved by 'effort' i.e. karma. This is not true, as Brahman, our true nature, is eternally present in past, present and future. This topic is very subtle and needs much explanation and intense meditation to understand it properly. Hence we will leave it as of now. It will get cleared as one progresses spiritually.

We will also discuss two theories of creations known as sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vāda and dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda.

16.1. Sṛṣṭi-Dṛṣṭi Vāda and Dṛṣṭi-Sṛṣṭi Vāda - Theories of Creation

(Shrishti-Drishti vada and Drishti-Shrishti Vada)

There are three main ways of understanding creation in the advaita tradition - namely,

1. ajāti vāda (in reality no creation occurred),
2. sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vāda (what has been created is perceived) and
3. dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda (perception is simultaneous with creation)

Ajāti view is held in the pāramārthika sense, while the other two views are held in the vyāvahārika sense. We have already discussed ajāti vāda. Let's discuss the other two. Please understand that a given teacher may use one or more of these vāda-s, depending upon his own views, the student's ability, and other factors.

sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vāda (what has been created is perceived)

According to this view, first came the universe and then the vision of universe (as separate from us) was perceived. We find from our śāshtra-s that first Brahman or Īshvara created the universe. Hence universe came into existence and then we jīva-s came into existence and experienced duality. Without this world, how can jīva-s be created?. Jīva-s need a place to live in. Hence sṛṣṭi (creation) is prior to dṛṣṭi (perception). This is sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vāda (what has been created is perceived). This view is commonly accepted and is better suited for new students as we all see this universe distinct from ourselves.

Note for advanced seekers -

After a student matures, s/he can adopt vivarta vāda and later on in final stage when one gets first glimpse of samādhi can adopt ajāti vāda. Ajāti vāda is important to strongly embed the reality of non-dual Brahman. It also breaks the common notion that Brahman can be achieved only by doing certain kriyā-s like japa, tapa, nidhidhyāsa, surrender, concentration, or kuṇḍlini activation. You can use 'autosuggestion' to go to sleep. For example, 'I am feeling sleepy, my eyes are getting heavy', etc are autosuggestions. You continue until you do not enter into sleep. After you enter in sleep, do you continue to practice autosuggestion. The purpose of autosuggestion is to 'sleep'. Once we are already sleeping, there is no need of autosuggestion. Similarly, all the processes and methods to realise Brahman are fulfilled when one enters into this blissful state. After entering into this state you do not need to do 'anything to enter' into samādhi. In this state, there is absence of concentration and all methods. This may not feel correct. Lets try to use proper wordings. This is because they all represent 'an act'. You need an object to concentrate onto. Hence there is always subject-object relationship. This relationship is dual in nature. It comes under relative reality and not absolute reality which is non-dual and independent in nature. Hence in state of samādhi, there is absence of act of concentration, absence of act of surrender, absence of any act of doing kriyā-s, etc. Just abide in your true nature.

Meditation process - from effort to effortless

Your true nature is Ātman or Brahman. In order to be 'just you', you do not need to do anything. So 'just be' in the natural state. Abiding in the 'natural state' is practically not possible for all. Only those who enter into this state, but cannot stay in this blissful, nondual state for ever, can actually adopt this vāda in practice. For such advanced seekers, there is no need to study vedānta, no need to practice Yogic kriyā-s, no need of any āsana-s, no need of japa or tapa. Nidhidhyāsa (Self Enquiry) or OM chanting happens by itself. One stays as an observer. After a thought is uprooted, Self Enquiry or OM chanting drops automatically and

everything melts into oneness. The little 'I' or 'ego' melts into to bigger complete 'I' called as 'aham'. This capital 'I' or Self than spontaneously shines itself. Self was already there the moment veil of ignorance draped with desires, emotions and thoughts is removed. What is left is capital 'I' or Self. Hence one has to just stay in natural state without any effort. Meditator no more makes any effort. Hence there is no kriyā (mental effort of any kind). Consciousness is naturally rooted in the source. **Meditation has now transformed from effort to effortless. Jñāna reveals itself as soon as ajñāna is removed just like the Sun shine returns as soon as clouds fade away.**

In words of Sri Ramana Maharshi

“As one enters into deep meditative state, there is someone already waiting for you. After entering into this state, you, as an individual, have no role to play, whatever is to be done is done by someone else.”

“After burning the corpse, fire does not remain alive but extinguishes itself. Similarly, the Self Enquiry or OM after removing ignorance does not continue but merges into its source.”

Next vāda is -

dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi vāda (perception is simultaneous with creation)

According to this less popular view, cognition or perception and creation are simultaneous. The world exist because we perceive it. The world itself does not say that it exists. Hence the creation is in mind. Here it is better to understand the creation of world as 'mental creation'. If we take real creation, then some objections could be raised. Refuting these objections will further complicate things. Hence we will stick with the interpretation of world as 'inner world created by mind'. Many things will begin to make sense if we adopt this view. Instead of talking about origin of universe, which will only be a guess work as nobody knows the truth of origin of universe, is it not better to understand the origin of inner universe and understand our own mind? This meditative approach helps one evolve to higher state of consciousness and dive deep within ourselves.

In case of advanced seekers, their guru is going to tell the truth which will be revealed to them as 'direct experience' either in meditation or in waking state with open eyes. What happens in dream happens exactly the same way in waking state. There is no difference in dream and waking state. But this truth may not be palatable. Hence **we will keep creation as 'jīva sṛṣṭi', which is our understanding of the world created by perception, supposition, preconceived notions, biased thinking, unnecessary valuation to objects and opinion of others and what not.** One person may be good for one and bad for another. Ours is relative world, every comparison, opinion or perception is relative to something and hence is relative reality.

In order to understand dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda, we must first understand that meaning of the word 'dṛṣṭi' (drishti).

16.1.1. Meaning of dṛṣṭi (vision)

Dṛṣṭi though is translated into 'vision' is not to be taken as just 'vision'. By vision, we mean our 'perception'. When we see something, say a golden brick, we add our own value to it. So Gold is not perceived just as a 'metal', but as 'valuable metal'. When we see something, image gets projected inside our brain. This is called as sensation. Brain processes this image and tries to give a meaningful suggestion. This meaningful suggestion is our own suggestion based on information collected in past and our opinion attached to the information. So **perception can be defined as 'sensation + meaningful suggestion'.**

According to Science, light rays fall on eye lens, are carried onto brain to form an image. This image is the cognised. However our shāshtra-s give different explanation. Mind travels up to object via senses, feels it and then projects its own opinion on the object. Shāshtra-s speak from mental level.

Sensation without meaningful suggestion makes no sense. Any sensation has to be coupled with meaningful suggestion. If no meaning can be deduced, mind rejects it. For example, while walking on road, eyes see many people, but do we remember all faces? However, if we spot a known face, say our friend, we will respond to him. We not only see an image of human being, but we see our friend in it. Along with friend, we keep his nature (character or personality and behaviour towards us) in mind while dealing with him. In other words, we have 'an opinion' about our friend. Hence we just do not sense or see, but we 'perceive' in our own unique way due to unique opinion. This perception is based upon

our own imagination and preconceived notions. Likewise, what may be important to one may not be important to another. Shāshtra-s call this selective perception as 'likes and dislikes' i.e. 'rāga and dvesha'.

So we do not just see the object, but we perceive it. In other words, mind tries to 'know' the object via senses. Hence seeing (which is actually perceiving) is knowing.

With this in mind, let us understand dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda with the help of snake and rope analogy in light of Sri Ramana Maharshi's verses #7 from '40 verses on reality'.

Now the question arises, How can both vision and creation happen simultaneously?

Sri Ramana Maharshi in 40 verses on reality verse 7 says -

“Though both jagat (creation) and knowledge (mana or manas or mind) both rises (comes forth) into existence and perishes simultaneously, still, it is due to mind (knowledge) that the world manifests itself [inside us]. That which shines or exists as the origin of creation and destruction [of inner world], and shines forth even when there is no activity of creation or destruction is the absolute truth (tatvam).

The question is why is it said that both knowledge (mind) and creation happens simultaneously?

We will understand snake-rope analogy part by part.

1. Eyes sees something but cannot identify what it is - Sensation happens first.
2. Mind tries to give meaningful suggestion of this unclear image (sensation) and so creates an image of snake. - Meaningful suggestion
3. This image, which is created within itself, is then projected onto object by mind via senses (eyes) - process of perception.
4. Observer believes that it has seen snake - Snake is perception

Though we have broken the phenomenon of seeing snake on rope in parts, in reality, one never sees rope in first place nor does one sees rope getting transformed into snake. One directly sees snake at first place. Hence we can say that both vision of snake and projection of snake happen simultaneously as Sri Ramana Maharshi has said. Hence this phenomenon is said to be dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda.

On a deeper level, we know that mind first creates an image of snake and then it projects onto object (rope). Here mind is knowledge and snake is samsāra. We see what our mind perceives. This is what is said by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Moving forward, let's understand how mind is knowledge. Mind [in dream] creates universe, preserves it and then destroys it in itself. Though in the dream there are many characters, in reality they are all played by mind. There is no one else than mind. Hence this creation depends upon mind which is both material and efficient cause. In other words mind has both knowledge and material to create the world. Hence Sri Ramana Maharshi refers to mind as knowledge.

We will connect these two vāda-s with four theories of creation. Sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vāda suits ārambha vāda and pariṇāma vāda and to some extent vivarta vāda. Whereas dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda suits vivarta vāda and ajāti vāda.

16.1.2. Detailed analysis of dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda

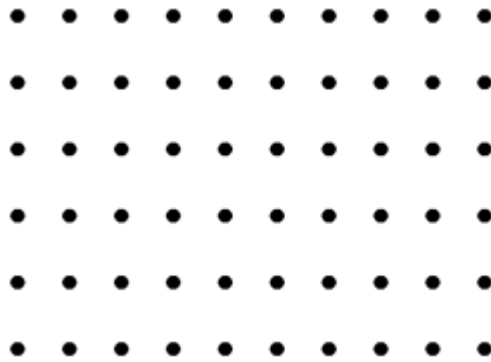
Please note that most of the things are already explained above in brief. Hence this article is repeated with detailed explanation.

How Brain Perceives any information ...

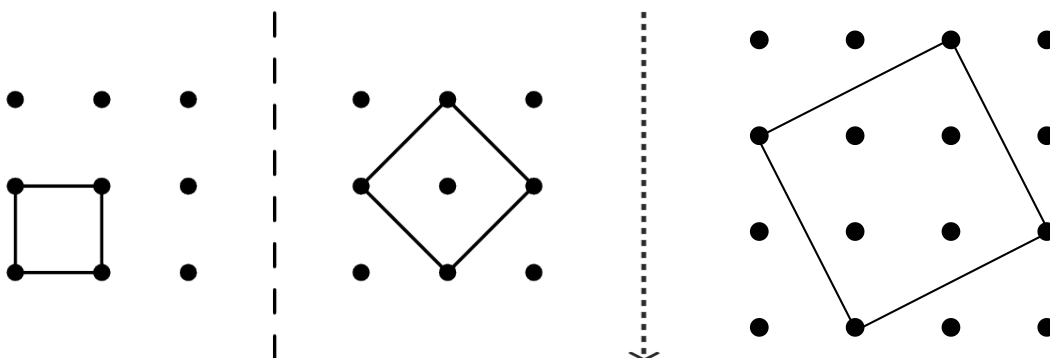
First we will have to understand the process of perception. According to modern medical science, when light rays fall on retina, light rays are carried via optical fibres and the image is projected on cerebral cortex. An inverted image is formed, is then perceived by brain. Brain tries to understand the image with the information it already has. For example if we see a shape 'clock', light rays which fall on eye lens are projected on cerebral cortex. This can be termed as sensation. Then brain tries to interpret the image by giving a meaningful suggestion. Here the suggestion given is 'this is a clock'. So perception may be defined as

sensation + meaningful suggestion. However, our shāshtra-s explain perception in a slightly different way. **Our shāshtra-s say, that mind travels through senses up to the object, touches it, feels it and then gives meaningful suggestion.** The explanation is based on mental level.

With this in mind, when mind senses anything via five senses, it immediately tries to find a meaningful explanation and tries to arrive at conclusion. When the object is not clearly perceived or seen, mind tries to correlate it with the nearest object that is stored in mind. Mind keeps imagining until it reaches an acceptable conclusion. It superimposes the nearest image on the unclear object. Nature of mind to constantly imagine until it reaches meaningful conclusion can be aptly explained by a small experiment of staring at equidistant dots



Keep seeing the dots. Soon, in few seconds, mind will try to connect dots. You may see a square, rectangle, triangle, rhombus, or any other relevant shape that mind can think of.



In above experiment, in reality, there is no shape, there are no lines, yet mind superimposes lines connecting dots. In other words mind sees what it chooses to see, which may not be the reality.

With this in mind, let us understand vivarta vāda with the help of dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda.

Further observations from snake-rope analogy:

Here, the object rope already existed prior to observer stepping in dark room. But it's existence was not noted and is of little consequence to the observer. Observer is not influenced by rope due to absence of cognition. The wrong cognition of rope as snake was due to faulty perception of mind. **The image of snake was first created or imagined in mind before it was projected on external object rope. Here mind represents knowledge and snake represents the world (samsāra). Snake is indeed considered as real on first instance of perception and the observer continues to believe in this false perception until the truth is revealed to him.** The world (of observer) is conceived inside the mind first. Hence it is the mind that makes the world (as perceived by observer) into existence (though both vision and projection happen simultaneously).

Let us recall the verse under consideration

Sri Ramana Maharshi in 40 verses on reality verse 7 says -

“Though both jagat (creation) and knowledge (mana or manas or mind) both rises (comes forth) into existence and perishes simultaneously, still, it is due to mind (knowledge) that the world manifests itself [inside us]. That which shines or exists as the origin of creation and destruction [of inner world], and shines forth even when there is no activity of creation or destruction is the absolute truth (tatvam).

Earlier, we had taken first part of the verse into consideration. Now we will take second part. This part is very important for a sādḥaka. One is trained to stay as a witness and search for the origin of thoughts or desires (vāsanā). This source of thoughts and desires is also the

source of any mantra. Hence all types of contemplation be it Self Enquiry or OM chanting, they all end in merging in this source. Hence from the beginning, the focus of meditation is this 'source'. Let's understand the second part.

That which shines or exists as the origin of creation and destruction [of inner world], and shines forth even when there is no activity of creation or destruction is the absolute truth tatvam.

In order to superimpose something, one needs a substratum, a base, upon which any image can be projected. Just like canvas is substratum or base for painting, rope here represents the substratum or base which is already present prior to (mental) creation, preservation and destruction (of projection of image of snake on rope). In this entire process, nothing in reality happens to rope. Rope never gets transformed into snake at anytime, but is wrongly perceived as snake due to faulty vision.

Rope, **as the cause**, exists in snake. Snake is in reality a rope (but is hidden). Snake depends upon rope for its existence, whereas rope can stay as rope in its natural state without any superimposition i.e. activity of creation, preservation and destruction of image of snake. Rope represents Brahman. Snake is not rope, but rope appears as snake due to faulty vision (perception), which in turn is due to God's māyā.

Meaning of 'Nārāyaṇa or Śiva is present in samsāra as cause'

In light of snake-rope analogy, let's try to understand the meaning of 'Nārāyaṇa or Śiva is present in samsāra as cause'.

Names Nārāyaṇa and Śiva represent Brahman. Nārāyaṇa is made up of two words, 'nara' and 'ayana'. Nārāyaṇa is found as #245th name in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma. Ādi Sankara in his commentary on Viṣṇu Sahasranāma gives one of the meaning of Nārāyaṇa as -

'Ātman' is known as 'nara' (नर), ākāsha et al (5 elements) originating from this ['nara'] are known as 'nāra' (नार). [nara], as their cause, pervades 'nāra', which is the effect, hence it [nara] is their resting place (house); therefore Bhagavān is known as 'Nārāyaṇa'. It is said in mantravarṇa (Nārāyaṇa Up. 13.1-2) - Whatever creation we see or hear [or experience via 5 senses] is pervaded by Nārāyaṇa from both within and outside.

Nārāyaṇa means, 'The resting place of jīva-s'. Śiva means 'in which all things lie'. Both names point to the source where finally jīva-s merge. It is also the place from where jīva-s emerged. Here present in samsāra as source means that rope (Brahman) is present in snake (world) as the cause. This does not mean that Brahman is actually transformed into universe. In snake, technically there is no rope, yet we can say that in reality it is rope only. The word 'cause' means that it is the root cause or source of anything. Here it means it is snake is not Brahman, this world is not Brahman, but Brahman appears as this world because of māyā. In this sense we say that Īshvara is present in jagat, yet it is not present, as mentioned in BG 9.4 and BG 9.5 and in other verses like BG 7.6.

An interesting thing to note is that 'samsāra' is not used by bhagavān in gītā. The word used is 'vishva'. It seems that the word 'samsāra' means 'jīva-sṛṣṭi' or 'mano-sṛṣṭi', while vishva or jagat means the world created by Īshvara.

Note A for advanced seekers: World is projection of mind of Brahmā jī

Further we may say that this world is created by the mind of Brahmā jī. Hence this world is a mental projection of Īshvara. If we take external world as illusion or projection of Self, and that each one of us sees i.e. perceives this world in different way, then how come we see this world as same. We all see this trees, objects, etc. The answer is that since we are covered by the mind of Īshvara and his māyā, we perceive same object. This truth is not acceptable, as we all live in this world. Hence we will stick to the world as 'world as we perceive'.

Note B: Faulty vision leads one to do faulty things

It may still not be clear how is this a dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda. We will take into consideration the reaction after which one suddenly sees rope. Remember we talked that we have preconceived notions and our own biases? Same applies here. After one sees (dṛṣya) snake, either one runs away from it due to fear or one tries to catch it to earn something out of it or to eat it. So the wrong notion of rope being snake leads us to doing wrong things. We live in such mental world. We give different valuation to gold and iron. The moment we see gold, we also attach an 'asset' to it. This applying of 'special value' makes gold special for us. Hence we live in the world created by us and perceive objects with our 'own vision'. **Vision is not to be taken as just vision. Sensation without meaning makes no sense. Hence any sensation has to be coupled with meaningful sensation. Hence we just do not sense or see, but we 'perceive'. This perception is based upon our own imagination. So vision**

(dṛṣṭi) and cognition (sṛṣṭi) happens simultaneously. This is dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda. What may be important to one may not be important to another. Each one of us perceives this world in his own way. Shāshtra-s call this selective perception as 'likes and dislikes' i.e. 'rāga and dvesha'. One has to rise above this perception of mind by being a witness and transcend the mind to enter into non-dual state where pure consciousness prevails.

Note C: Why mind does not see the world?

We must understand that we are not talking about the world and its objects, but the 'way world is perceived by us'. What mind cannot perceive, is non-existent for it. For example every moment someone is born and someone dies. But do we feel happiness and sorrow each and every moment. But suppose that we see a person hit by a truck and is in pain. Now our mind reacts to this incident as it is cognised by mind. If you were not present on the scene of accident, you won't feel anything. This incident never happened for you. That is why when mind is destroyed or merges into Brahman, one does not see or experience any creation. Here it is to be noted that the world is negated and not destroyed. Negation does not mean destruction, else if one person gets enlightenment, the whole world will be destroyed. It should also be noted that if there is no desire for any object, it makes no difference where the object is present in front of you or not.

Earlier, we were talking about nara and nāra. We discussed various theories of creations. We will refresh this topic.

According to **ārambha vāda**, God really creates the real world and souls. This view looks good to beginners but is rejected by vedāntins as God in reality never divides himself and creates world and souls. In this case of name #245 Nārāyaṇa, ārambha vāda would mean that God actually creates universe and is separate from it. This view opposes the views of Vaiṣṇava-s who think jīva jagat and Īshvara are eternal. Hence creation in reality cannot be 'created', as it is eternal.

Pariṇāma vāda is better than ārambha vāda, as the creation happens by itself. Milk even though left undisturbed transforms into curd. Hence God pervades into the world as its cause. Īshvara is cause and jagat is effect. This logic is useful for practical purposes on vyavahārika level.

We also discussed **vivarta vāda**. *nara* is present in *nāra* i.e *nara* pervades *nāra* as cause. Rope is present in snake and pervades it as its cause. In reality rope never pervades snake, as snake was never real. In other words, snake is real but temporary and rope is its cause of creation only until the truth is realised. After realising the truth, there is no creation. This is **ajāti vāda**. In vivarta vāda there is no real creation of universe.

There are two other vāda-s or theories of creations explaining the position of cause and effect. They are satkārya vāda and asatkārya vāda. These two vāda-s pointed out by a reader [Śrī Ravishankar jī](#). Since these two vāda-s are added later, they are explained in brief separately as earlier four vāda-s along with sṛṣṭi-dṛṣṭi vāda and dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda well are integrated with each other. Information about these vāda-s is compiled from [notes](#) of Sri S.N. Shastri ji, a well known Advaitin who has translated many work of Śrī Ādi Śankarāchārya jī in English. Credits: Thanks to [Advaita Vision](#) for sharing this info.

16.2. Satkārya vāda and asatkārya vāda

‘sat’ means ‘existence’ or ‘truth’, ‘asat’ means ‘non-existence’. We recall the verse BG 2.16 - Truth (reality) never dies, and untruth (unreal) never exists. ‘Kārya’ here means ‘effect’ or ‘that which is produced’. Sat, which is Brahman, is the cause and kārya (effect) is the creation.

Satkārya vāda is propagated by sāmkhya and asatkārya vāda is propagated in nyāya-vaśeṣika (न्याय-वैशेषिक) and Buddhist philosophy of śūṅya vāda of mādhyamika school.

According to satkārya vāda, effect is pre-existent in the cause. According to Buddhist version of asatkārya vāda, Cause cease to exist after it gets transformed into effect. Hence cause (Brahman), cease to exist. This is śūṅya vāda, where the zero state, non-existence of anything is the final state.

According to nyāya-vaśeṣika’s asatkārya vāda, effect is not preexistent in cause, but cause is present before, during and after cause is transformed into effect.

sāṃkhya rejects asatkārya vāda, pointing out that, if the effect is not already in the cause, then anything can be produced from anything else, for example, curd can be produced from water and oil from sand. So the sāṃkhya-s hold that the effect, kārya, must exist (sat) in the cause.

Sāṃkhya-s further hold that there is a real transformation or pariṇāma of the cause into the effect and that both the cause and the effect are real. Advaita vedānta accepts one part of satkārya vāda, that effect (kārya) is pre-existent in cause (Brahman). However sāṃkhya-s and those schools which accept pariṇāma vāda often give example of 'Milk transforming in curd' or simply 'milk changing into curd'. Brahman, also known as Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu gets really transformed in the creation. This 'reality' of transformation is not accepted by advaita, as, if Brahman gets transformed, then it is divided and that 1/4th part which got transformed into jagat and jīva-s will cease to exist. Also this process is irreversible. Curd cannot be reconverted into Milk. Hence this world cannot die, which contradicts BG 2.16, that anything that is born dies and truth is unborn and does not suffer from non-existence. Brahman cannot suffer from non-existence. Though there are technical issues with pariṇāma vāda it is easy to understand and hence adopted by vaiṣṇava sampradāya-s. They must also have given a logical logical explanation so as not to contradict BG 2.16 and related verses and must have made sure that Brahman's eternality is not compromised.

We must understand that no theory is perfect from all viewpoints. For example this world is not real but mithyā is difficult to accept. We must also note that no example used to explain any theory is perfect, especially if interpreted from different view point. An example has it's own limitations. An example should be understood and interpreted with context to the theory that is explained and from positive attitude.

We will now move over to a new topic. Sanātana Dharma has many distinctive features, which are not found in other religions.

17. Distinctive Features of sanAtana Dharma

Some of the distinctive features of SD are :

1. Religion without any name.
2. One God depicted as many - Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, Ādi Śakti, Gaṇeśa and Ṣaṇmukha (Murugan, Kartikeya).

3. God has a form (attributes) and is also formless (attributeless, nirguNa brahman).
4. Varṇa-Āshrama dharma.
5. Every action thought and carefully carried out is for personal and universal well being and for Ātmic development i.e. to attain inner purity.
6. Takes into account after life. Following injunctions, as laid in shāstra-s, will make one ascend to higher, spiritual more evolved worlds of demi-gods, and other worlds.
7. Rebirth (reincarnation)
8. Final liberation is to be free from cycle of birth and death
9. Freedom is here and now in this world. One can be free in this life itself, while living i.e. still being in physical body.
10. Covers people of all kinds of temperaments.
11. Covers all aspects of Life.
12. Unlike other religions, which are named after their founders, Hindu dharma is not created by any one person.
13. Vedas have been independently existing since time immemorial. They were revealed to great saints called rishi-s. They were not created by men or God. Hence veda-s are eternal, without any beginning or end. Since time does not exist before and after creation when there is nothing but Brahman, the unborn supreme reality, hence veda-s which have existed eternally are not restricted by time and hence are timeless.
14. Conversion is not a requirement in Hinduism nor is there any conversion ceremony where you pledge to a belief in a particular savior.
15. Heaven and Hell are not eternal nor the life in Heaven and Hell is eternal. A soul in order to suffer or enjoy the fruits of his / her action either ascends in heaven or descends in Hell, the lower worlds, and stays there until the fruits of karma are not exhausted. After the fruits are exhausted, the soul takes birth in earthly plane. Hindus do not wish to stay and enjoy with 72 virgins waiting in bedroom in Heaven.
16. There is no judgement day and resurrection as believed by Christians and Muslims nor Hindus consider themselves as special people selected by God as believed by Jews.
17. The cycle of creation, preservation and destruction of universe is an ongoing process.
18. Life and Death are continuous and never ending like day and night until one extinguishes all desires and fruits of karma-s to get liberated
19. Belief in concept of avatAra, incarnations of God either in full or in part and descend of fully realized saints and siddha-s for upliftment of humanity and for removal of weeds and non-vedic elements that have crept into Hinduism.
20. Guru-SiShya paramparA, the Guru – disciple tradition.
21. The concept of jivan mukti - Attain immortality while still staying in physical body.
22. Hindu-s may choose to live in blissful company of their beloved God in their God's loka like vaikunTha and enjoy his constant company eternally until they merge in their ISTa devatA.
23. Being of contemplative nature, sanAtana dharma is scientific in nature. It encourages one to dive deep into the subject and find the cause of object under study.

Now, we will discuss an important and unique part of SD which is the backbone of SD and the reason for sustainable of SD from time immemorial.

18. varnAshrama dharma

varNa is often translated and used interchangeably with the word 'Caste'. Caste is not the word of Indian Origin, but of Portuguese origin. Caste is not *varNa*. Caste is translated as 'jAtI' (jātī) which is a subset of *varNa*. There are four *varNa*-s –

- brAhmaNa (Brahmin, also written as brAhmin),
- kshatriya (xatriya),
- vaishya,
- SUDra (shUdra, śūdra).

Within brAhmin *varNa*, there are many jAtI-s.

varNAshrama dharma is made up of two words *varNa* [dharma] and Ashrama [dharma].

18.1. varNa dharma

Opinion of traditional *vaidika āchārya*-s like Sankarāchārya, Rāmānujāchārya, Madhvāchārya, etc is that '*varNa* is by *guNa* but *guNa* is by birth because we take past lives into account'. It is a misconception that *varNa* is purely based on *guNa*-s only. This is explained later in an article [Traditional view of varṇa dharma](#).

Let's understand four *varṇa*-s in brief.

18.2. Brāhmaṇa-s

Veda-s are of utmost importance. They have to be protected. *Veda*-s are not short texts that can be easily memorized. Further the mantras (verses) contained in them have their own potency when they are pronounced properly. To ensure this, a full proof system was developed by great *rishi*-s (Seer) so that not even a bit of information gets corrupted while orally passing from one person to another. Each verse in *veda* called as *shruti vacan* (commandment of *shruti*) has

- a *rishi* (seer to whom this verse was revealed),
- a *devatā* (God / Demigod to whom this verse is attributed or dedicated) and
- *chandas* or meter in which a verse has to be sung or chanted.

18.2.1. Veda-s can only be preserved by oral tradition

Veda-s cannot be preserved in written form even with svara-s (musical annotations) as they are insufficient to describe pitch, length and the depth of a particular character in a particular word. This can only be known by listening it from an accomplished master. Mantra is sound. Sound is nothing but a kind of energy and vibration. We are all affected by vibrations and energy. When a vedic mantra is properly pronounced, it produces divine positive vibrations. Anyone who hears them or is present in vicinity receives these vibrations and his subtle body, mind and nADI-s are cleansed and purified. Each vibration has it's own frequency. Hence to generate a particular frequency, one needs to pronounce a word in a definite way to produce desired effect. This is the reason why veda-s cannot be preserved in books. They must be chanted.

To master one veda, it takes around 10 years. Hence to master 4 vedas, it would take 40 years of dedication. Further the works mentioned in vedas are to be carried out faithfully to ensure universal well being and for personal spiritual development. This is a Herculean task. For this purpose, an entire class was created, who was entrusted with this responsibility. They came to be known as brAhmin-s. Their foremost duty is to learn, recite, practice and teach veda-s. brAhmin-s also carry other duties like being a pujArl (priest), performing various rites and rituals like marriage ceremony, after-death ceremony, etc. They also teach various arts like warfare, economics, etc.

18.3. Kshatriya-s

Society needs to be safe guarded against any foreign attack and needs to be governed properly to function effectively. Duty of protection and administration is entrusted to kshatriya-s.

18.4. Vaishya-s

Agriculture and trading are the heart of any community for its sustenance. These duties are entrusted to vaishya-s. They are the business community. While the modern education has special courses for management and in doing business, SD already has a special varNa in whom art of doing business is in their blood. There is a popular saying that mARvArl-s (a mArvArl speaking business community practising either Hinduism or Jainism) and Jains learn art of doing business in their mother's womb. They don't need to enroll in a 2 year course on Business management.

18.5. Sudra-s

Sudra-s are helping and trading class. They are essential for running of society. Without them society would collapse. They do not need to learn veda-s. Ensuring their spiritual progress is the duty of brAhmin. If he stops chantings vedas, it is shudra who has to suffer, as he is entrusted with different vocation. If a shudra starves, it is vaishya community which has to be blamed. If Shudra feels insecurity, Kshatriya has to protect them. Kanchi Paramacharya says that there are some portions of veda-s which Sudra-s are supposed to chant. However, he has not pinpointed verses or sections to be chanted by Sudra-s.

The common perception is that Sudra-s do not enjoy the same status as that of other three varṇa-s. However, brahmins and other varṇa-s have restrictions on diet, behaviour and freedom. brAhmin-s are supposed to follow restrictions strictly than other varNa-s. Sudra-s enjoy liberty in restrictions. According to KarpAtrI svAml, a highly revered saint and most preferred and deserving sanyAsin to hold title of SankarAchArya (of jyotirmath), a sudra gets purified and gains same merits by simply looking at the temple doom as a brAhmin priest gets from performing pUjA.

Kanchi Paramacharya says:

We must note that they (Sudra-s) are comparatively free from the discipline and rituals to which the rest are tied down. In the past, they knew more contentment than the other castes, living as they did by the side of the lord. Vyasa himself says: "Kalih saduh, Sudrah saduh" (The age of Kali is no way inferior to other ages nor the sudras inferior to other castes. Kali is indeed elevated and Sudras exalted.) In other yugas or ages Bhagawan is attained to with difficulty by meditation, austerities and puja, but in Kali he is reached by the mere singing of his names. The Brahmin, the Kshatriya and the Vaisya are likely to have self pride, so they cannot attain Atmic liberation easily. The Brahmin is likely to be in vain about his intellectual superiority, the Kshatriya about his power as a ruler and the Vaisya about his wealth. So these three varnas will tend to stray from the path of dharma. A member of the fourth varna, on the contrary is humble. ([source](#))

Mahatma Gandhi says,

"Varnasrama is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth ... The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or to assign to another a lower ... Varnasrama is self-restraint and conservation and economy of energy ...

***" I have often shown the distinction between varnasrama and untouchability. I have defended the one as a rational, scientific, fact and condemned the other as an excrescence and unmitigated evil ... I do regard varnasrama as healthy division of work based on birth ... Varnasrama, in my opinion, was not conceived in any narrow spirit. On the contrary, it gave the labourer, the Sudra, the same status as the thinker, the Brahmin. It provided for the accentuation of merit and elimination of demerit, and it transformed human ambition from the general worldly sphere to the permanent and the spiritual. The aim of the Brahmin and Sudra was common -moksa of Self-realisation, not realisation of fame, riches and power. "* ([source](#))**

18.5.1. What a sudra can do

bhagavAn in uddhava gltA says that all four varNa-s are devoted to me. Hence a sudra can be as devoted to Ishvara as a brAhmin. There is no reason for not being so. However, like women, a sudra is relieved from the burden of protection veda-s which is a full time job. Topic of status of [women in sanAtana dharmā](#) is discussed later. Except learning and chanting veda-s, a sudra can do pretty much everything that other varNa-s can do, learn sanskrit, learn Agama shAstra-s, practice yoga and tantra, learn any arts like dancing, singing, etc. sudra can do all things that he is capable of and if financially his parents can afford to educate him. Like vaishya, a sudra also has natural advantage to learn trading and other occupation of their parents from childhood. If family is fairly rich, they can educate their son or daughter and a sudra can very well become an engineer or a doctor. There is no question about his intelligence or about his abilities.

18.5.2. Why a sudra cannot touch a brAhmin?

In kayuga, it is said (in parAshara smriti) that a man incurs sin only by his wrong deeds and not by touching a sudra. In other yuga-s, there was so much of purity that certain rules were established, which cannot be applied in today's life. Alternatively, purANa-s and itihAsa have predicted decline of varNa dharmā and that a sudra will sit next to a brahmin indicating that the older custom of sudra-s being forbidden to touch a brAhmin will fade away. Still, we will try to understand the reason why sudra-s cannot physically touch a brAhmin. There is a belief that it pollutes brAhmin. How is this possible? Lets try to understand the reason behind this belief.

In order to understand, we must also take into account the other side of circumstances that a (financially) poor sudra-s live in. This should not be taken as a racial discrimination nor is an insult to them. It may sound politically incorrect, but we are just presenting the other side of coin. Generally, poor people are more concerned about their livelihood. If we see the life of a hawker or a road side tea vendor, they have to strive daily to earn money just sufficient to fulfill their daily basic needs. In other words if they do not work the next day, they are going to starve. Hence the whole focus of their life is to earn money. Labourers, unlike middle class, are on daily wages even today. We can understand that the entire focus, the whole energy, their thinking, etc is on 'how to earn and fulfill basic needs'. For them money is very important, important than middle class or a higher middle class. All this is due to their circumstances. Hence their consciousness is strongly embedded in physical body. Due to the condition in which they live, they have little time to devote to Ishvara, as after a full day of hard work, they need to get rest and take adequate sleep. Life of a brAhmin is completely opposite. A brAhmin is not allowed to work no matter if he is born in a (financially) poor family. He has to depend upon donations received from society.

Devotion to Ishvara raises one's consciousness to such a level that the devotee is able to detach himself from his mind, body and intellect. For this constant efforts for many years is needed. The words like 'mudha', or 'impure' or 'polluted' does not mean that the physical body of any person is polluted or is infected with some disease. These words are connected with the evolution of consciousness, and inner purity, i.e. purity of mind. Again, there is no connection between mind and intellect. An intelligent person can be short tempered and arrogant while an average person can be very humble. Again, the nature of mind or deeds does not indicate the evolution of consciousness. A noble person, who is a great social worker and having down to earth personality does not indicate that he has detached himself from his physical body. Noble character is not a benchmark of evolution of consciousness, though it definitely helps in spiritual progress.

Let's understand the words *mudha*, ignorant fool, impure, and polluted. Adi SankarAchArya ji in his famous composition moha mudgara, also known as bhaja govindam, has said, ' bhaja govindam, bhaja govindam, govindam bhaja *mudha* madhe'. This spontaneous composition was composed when the great saint saw an old man parroting shAstra-s but his inner eye (of wisdom) was not opened. He had not progressed spiritually instead of practising and reading scriptures since many years. He knew that the path of renunciation is difficult, hence he advised old man to sing glories of the Lord as his consciousness was still strongly embedded in physical body. Upanishads say that we are not the body, or the jIva. According to Adi Sankara, jIva is technically not different from the supreme reality.

Note: Here we are not taking into account the Aishvarya of the Lord, meaning jIva trapped in panchamahAbhUta and acquiring qualities like alpaGYa (ignorant of true nature, having little knowledge), alpavyApI (caged in limited space or place) and alpashaktimAna (having limited power), while Brahman endowing itself with mAyA and becoming Ishvara by willingly acquiring or endowing itself the qualities like sarvaGYa (all-knowledgeable), (sarvavyApI) omnipresent and (sarvashaktimAna) all powerful. In free state, beyond mAyA jIva and Brahman are same as both panchamahAbhUta and mAyA are upAdhi-s. Ishvara is endowed with six upAdhi-s called as six qualities. When in duality, until jIva is trapped in panchamahAbhUta (five bodies made from five elements earth, water, etc), we as jIva-s are ansha (part) of sarva (whole). If we take 'mind' into account, then each jIva is unique with other i.e. each jIva has unique personality and is different from Ishvara. The reality of being eternally free and one with brahman is different from our day-to-day experience, indicating that we need to make 'an effort' to realize truth. While living in dual world, one needs to take refuge in Ishvara and pray to him to raise our consciousness beyond mAyA and merge individuality (feeling of individual identity called sa ego) into totality. Nothing happens without the grace of Ishvara and his mAyA, his spiritual consort, who is our divine compassionate mother.

So here **mudha which is often translated as 'ignorant fool' or simply 'fool' means a person whose consciousness is strongly embedded in physical body.** This means that though you read a thousand times that 'I am not body', still consciousness does not detach from body, but continues to believe and experience itself as physical body. In such a person, the vibrations are not spiritually elevating. They do not help others to excel in spirituality. Vibrations of subtle body and mind definitely affect environment and nearby persons. On the other hand, a brAhmin is walking on a devout path to raise his consciousness. He is chanting veda-s and upanishads that teach us to raise our consciousness from physical body know the true nature. A life of brAhmin is near to that of a sanyAsI in terms of purity. Hence vibrations of his subtle body and mind are purer than that of a sudra who constantly thinks of taking care of his body and how to fulfill his basic necessities. Though, in general, consciousness of all is embedded in physical body, in case of (financially) poor sudra, there is little or no effort to raise it to higher plane. When we physically touch each other, some vibrations and energy are interchange and enter into each other. Hence a brAhmin is not supposed to interact with a sudra physically. When one uses any object or a place regularly,

emotions and thoughts of the person also gets embedded in that object or place. Hence orthodox brAhmins do not accept gifts or donations from shUra-s, and do not drink water from well used by a shUdra. however things are changing now.

The author again request readers to take this explanation in right spirit. We may not adhere to old customs, but we should not hate them either. We must properly understand them. As said earlier, now with changing time, situation is changing and hence there is downfall in the life of brAhmins as few are interested in carrying out their vocation by birth and Government is encouraging lower varNa-s to study Government gives many grants and benefits to lower varNa-s so that they can take admission in schools and colleges. Today, money has become the defacto status symbol and not dharma. Hence a rich be it a brAhmin or a shUdra are treated equally. Once a person of lower varNa or jAtI acquires money, lifestyle and etiquette changes to match 'rich' society. They become respectable by all.

18.6. Dalits, Mahadalits, Outcasts, BCs, OBCs, SCs, STs and vanavAsi-s (AdivAsi-s)

Dalit or a mahadalit is not a varNa created by Lord brahma jI. It is a man-made jAtI (and not varNa). While the author, Amrut, has very limited knowledge and has done limited study, Amrut is yet to find a reference in the works or biographies of great traditional AchArya-s use of the word 'dalit'. Obviously we do not find the use of word 'outcast' or 'shUdra', but not dalit in purANa-s. Works and biographies of saints of medieval period like vidyAraNya svAmI and sAyanAchArya (13th century) vedAnta desika (13th century), madhusudan sarasvatI (15th century), Srl caitanya mahAprabhu's biography Srl caitanya charitramrita - (CC), (15th century), ranga rAmAnuja muni, the upanishad bhAshyakAra of SrlvaiShNava-s (16th century), bhAskarAya mAkin (17th century), upanishad brahma yogin (18th Century) needs to be studied if there was much use of 'dalita' word. A study needs to be done in order to trace the origin of the word 'dalita'. Any information regarding this matter is highly appreciated.

Many Buddhists are of lower varNa-s. Britishers brought missionaries who actively converted dalits into christianity. Similarly, in 800 years of muslim rule, many people of lower varNa-s converted into Islam along with few nAgara brAhmin-s who converted into Dawoodi Bohras. Hence dalits are no more dalits as they have changed their religion.

Word '*dalita*' word is found in CC and t means crushed, powdered, broken or defeated. Hence the origin of word 'dalit' is fairly new to Indian customs which is thousands of years

old. It is said that dalits existed in 15 century during caitanya mahAprabhu's time, but we doubt if they were so-called during Adi Sankara's, rAmAnuja's and mAdhva's time.

The word '*chANDAla*' is used for an outcast and is found in Adi Sankara's biography, '*mAdhaviya Sankara digvijay*' during the episode of his meeting with bhagavAn Siva in the form of chANDAla. chANDAla-s are said to carry dead bodies i.e. work in cremation ground and are dog-eaters. They are the outcasts which higher varNa-s avoid to touch them physically.

Outcasts became outcasts because maybe their ancestors were excommunicated due to some or other reason. They are simply the lower jAtI-s.

SC and ST are Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. These are the people living in forests. Hence they are called as vanavAsi-s. *vana* means 'forest' and *vAsa* means 'to live'. However, Britishers, for political reasons coined the word 'AdivAsi' meaning the first or original inhabitants. *Adi* means 'First'. In other words they called them as aboriginals, the original forest and cave men, the oldest inhabitants of India. They created this word 'AdivAsi' so that they can make us believe that like their ancestors, Indian ancestors too lived a primitive life and were forest dwellers and cave men. They want us to believe that we have progressed from stone age and Britishers have evolved into superior race and has invented many things. They did not want us to believe in our glorious past, in the life of rAma and kRShNa. For them rAma and kRShNa are imaginary creations. SC, ST and vanavAsi-s are still living in forests and living a primitive life. They are less connected with modern society, though they may earn their living by selling their work in nearby village. As India is developing, this situation of isolation is changing. Like sudra-s they too, in general, do not make any efforts to raise consciousness to higher plane. They still revere Ishvara and worship him in their own way.

BC means Backward Class and OBC means Other Backward Class. Both are collective terms used to lower financially poor castes. OBCs are in a better financial position than BCs and can sustain on themselves, while BC which covers SC, ST and dalits have to depend upon others for earning and survival. some OBCs are rich, and some are super rich. One of OBCs caste (jAtI) is 'Patels'. Patels are generally farmers or traders. After earning money, they educate their children and the business expands. Next generation is born in rich family and so adheres to the customs and etiquette of 'rich' Class. Such people are accepted by other varNa-s and often mix with them. Still they do respect brAhmin-s as they are needed for priestly work on an occasion.

SC, ST and vanavAsI-s have their own customs. They believe in Ishvara and worship him in their own way and follow their own customs.

We must understand that Ishvara will always give us birth in a family, varNa, jAtI and environment that helps us progress spiritually and fulfill our dis-satisfied desires (vAsanA-s) with which we have taken birth in this human body.

We must also acknowledge that bhArata has produced many great Dalit saints and leaders from lower jAtI-s. Great men are born in all traditions, all varNa-s, all jAtI-s and in all societies.

Let's understand why varNa vyavasthA was created.

18.7. The ultimate purpose of varṇa dharma

Today, the functions of Kshatriya-s, Vaisya-s and Sudra-s have changed and become mixed. Even so the work of the government goes on somehow. Defence, manufacture of various articles, trade, labour - all these go on somehow. But, unlike in the past, there is jealousy as well as rivalry in all fields. Even so, the duties of the three castes are carried out despite the fact that varna dharma has broken up. They are a practical necessity for day-to-day life as well as for the functioning of the government. So they are performed, albeit unsatisfactorily.

The ultimate purpose of varṇa dharma is to rise above varṇa and āshram dharma and achieve moksha.

18.8. Beyond varṇa-s

Before we begin this topic, we must note that devatā-s do not have varṇa. They are knower of veda-s and so their descendants, aṃśāvātara-s (parts born as human like vidur, karṇa etc) also have knowledge of veda-s. It is also said that in kreṭā yuga (sat-yuga), immediately upon birth all sins (if any left) are wiped off and one instantly got enlightenment. Hence in sat-yuga, there were no varṇa-s. It seems that varṇa-s originated from treṭā yuga. Though it may seem that initially varṇa-s were based on guṇa-s (since earlier there was no varṇa and no question of varṇa being hereditary), over a period of time, for some reason varṇa became by birth. We have already known the reason. In later article, we will also learn the advantages of varṇa by birth. As years passed by, mind began to lose its strength and purity.

Hence certain rules must have been adopted so as to control mind which would have eventually lead to varṇa being descend upon next generation.

Vedic karma kāṇḍa is not to final destination, and all karma-s are sakāma karma, be it a yajna for universal peace. Vedānta asks one to rise above varṇa-s into the root cause of everything, into the root of the asvattha tree (BG15.3), the inverted tree of samsāra with roots at top and branches at the bottom. **Always remember, varṇa jātī and any division in general is only upto mental level only. Spirituality is to rise above mind, but for that, one must be sufficiently inwardly pure, so as to rise above customs, rites and rituals. Remember, one must not drop i.e. renounce or reject, vedic rites and rituals, but rise above them after attaining sufficient inner purity.** With this in mind, let us begin our discussion on 'beyond varṇa-s'.

While the standard practice is to stick to dharma of your varṇa, after one receives initiation into any mantra, guru grace is on his disciple. No matter if the disciple is of any varṇa, if s/he practises meditation and mantra chanting diligently as per guru-s instructions, then one day s/he might become inwardly pure sufficiently to become a sanyāsī. Traditionally, in vedāntic system, sanyāsa is not given to women, but her spiritual progress is not hampered. In recent years many saints have given sanyāsa dikshā to women also.

After one becomes a sanyāsī, one is above varṇa. There is no varṇa sub-division within sanyāsa. Monastic life is the best suitable for spiritual upliftment, as one does not have to worry about anyone else. It's just you and Īshvara. The world of sanyāsī is himself, God and guru, nothing more. shāstra-s teach us to detach us from physical body, mind and intellect. varṇa is linked to mind. It is the mind and intellect that makes distinctions. After detaching the 'I' from physical body, mind and intellect, one realises that this 'I' is not anyone of them but is something very different. It is pure consciousness. In soul-consciousness or in God-consciousness there are no thoughts, there is no distinction, there is no activity inside soul. A soul is a witness. Soul does not have any gender, nor does it have any varNa. Hence an advanced sādḥaka (meditator) rises his consciousness and by being a witness, it does not have to adhere to the dharma of mind or intellect. Such a person will see the in each person, in each living being, there abides the same divinity. This experience produces the bhāva (feeling) of *samadarshana*. 'sama-darshana' means to know by direct experience that there is same divinity in each one of us. Naturally such a blessed soul (pavitra jīva) has already transcended the boundaries of varNa dharma and gender.

shAstra-s teach us to be 'sama-darshina' and not sama-vartina' meaning to see or to experience same divinity within all, but not to behave in same way with all. One cannot behave in a same way with mother, wife, sister and daughter. One cannot deal with boss, subordinate, colleague and a stranger in same ay. One cannot give grass to cow, dog, elephant, tiger, pigeon, and a man though each one of us has same divinity. Cow can eat

grass, but not dog. Dog can eat chapati or some veg and non-veg food too, but elephant cannot eat non-veg food. Tiger cannot eat veg food.

However, in practice, while dealing with society, such a blessed soul will still maintain different relations with different people as per their age, experience and their post.

But to rise or ascend to such blissful state, one has to adhere to some rules, some guidelines, and should not cross certain boundaries. These rules are created by those great rishi-s who have mastered the act of being a witness, and have merged their individual consciousness into supreme consciousness. varNa vyavasthA is one such rule. Our dharma, including varNa dharma is a systematic structured arrangement for everyone to progress spiritually and finally rise above varNa dharma into the realm of equality. The ultimate aim of vedAnta is renunciation of all worldly attachments, be it possession of worldly objects, property, family, friends, money, or even attachment towards one varNa and jAtI.

It is foolishness to break this arrangement while our consciousness is strongly embedded in our physical body. Physical body is a cage, as it has caged infinite consciousness into a limited shape and space. As one detaches oneself from this case by dis-associating with it, one becomes *free*. In other words, one is *freed* from the *cage*. Similarly, by dis-associating with mind, intellect and ego, one is freed from them and no more suffers the deeds of mind, is not affected with decisions that intellect makes and the ego that binds us to physical body and takes everything upon itself by clinging onto the fruits of results. One becomes free of suffering. Where there is no suffering, there is happiness. But this happiness is different. It does not arise as a result of achieving any object, on the contrary, it manifested by itself when the desire for achieving object with renounced. Since this happiness does not depend upon any external object, it stays for a long time, has a lasting effect and does not fade away no matter in whatever condition you are. It's impact is very deep. This happiness, born out of dispassion gives a sense of deep peace and a feeling of completeness. The intensity and sweetness of this bliss and deep peace is far more than that we have ever experienced by gaining material objects. It is incomparable. But this dispassion must be born out of proper understanding.

The real sanyAsa is absence of desires (in mind). Hence, even if one has not taken sanyAsa, while living within society, one can live a detached life like that of sanyAsI and staying immersed in Ishvara while doing work. One may think how is this possible? The simple answer is that our mind is divided into two parts. One part keeps thinking and other takes control of physical activity. Classic example driving or riding bike. We change gears, apply brakes, raise throttle, do everything and still we keep thinking about something. If one has doubts that only those who have good concentration can progress, the answer is, it is not

true. Any person, be it an average Joe, who just manages a passing grade in exams, can also practise spirituality. How? Let's understand with an example. When we are watching TV and suddenly story takes turn and becomes interesting, we are so engrossed in TV that we forget the surroundings, we forget our body, we forget the position in which our body is, even if we are not sitting in comfortable position, we still stay in that position until the climax is over. Even body pain is not experienced. What matters is where your mind is, where your heart is and not physical body. A lover constantly thinks of his / her 'love of life' even while doing work. If this is possible, then why can't a devotee who with immense faith in the Lord surrenders and then does all the work can't remember him? If one can remember loved ones, why can't one remember the great Lord who is the creator of this entire world, the substratum of entire universe.

varNa-s are there not to keep us shackled in them. They are there to raise us beyond them, but in a proper and a systematic way. We must trust our ancestors, our rishi-s who worked selflessly for all mankind without any want of reward under the divine intuitive guidance of Īshvara, the all powerful, all merciful, all compassionate, full of unconditional love and bliss, unborn supreme reality.

Always remember - *no rule is permanent*. Every rule has it's advantages and limitations. Advantage is that it will make sure that we progress until we are do not rise above it. Rules help one keep a check one oneself and do not cross boundary. Limitation is that rule itself or any kind of discipline cannot, by itself, raise us beyond it. It just guides us through a path that ultimately raises us above it. One rule cannot be applied throughout the whole life. It is applicable only upto a certain point, until one attains certain level of inner purity. The difference between a laymen and an advanced sAdhaka is that the later has purified his mind to a great extend.

We all long for freedom. Moksha is absolute freedom. This means, freedom from adherence to rules too. Rules are for disciplining and training mind. But are we mind? No, then whom to discipline? It is our association with mind, i.e. association of 'I' with mind, that binds us, i.e. binds 'I' to mind, and hence we have to adhere to the dharma of mind, but not otherwise. We will have to train our mind, discipline it, keep a check on it. Once the attachment is destroyed, there are no rules to follow as the purpose of following the rules is fulfilled. In other words, as a result of ripening of fruits of disciplining mind, one transcends the very mind.

Though a detached soul is free not to adhere to varNa and Ashram dharma, it is a personal choice. Some saints continue to do their work even after they transcend mind, body and

intellect. Hence a weaver like Sant Kabir didn't quit his profession even after getting enlightenment. ***sanyasa is a state of mind and not a way of living.***

As said earlier, attachment to anything is what matters. Proper way to transcend varNa and Ashrama dharma is to detach from mind, body and intellect. We must have this broader picture and accept varNa dharma and any kind of discipline positively.

What looks ethically and morally on a very high ground may be spiritually on low ground. Equality of all is one such view, which we will touch later in article, '[The illusion of equality](#)'

We will now continue to discuss more on varNa dharma and why it is by birth.

18.9. Why varNa by Birth?

No varNa is higher or lower. It is just division of vocation by birth. In bhagavad gItA BG 4.13 and 18.41-48, Adi Sankara and other prominent vaidika AcArya-s explain us that varNa is based upon guNa (qualities), but guNa is inherited by birth because we count fruits of action of past lives into account. So getting birth in a family of brAhmin (brAhmaNa) is considered as a result of living an ethical, moral and spiritual past life or lives. However, today brAhmin-s and other varNa-s do not carry their prescribed duty, hence the natural advantage of being born in a particular varNa is lost. A materialist or an atheist Brahmin is Brahmin for name sake only, he is more or less like a Sudra. So a spiritual soul might be born in a pious and religious vaiSyA family then materialistic Brahmin family, as his / her purpose to excel in spirituality may not be fulfilled by living in such Brahmin family as s/he does not get opportunity and encouragement to walk on spiritual path since childhood.

18.10. Jātī, Kula and Gotra

Jātī is a subset of varṇa. It is further subdivision of a varṇa on the basis of occupation. Jātī-s are not created by God, but are manmade.

Kula is a subset of Jātī. It is about our family and extended family. We all have heard words like 'Yādava kula'. It represents a particular clan.

Gotra means a family clan, where the descendants are in an unbroken male line from a common male rishi. Person belonging to same gotra is considered as close relative having common male ancestor.

18.10.1. Marriages with First cousin banned in Hindu Dharma smriti-s

First cousins are said to belong to the same gotra. Marriage within same gotra is banned in dharma shāshtra-s. Recent study suggests that children whose parents are first cousins doubles risk of birth defects. Child may suffer a severe problem, such as a congenital malformation or learning disabilities. Our ancestors may have well understood this problem have must have banned marriages. Study also suggests that children born through parents who have married second cousin also have high risk of congenital disability.

An interesting article explaining validity of discouraging marriage within same gotra with scientific basis is published [here](#).

Note: The article is well researched and well written. Though the author has done some research to pen this article, since the author has not traced the original source of his/her extracts, we cannot give 100 % legitimacy to the claims made by author on scientific background, however the effort of the author is much appreciated and we personally believe the information to be true.

We will now understand Āshram dharma.

18.11. Āshrama dharma

We have already seen what is varṇa dharma. Like varṇa dharma, Ashrama dharma is also divided into four parts – brahmacharya, grihastha, vānaprastha and sanyāsa āshram.

Average life expectancy is taken to be 100 years. Time duration for practicing one āshram is 25 years. One is expected to stay in one Ashram for 25 years. Though this period is not strictly followed, this is said to be the maximum time one can stay in one āshram. For first 25 years of life brahmacharya is to be observed, then for next 25 years comes grihastha i.e. to lead a family life. Next 25 years, one has to live in forest with or without wife and contemplate on inner meaning of scriptures. Finally in last 25 years, one renounces the society and becomes a monk in search of highest truth, brahman, after knowing brahman, nothing more needs to be known. The purpose of human birth is fulfilled.

Learning of veda-s and by hearting verses might take around 25 years. After that up to 50 years one has to carry the burden of family and social relations. Grihastha is the most important āshrama in the sense that it is the only Ashram in which money can be earned. Hence a grihastha nourishes and supports other three āshram-s. Not much is said about vānaprastha Ashrama. vānaprastha āshrama is described in manu smriti Chapter 6, verses 1-28. It is said in Nirnaya Sindhu, one influential dharmashastra, that vAnaprastha Ashrama is 'kālivarjya' i.e. inoperative in the kālī yuga (Kali Yuga / Kalyug). Today, only grihastha and sanyāsa Ashrama are being followed. It is said in dharma smriti-s like manu smriti that even after attaining sufficient inner purity, if a mimamsaka i.e. the one who is actively engaged in vedic rites and rituals, does not renounce the society and become a monk, but continues practising karma kāṇḍa with no selfish motive until death, then such a person after death ascends to brahmaloka where Bhagavān Brāhmā jī himself initiates him into brahmajñāna and the jīva at the end of kalpa (eon) will finally merge into brahman without any pain. Such a jīva will get liberated at the time of destruction of world. All jīva-s residing in brahmaloka are capable of experiencing brahmajñāna and never suffer from pleasure and pain but experience intense bliss, as brahmaloka is the highest amongst all loka-s says Kanchi Paramacharya. It is believed that for such a soul, there is no return back to earth.

The idea of Ashram dharma is to purify the mind. When one becomes inwardly pure, then it is time to leave the society and contemplate on the inner meaning of vedānta and meditate on the highest truth, the Brahman. If a person attains inner purity in childhood, then such a person is considered worthy of skipping grihastha and vAnaprastha Ashram and enter into sanyāsa Ashram. After taking sanyāsa, one stops associating oneself with his varNa one's varNa and views all people with an equal eye. All sanyāsin-s strive for only one goal in life – moksha i.e. liberation from the cycle of birth and death by realizing and abiding in natural state, our true nature which is Brahman.

18.12. Advantage of Vocations by Birth

When vocations are practiced by birth, there is a guarantee for everyone to get employment. A person has natural advantage as he learns his vocation by birth from his childhood. Today, when this arrangement is broken, everyone wants to do the best work. Sadly, best today means, the work which gives 'good money'. Hence there is competition for becoming a doctor or an engineer, which was absent in earlier times. Not giving freedom is not bad. The ultimate purpose of Religion is to up-root ego.

18.13. Advantages of varNa dharma by Birth - Explanation from Yogic POV

mantra is a sound created to resonate in a particular frequency. We all know that sound has vibrations and these vibrations influence the speaker as well as audience and all those who

are in speaker's vicinity. vedic mantra-s are specially formulated in a way that when they are pronounced correctly, they produce vibrations that cleanse our psychic nerves (nADI-s), chakra-s and our subtle bodies. They cleanse environment. In addition to vibrations, mantra-s have a definite meaning. Chanting them keeping the meaning in mind creates divine thoughts that float and influence all those in its vicinity. Regular chanting of mantra-s has a purifying effect not only on the one who chants them, but also on the nearby environment. We experience these divine vibrations as bliss or peace of mind or natural focus or attraction to a deity when we enter into any temple.

As one chants vedic mantra-s, their nADI-s, chakra-s and subtle bodies purify and expand in size. Their house is also purified and vibrates with divine energy that helps one uplift spiritually. Children subconsciously absorb these thoughts and vibrations. Hence kids (both boys and girls) grow up in a spiritual environment and get in tune with mantra-s on subconscious level. It is said that the child in the womb also absorbs all kinds of thoughts and vibrations that it can catch without discriminating them as good or bad. Hence a vedic couple and their children have natural tendency and better understanding to carry on the tradition of protecting veda-s by continuing oral tradition. People of other varNa-s do not have this advantage. It is the foremost duty of a brahmin to protect veda-s. His wish of protecting veda-s, spiritual vibrations, thoughts all gets transferred to his family members, especially his children and grandchildren. His successors pass these vibrations and thoughts to the next generation and so on. In this way, knowledge and subtle spiritual vibrations are passed on from generation to generation. It is due to this reason that varNa by birth was practised in ancient days.

Here an argument can be made that an AchArya can grace his disciple and bestow spiritual vibrations on him. Hence even if the disciple is not a Brahmin, he can still purify himself inwardly and can progress spiritually. While this argument is true, a Non-Brahmin disciple has to constantly stay in guru's company, and the inner transformation happens later after his initiation and with intense practice. While in case of Brahmin by birth, he enjoys natural inner purification without making any efforts, as the vibrations of his father and grandfather keeps purifying him. A Brahmin kid has a natural tuning for learning karma kANDa. Hence a Brahmin is the most suitable choice for carrying on vedic tradition.

Alternatively, God gives us birth in an environment that helps us fulfil our dis-satisfied desires and progress spiritually. In this case too, a vedic brahmin family is a better choice as brahmins are expected to live a pure life similar to an ascetic, but living in society.

However when the family tradition has collapsed, there is little advantage to stick to varNa by birth. Still, the advantage is not completely lost. Just like a bicycle keeps moving even

after paddling is stopped, similarly, the 'spiritual push' given by our ancestors since ages keeps us moving. Brahmins still have spiritual energy to take up our their vocation by birth. With the passing of each generation, this push gets slower and slower and may one day fade away if vedic karma kANDa is not practised. We must not let this happen. We must make efforts to restore varNa dharma and encourage Brahmins to take up their vocation entrusted to them. Once Brahmins show interest in taking up their vocation by birth, Brahmins can educate other varNa-s the importance of following vocation by birth.

18.13.1. Solution to end discrimination based on caste

While we get a proper understanding of importance of varNa and Ashram dharma, we cannot shy away from the practice of discrimination against any varNa or jAtI. A problem cannot be solved by shying away from them and keep defending it with a blind eye without seeing what is going around in our society. Practical implementation is what matters and not just theory. A good or an ideal theory is of no use unless it is successfully implemented in our daily life. We must also make sure to remove the weeds of non-vedic elements that has creeped into society. Though it is the nature of mind to keep creating difference and ego to induce superiority and inferiority complex in our mind, consistent efforts are to be made so that discrimination against any varNa is dropped from our mind for ever.

Let us assume that varNa dharma is completely eradicated. In this case, 'caste conflict' will cease to exist, but it's place will be taken by 'Class Conflict'. Rich, powerful, influential people with political backing will always exploit and subdue poor and ordinary citizens. The solution does not lie in removing varNa dharma altogether, but to train our mind as such that it's stops creating differences based on varNa.

Is chopping off head a solution for curing headache?

Our efforts should be in the direction that purifies our mind and brings us closer to God. As one progresses spiritually, his / her antakaraNa gets purified and lower animal emotions (pashu vritti) fades away. Heart purifies, divine emotions like compassion for all (dayA and karuNA), bhakti, peace, nonviolence, patience, obedience, guilelessness, being in harmony with nature, and other qualities begin to cultivate and blossom.

In order to uproot discrimination, two types of efforts are necessary to be practised simultaneously. First is to practice spiritual discipline and increase Ishvara bhakti and another is to renounce any lower emotion. If spiritual discipline is not practised, then mind cannot be trained to renounce. Discrimination and bias will still remain in our mind. Mind

cannot stay without thinking and creating differences. It needs something to which it can hold onto. Hence when one thing is renounced, mind holds onto another object. For example, a person quits smoking, but starts taking tobacco. In order to fly, two wings are needed, both efforts are to be simultaneously practised so when with one hand discrimination against varNa is renounced and on other hand, it is substituted with Ishvara bhakti.

While we see discrimination against a varNa or a jAtI, we also must notice that many customs are practiced which do not have sanction in our shAstra-s. For example dowry system. There is absolutely no evidence in our dharma smriti-s like manu smriti or parAshara smriti for dowry. It was created by false notion that daughter is considered as a liability that needs to be quickly disposed i.e. should be married else she will denigrate the status of family. Ironically, when a baby girl is born there is a famous saying 'mAtAji has descended' meaning '(part of) Mother Goddess has descended in our family'. This statement is rather said as a taunt, not out of reverence and humility. It became a notion that daughter is 'another man's property' i.e. she is not going to stay with us forever, but only until she is not married. The reason for this attitude is because money has become the center of our life. Wealth has exchanged value.

We may think that men subdue women, but ironically, it is the women who subdues and denigrates status of another women. Mother-in-law subdues daughter-in-law. Mother-in-law oppresses daughter-in-law. Men, husband and father-in-law leave home for work and return only in night. When they return they want peace in house and so avoid getting into trivial family matters. Entire day mother-in-law and daughter-in-law have to spend time together. Women is jealous of another women. We are not saying that men are not responsible. We only say that women are also responsible for subduing another women. Such an attitude is not found in shAstra-s. It is our mind that has created this discrimination.

Hence, along with proper understanding and correcting wrong belief, one must give the rights that are sanctioned by our shAstra-s, like women are allowed to perform aupAsanA (not upAsanA) and shUdra-s are also allowed to chant certain portion of veda-s. Alternatively they can be taught Agama shAstra-s.

varNa and Ashram dharma has been the backbone of sanAtana dharma and the very reason for the sustenance of our dharma since thousands of years. They need to be properly understood and implemented in a fair way for universal well being and harmony.

18.13.2. Sri Ramakrishna: bhakti can remove discrimination created by varNa and jAtI

Sri Ramakrishna said, "The caste-system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love. Chaitanya and Nityananda scattered the name of Hari to everyone, including the pariah, and embraced them all. A brahmin without this love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti an untouchable becomes pure and elevated."

Ref: [Sri Ramakrishna on caste system](#)

Source: *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

18.14. The illusion of equality

Eradicating varNa and jAtI system is not we all want

We have already touched this topic recently, hence we will discuss it in brief. There has been great debate and advocacy by civil rights activists, human rights activists, feminists and samaritans for equality of all. Though this looks like a noble idea, the work and functioning of society is always divided. varNa dharma is followed indirectly. The thing is that mind does not stop to discriminate. As said earlier, after caste conflict is gone, there will be class conflict. Our life revolves around money. The lower jAtI enjoy reservation, though they are financially capable to live and enjoy life without getting any concession from government. Infact, OBCs are trying to downgrade themselves to SC, SCs try to downgrade an register as ST just for the sake of benefits in various government schemes and for free perks that politicians and government offer or lure them to offer. The reverse trend is going on. We know that dalit is not a varNa. Let's talk about abolishing the dalit and accept them as brAhmin-s and not lower caste. They will refuse to accept higher varNa simply because they will lose all the benefits of lower varNa and jAtI. Accepting higher varNa does not change their financial situation. Similarly, there are words like dalit-christians, dalit-muslims. Why are these words coined. They want equality, but they want to get benefits of caste system. If they change religion, they will lose benefits. Basically, people want is to enjoy whatever they get it for free.

So if we decide to eradicate the entire caste system (varNa and jAtI division), then too the lower varNa which are 49 % of total population will oppose this move.

Again, after a person of lower jAtI earns money, he will change his lifestyle to match those of his status. Still he does not want to lose benefits of various schemes for upliftment of poor.

There is always discrimination on the basis of money.

Don't we see business class, first class, economy class, second class reservation in trains, aeroplanes and other modes of transport. Gradation, seniority according to the post will remain, a peon cannot sit on the chair of chairman of multimillion company. A chairman has more power than General Manager, G.M. has more power than Asst. Manager, Asst. Manager has more power than office staff and so on. A peon works more hard than a chairman. He open office, cleans it, and closes office. Hence he comes first and leave s last, while officers on higher posts come late. But then why is it that peon's monthly salary is just Rs. 5000.00 while that of a Chairman 500000.00 ? If all are equal, then each and everything should be available to all. Medicines of cancer and other deadly disease should be as cheap as that of common cold. Medical fees has to be same for all patients for all disease and there should be no price difference between ICCU, ICU, and general ward. Patients should be kept in appropriate wards. Why poor has to suffer? Is this not a reality? Does not strong oppress weak? Does not rich exploit poor? Does not a government officer or a politician exploit common men and give false promises, register fake cases to extort money? When we are one in the eye of God, when each and every person has same democratic right (and duty), is there really any equality? Those who project themselves as 'common man' and say that we fight for right of poor people cannot be freely accessed. We need to have an appointment and nobody truly hears the pleas of poor, no matter whatsoever religion he may be. These days, politicians are doing vulture politics, worst practice of getting political mileage on the dead man.

If the discrimination on the basis of varNa is eradicated, discrimination of another form will arise and get strong hold, like discrimination on basis of money power, political influence, government post and son. *We should not make money goal of our life.*

Different posts have special powers and duties than average citizens

If we take example of constitution, MLAs, MPs, CMs, senior bureaucrats, Union and cabinet ministers, Deputy PM, PM, Vice President, President, Inspectors, Chief of Police i.e. commissioner of police, COAS (chief of Army Staff), Navy and Air Force chiefs, various posts

within army, Lawyers and Judges are given special powers and responsibilities than average citizens. You cannot give equal power for all as all are equal in eye of God or every citizen has same fundamental right which is guaranteed by constitution. Never let 'pride of post enter' into our mind. Stay surrendered. *Show gratitude and reverence to God for giving you success.*

Discrimination on basis of race or religion

Westerners and Arabs consider themselves as superior race or they find support for discrimination in their religion. Abrahamic religions who proclaim equality of all and do not believe in caste system do preach inequality. The only difference is 'people believing in their religion and worshipping right God are treated as equal, rest are not' Some religions like Islam discriminate people into muslims (believers) and non-muslims i.e. khafirs (non-believers) and are considered as second class citizens. *Do not think that only my religion is true, and that all else worship false Gods. A wrong does not become right when done by a person following a particular religion.*

Equality is indeed an illusion

Be it on religious basis or on the basis of humanity or on basis on constitution, there can be no equality in real sense. Discrimination will remain. 'Equality is indeed an illusion'.

Men and Women are created differently

God has created men and women differently. Women has to bear child in their womb. They are capable of creating a new body, and give soul a chance to be one with God. As soon as mother delivers baby, mammary glands automatically begin to produce milk necessary for survival of newborn baby. Mother is endowed with greater understanding and with greater degree of emotions than men. Women are responsible for nurturing children and giving sanskAra in initial years, as child will have greater affinity towards mother. They embed positive qualities in child and thereby shape entire society and nation. Since they have capacity to create and nurture (protect), they have capacity to destroy i.e. embed negative qualities in children. Initial years are very crucial for shaping mind of child. Father comes into picture later on when he along with mother shapes the intellect and continues to embed good qualities into child.

For carrying out great responsibility of carry forwarding the future of nation, they deserve respect, albeit greater respect than men. However women do not need to prove that they

are no less than men in any department. According to veda-s, purANa-s, itihAsa, Agama shAstra-s, tantra and yoga shAstra-s women are superior to men and can easily progress spiritually because they have greater receptivity than men. Certain qualities which are to be developed by men after renouncing society, women are gifted these qualities from birth by God. Qualities like receptivity, obedience, renunciation, tolerance, acceptance, etc are imbedded into them by birth. A women leaves her home and her loved ones and begins a new life with new members. She has to understand nature, choices, likes and dislikes and way of living of new family members. She has to renounce older ways, accept the change, adapt to the change and shape her accordingly. It is only in the capacity of women to do so.

We all deserve respect, but there is no need to enter into a dogfight to prove equality. God created us differently. Each one of us are unique, then how can we all be same i.e. have same intellect, have same kind of thinking, same liking, same temperament and use same logic. We are all unique.

However, seeing the practical side, in some areas, women face discrimination. Injustice against women and their oppression should be discouraged aggressively, and if need be, a new law should be passed by the locals protecting them, because if women are deprived of their rights, and cannot mature emotionally, and intellectually, whole society is at great loss if women. Under emotional stress due to oppression or little freedom they cannot carry out their duties properly. Women needs to be given opportunity to freely express themselves. Of Course there are some limitations. Any kind of freedom is not without conditions. There has to be a balance.

Some think that educated women are not supposed to be a housewife as housekeeping is repetitive work, a job suited only for illiterates. This is not true. A house, a family, social relations all of which is in the hands of female members is to be properly managed. There are many jobs that are of repetitive kind. For example, job of receptionist, labourer, skilled worker, clerical job, chef, waiter, cashier, etc. All these repetitive jobs are done by both men and women. The problem is not with job, but doing right job and having a proper attitude. We will understand this as we read further.

Parenting not a job of illiterate or grandparent.

If both husband and wife go to office, who is going to take care of children? Grandparents live with older and often obsolete ideas and are known to spoil grandkids. Parenting is not a job of illiterate. It is an art, rather a difficult one. One needs to find out the interest and unique quality of their children and encourage them, make every effort to shape unique quality. If money is the only goal of life, if carrier is given greater importance than children,

then children will suffer. They won't be able to take advantage of the knowledge of their parents. These days, parents are often competitive. Instead of allowing kids to enjoy life, they push their kids so much in extra-curricular activities along with lengthy syllabus that kids hardly find time to enjoy their life and understand themselves. Today's education system is rather cumbersome. Some schools teaching take interviews of parents. They have some criteria that parents need to qualify. Any one of parents (mostly mothers) should be housewives. Mother should be atleast graduate, preferably post graduate in english medium. The only exception is that wife is practising critical profession like lawyer or doctor. The reason for this criteria is that syllabus is very difficult. Only kids of capable parents are given admission in some ICSE and IB schools. Else students may score lower grade, or even fail. They may develop low esteem and lose confidence in themselves. Hence parents should be capable enough to teach their kids.

Both men and women needs to change mindset

When we say, 'women need not prove their capability by trying to enter into each and every department', we also need to know why they have taken these steps, why did such situation arise such that they had to aggressively fight for their fundamental rights and for their own respect. We earlier said that women downgraded status of another women, mother-in-law subduing daughter-in-law. However the role of men in subduing women cannot be neglected. Men also need to understand that women needs emotional and moral support from them. Women needs encouragement from their family members. They deserve respect and above all love. Both men and women needs to change the mindset.

We must all understand the root cause of problem and act responsibly and not give in to the sway of mind. We must not allow emotions and our wishes to control ourselves. We must keep a check on ourselves and do what is necessary.

However, we are stuck up, we do not go beyond our body consciousness. We have covered the importance of restrictions and how they pave way to rise above them in articles, '[Beyond varNa-s](#)'. We will continue to understand practical aspect of living in harmony by wholeheartedly accepting diversity, uniqueness in all.

Better solution - Stay in moderation

A practical solution is to stay in moderation. Better solution is to adopt varNa dharma up to the extend we can, adopt varNa dharma as one of our duty, live in peace, do what suits your nature, do what suits your temperament, do job in a field of your liking and not where you

get good money. Learn to keep a check on ever demanding mind. Always remember, 'Anything in excess is poison'. Prakriti always strives to keep a balance. When an unbalance is created, nature tries to correct it. For example if low pressure is created, wind with great speed will rush towards area of low pressure in order to neutralize it. In the same way, sub-conscious mind tries to remain in harmony with nature. Hence we must keep a check on ourselves and maintain balance in each and every aspect of our life, give them equal importance.

Compromise is necessary to sustain any relationship

A compromise is necessary in order to maintain healthy relationship with life partner, family members, friends, business associates and with everybody. Tolerance is must. We must not try to superimpose our views on others. Each one is unique, let us not try to make an alter ego. Lets try to find out unique quality in others, let's find out strong quality in others and encourage them to explore and use them to their fullest. Then only we all can be happy.

Think before you think

Each one of us has right to speak out and each one of us has right to reject any thought and be at peace. It is perfectly alright not to accept anyone's suggestion. It is perfectly fine to agree to disagree. If anyone says something about you, it is their thought, it is upto us to accept it or not. Only if we give importance their someone's thought and start thinking on it, it becomes 'our' thought, not otherwise. Now whatever we think or build thoughts based on somebody's inputs, is entirely our own creation and for that we alone are responsible. *So think before you begin to think on someone else's thought.*

Hold on to lofty ideals

Hold one to lofty ideals. We all want freedom. moksha is absolute freedom. We have great heritage which has produced many great Self Realised saints and great devotees of God. Lives of great saints, their life and songs composed in ecstasy have deep impact upon us. They help us swim ocean of samsAra. Their writings help us interpret shAstra-s correctly. Their grace help us progress spiritually and be at peace. *Follow teachings of great saints. Apply them in our life as much as.*

Be positive, meditate to remove discrimination

In order to change ourselves we must stay optimistic. Be positive, never lose hope, have faith in yourself, guru, God and tradition. Gradually, things will become clear and

discrimination will be removed from our mind. *Meditate to remove negative qualities and remove discrimination, attain unity with all, have impartial vision.*

Practice discipline to rise above discipline

Practice discipline so that one day you will be free of discipline. Practice our duty so that one day we will rise above duty. Practice discrimination of Self and non-self, so that one day will rise above duality and merge in God. Meditate so that one day you will have no need to meditate in order to realise your true nature. Think in a proper way, as described by shAstra-s and by guru so that one day you may rise beyond the realm of mind.

After understanding advantages of vocation by birth from vedic POV, lets under understand varNa and Ashram dharma with another angle.

18.15. More on varNa dharma and Ashrama dharma

varNa dharma, which is the unique feature of SD has often come under criticism. The very reason why our dharma is sustained since time immemorial is being criticized by revisionists and social reformers, without understanding the importance of varNa and Ashrama dharma in maintaining communal harmony, peace and universal well-being, for peaceful and harmonious running of society. The misunderstanding and evil practices that have crept into our society is not because of faulty SD, but due to our faulty understanding. Our dharma smriti-s are the most flexible one in the world up to the extent of removing absolute laws and creating new laws, as said in parASara smriti which is most suited in kali yuga. parAshara smriti is quoted in later section '[Hindu dharma has the most flexible civil laws](#)'. Discarding varNa dharma is like offering a solution of chopping off head if one is having a headache. Can this be a solution? Cure the headache and not decapitate the head. Tossing up vedas and upanishads in wild for free may look ethically and morally great specially by the revisionists advocating equality of all, but it gives rise to a great danger of misunderstanding them. An unclean mind, a destructive mind reading upanishads by himself / herself is like a disaster waiting to happen. If it was possible that anyone can correctly understand upanishads and veda-s by themselves, Guru-Sishya paramparA would not have existed and there would be no need to live a life of monk.

However, vocations by birth may be overridden, if an individual has attained inner purity early than expected or have attained purity by birth due to merits of his past life. In such a case, a disciple can be initiated into vedAnta, which expounds the highest truth. Still, in order to maintain discipline and avoid chaos and excessive competition, certain restrictions have to be imposed for the good of all. Not being authorized to learn veda-s does not mean that one does not have right to chant God's name, learn Agama shastra-s practice yoga, read itihAsa and purANa-s and even know the essence of upanishads in simple words. Only authentic chanting is forbidden for Sudra-s as it is a full time job. Women are forbidden for

taking sanyAsa, but they are not forbidden to gain knowledge of vedAnta, realise their true nature and be eternally free from cycle of birth and death.

We have understood why varNa is by guNa but guNa is inherited by birth. We will now understand why varNa cannot be purely based on guNa-s.

18.16. Why not varNa purely based on guNa-s?

This question is often asked by so-called advocates of equal rights for all. However, not all purposefully try to denigrate and break our social culture. There are many people who genuinely believe in equal rights for all. They should not be blamed just for having a non-traditional view.

Before trying to understand why varNa cannot be purely based on guNa-s, we acknowledge that even in past such efforts to grant equal status to all were made by saints.

18.16.1. Resistance to varNa dharma

In medieval past and in around 9th century AD there were some saints who strongly opposed varNa dharma to an extent that they discarded veda-s and established a new independent sect. Great examples are Lord Buddha and mahAtmA basavaNna also reverentially called as maharshi baSeSvara (Basheshwara) who created a casteless vIra Saiva (Veera Shaiva) or lingAyat sect. lingAyat-s worship Siva linga and wear Siva linga as a locket. Siva linga represents formless aspect of Sankara bhagavAn and has trinity and all the deva-s inside it. So worshipping Siva linga is worshipping the whole brahmANDa (universe), trinity and all the devI-devatA-s. nAtha yogi-s, the followers of great yogi-s, the mahAsiddha guru gorakshanAtha, the disciple of guru macchindernAtha (matsyendarnAtha) also teach yoga to all those who deserve irrespective of caste or gender. They practice laya yoga, which is to merge (laya) in brahman via sound which is heard in the right ear like sound of damaru or a flute, etc. It is like arriving at ocean shore by following the sound of waves of ocean. Though one does not know where the ocean is, by following the sound of waves, one can reach ocean shore. tantra was developed for all irrespective of caste, creed or sex.

18.16.2. Difference between modern and medieval reformers

Medieval reformers did oppose tradition Varṇa dharma, however their approach was different than modern reformers. We will take examples of Maharṣhi Basavaṇṇa, Lord Buddha and the Nātha lineage.

Maharṣhi Basavaṅṅa revolted against varṇa dharma and the vedas. He rejected both. But on the other hand, he gave Śīva bhakti. He founded a new sect from the same āgama śāstra-s that Hindus use and considered them as authentic and revere them just like vaidika-s revere vedas. It is interesting to note that he did not burn copies of either dharma smṛiti-s like Manu Smṛiti or burn vedas, but he founded a new parallel philosophical school which does not believe in varṇa dharma. Unlike modern saints like Sriram Sharma Acharya and Dayananda Sarasvati, Basavaṅṅa didn't began preaching 'vedas are for all'. He didn't initiated people from all varṇa-s to perform vedic rituals. Same was the case with Lord Buddha. Infact Buddhists and Jains are said to learn and master vedas and gain positive information from them. Both Takshashilā and Nālandā taught all kinds of scriptures of various faiths prevailing at that time. One needs to learn philosophies of rival sampradāya-s in order to find faults and refute them.

Lord Buddha is said to oppose vedas. By vedas we mean pūrva mimāmsā, the karma kaṇḍa part, which has rites and rituals. Brāhmins during his time might have got corrupted and would be threatening laymen to face the consequences and incur sin if they do not perform a particular vedic yajna. Hence Lord Buddha must have opposed vedas not to defame or denigrate them, but the wrong unlawful use of vedas in order to extract money by instilling fear in hearts of laymen. Brāhmins could only earn from donations. Ours is a demanding mind. Demands keeps increasing day-by-day. Another point was to maintain their superiority or rather take advantage of their superior position over other varṇa-s. Hence Lord Buddha must have rejected the then prevalent implementation of veda-s. In other words Lord Buddha, in my opinion, did not reject veda-s themselves, but their corrupted implementation. We know that saints often revere scriptures of rival sampradāya-s. An example is that of a great nAyannara saint GYAnasambandhara. He won a debate against Jain sAdhu-s. Feeling humiliated, they began burning their scriptures, GYAnasambandhara stopped them from doing so, hold their hands from throwing scriptures in fire pire and explained them that it is not that there is problems with scriptures, but with our own understanding about them.

Lord Buddha began to taught laymen in their daily used language Pālī and not in sanskrit, as it's use was reduced only to the elites. Lord Buddha didn't broke the entire varṇa dharma or disturbed the vedic injunctions, but he insisted on living a moral and ethical life than to use vedas to extract money by instilling fear in heart of men and women. In one hand Lord Buddha took away the vedas from us but in return he did gave his own doctrine of nonviolence, faith, moderation and eight golden rules.

The rejection was more of nonviolent type i.e. non-acceptance of scriptures. Unlike modern reformists, who are busy finding faults in a system or scripture and keep denigrating them,

these saints didn't take away bhakti and the path to salvation. They didn't make one atheist or materialist. Though the present teachings of Mādhyamika school of Lord Buddha founded by Śrī Nāgārjuna looks like an atheist philosophy, as it says sUNya avasthA (zero state, state of nothingness is the final state), many Hindus believe that original teachings of Lord Buddha are not the same. Lord Buddha remained silent on a question about God's existence. His silence, from vedic perspective, is the perfect answer to the questioner as the final state of Self Realisation cannot be described. It can only be expressed by staying silent as silence (maun) is the only expression that describes it. Even the practical answer such as 'no matter I had said Yes or No would further confuse the questioner' does not sound atheist.

Nātha Yogī-s like Mahāyogī-s Gorakhnātha and Matsyendranātha didn't object to varṇa dharma nor they spoke against veda-s. They preached an old spiritual system based on mantra chanting. They wrote their own texts which was divinely revealed to them. They also adapted works from tantra-s. Since tantras are for everyone, there is no restriction to learn them. The only caution to be taken is to test and cross check the spiritual maturity and nature of disciple before passing him subtle knowledge that results in piṇḍa-siddhi i.e. mastery over five bodies.

How can we forget contribution of great vaiShNava saints who have blurred the varNa dharma and had a big heart to work for downtrodden. AchArya-s like Śrī rAmAnuja and Śrī mAdhva integrated agama worship with that of vedic worship. They worked hard to convince vaidika-s that vaiShNava Agama-s said the same thing as veda-s and are not opposite to veda-s. By doing this, they restored pride and sense of belonging to those who didn't had access to temples. Since Agama-s are for everybody, not just brAhmins, vaiShNava AchArya-s made pancharAtra Agama very popular. Then there was another AchArya Śrī vallabha. He not only revived a siddhAnta known as Suddha advaita, but upon kRShNa's orders formed a new sampradAya popularly known as puShTi mArga. Suddha advaita of viShNu svAmI got fused with puShTi mArga. Śrī vallabhAchArya jI also found a svambhu (self-created) idol of Śrī raNachoDarAi (a form of kRShNa). He converted many jains back to sanAtana dharma. All these AchArya-s created a initiation process. Anyone initiated will have to follow a particular set of rules and prescribed way of living. There is no varNa or jAtI restriction on who qualifies for initiation. It is open to all. Only brAhmins are given special reverence. Same is the case with the newest sampradAya known as svAmInArAyaNa sampradAya.

We must note that there is difference in rules for worshipping temple deity and home deity. Temple rules are strict and they require pundits to do the priestly work. Hence they are necessary. brAhmins are to be respected. But the varNa lines blurred from 4 varNa-s to just 2 - brAhmins and non-brAhmins. Likewise there were other great saints like Sri caitanya mahAprabhu who along with his disciples spread the divine name of hari far and wide. These God-intoxicated saints made harinAma-sankirtan a mass movement which crossed varNa and jatI borders. Saiva poet saints known as nAyannara-s and vaiShNava poet saints alvars or Azvars spread Siva bhakti and hari bhakti far and wide. All these saints didn't hated sanAtana dharma nor did they robbed us of bhakti. Contrary to modern reformers, they instilled bhakti in hearts of common men.

These saints were men of lofty character and influenced men and women by their noble character more than engaging in polemical debates (shAstrArtha). All great saints emphasized on 'experience' than just staying contended with 'dry logic'. Since new or uncommon or lesser known philosophies find resistance from the elite class, some AchArya-s even went ahead to write a commentary on brahma sUtra-s in order to prove siddhAnta they preached. While Adi Sankara established pure vedic dharma and advaita , other AchArya-s contributed to yoga and bhakti movements in their own way. Many dedicated their lives for the downtrodden. They showed men and women the path of salvation and instilled Self Respect in hearts of all varNa-s. Modern reformers and social activists, on the other hand just keep bashing our religion and quote isolated verses without understanding the context. Alternatively modern reformists except a few like Sriram Sharma Acharya and maharShi dayAnanda sarasvatI do not meditate nor live an ideal life, but still keep finding faults in sanAtana dharma. At times situations demand strong opposition to orthodox behaviour or wrong understanding of shAstra-s. An example is freedom struggle. In this case, some may denounce caste system, while some said, 'for some time until our country becomes independent, let's stop worshipping our deity and worship only bhArata mAtA'. More than 65 years have passed. Now the situation has changed. One must act accordingly in appropriate way.

Lets now understand traditional view of varNa dharma.

18.16.3. The traditional view of varNa dharma

The topic of varNa-vibhAjana (division on the basis of varNa) and varNa dharma (duty of varNa) is debated extensively since ages. Should varNa be on the basis of guNa-s or on basis

of birth? Examples supporting both claims are quoted extensively. We will try to give the traditional POV. Various examples in purANa-s and mahAbhArata and in rAmAyaNa can be found which support both theories of varNa by birth and by guNa-s. Dharma smriti-s are however clear on this matter that varNa is by birth. Veda-s do not clarify its stand in varNa either. We should note that only 5 % of veda-s remain rest is not extant anymore.

Had there been no Adi Sankara bhagavadpAda, God knows what would have left for us to practice. **According to Adi Sankara, varNa is by guNa, but guNa is inherited by birth.** Similar is the opinion of other traditional AcArya-s. Hence this is the traditional view of all vaidika AchArya-s. References in support of this claim can be found in their commentaries on gltA verses related varNa dharma i.e. BG 4.13, BG18-41-48.

However, lets for time being consider that varNa is purely based on guNa-s and try to reach a conclusion.

We all have three guNa-s - sattva, rajasa and tamasa. In the night, tamasa is predominant, in brahma-muhurata (3:30 am to 5:30 am) sattva is prevalent and during day time, it's rajasa. Hence each person is a brAhmaNa in early morning and sudra in night. This does not sound correct. Again, even during daytime, our mood is not the same, sometimes, the effect of sattva is predominant for few minutes or hours. Another moment one can get angry and have rajasa. Cursing others and pledging to take revenge makes one tAmasika. So a person within 5 minutes has changed from brAhmin to kshatriya to sudra. How is this possible? It does not make any sense.

Now let's imagine that if a person though born in lower varNa is promoted to higher varNa say brAhmaNa. Now suppose that s/he commits a mistake. Now has that person downgraded himself / herself to a kshatriya or vaishya or Sudra? Again after regretting his actions, performing some rituals and penance, one purifies and can again become a brAhmaNa. But as soon as one makes mistake or carries out a sinful act, one is no more a brAhmaNa, as any karma based on rAjaska or tAmasika guNa like murder, beating others, robbery, stealing of credits, killing animals, etc, is not of brAhmanical nature. Hence such a person loses his brAhmanical status and so loses his right to perform vedic rites and rituals even for the sake of repentance. In other words, if varNa is strictly based on guNa or say brAhmaNa is a 'quality', then in this case, brAhmaNa is not allowed to make any mistakes as making mistakes downgrades him or her. Does this make any sense? We are all humans and we all make any mistakes. What is important is to realise our mistake and make strong sincere effort to correct ourselves and not repeat our mistakes.

Now suppose a Sudra claims to a pure at heart, is intelligent and wants to learn veda-s or become a priest. A bigger question is who is going to judge whether a person has a particular guNa. Qualities and desires are invisible. Hence to understand the desires (vAsanA-s), we will have to judge the actions, as actions are grossest form of vAsanA and vAsanA is subtlest form of action. Without trial and error what is the other choice? Are there any saints who can look into mind and declare predominant quality of a person. If there are, how many saints genuinely do have this ability? What if a person after spending some time realizes that he is not suited to become a priest or loses interest in it or that

Guru finds him / her incompetent? Answers to these questions are not easy. We have a practical problem if everyone is given a free run to let their mind loose and choose whatever they want to do and live the way they want to live. We would not say this is anarchy, but it's definitely a mess and there will be many souls who would have lost direction and clarity and on their goal of life. Hence it is better to stick to our own varNa. BhagavAn in gltA (BG 3.35) also says the same that svadharma is better than para-dharma even though paradharma looks better.

Today, not many brAhmin-s practice vocation prescribed by great saints. brAhmin-s have chosen to earn money by trading of shares or do job or business. If this is the case that the highest of varNa do not stick to their vocation, why would other varNa-s? The answer is not easy. There are two reasons for sticking to our varNa dharma.

1. No one denies that a Sudra can be an intelligent and probably even intelligent than brAhmin. But chanting veda-s is not only dependent upon intellect. It requires a pure and spiritually matured mind which is possible only after accumulating merits of many of many past lives. Today's education system does not consider 'nature' and 'mental makeup' of any person. It only depends upon recitation, retention power and intelligence. Suppose if 'A' get 95 % in HSC exam (12th grade) but is of destructive mindset and 'B' gets 90 % but his mind is constructive, who will get admission first? Again, if you do not get admission in your field of choice, students select another branch and later they get job in a field that is not related to their study nor do they like work they are doing. This produces stress in mind as there is no 'liking' for the work, which after certain years manifests as incurable disease, one keeps cursing his fate and life goes on in negative direction. Had the person working in the field of his liking, there would not have been too much stress. Nature, mental makeup and purity of mind are important factors which should not be neglected. Not every person is fit for any kind of job.
2. Practicing vocation by birth is a choice. It is the choice of brAhmin-s to dedicate their lives for veda-s or to live for earning. This does not mean that those who are doing Job do not deserve to chant veda-s. Being born in brAhmin family gives one a great opportunity which is not possible if one is born in a family of a poor Sudra where both parents and even children have to work for their livelihood else they die of starvation.

18.17. Future Prediction of deterioration of varNa dharma and it's solution

itihAsa (mahAbhArata) and purANa-s have predicted that in kalyuga, as time passes, the dark effect of kalyuga will increase which will lead to deterioration of varNa dharma, the backbone of SD, and varNa-s will mix with each other. sUdra will sit next to brAhmin (brahmANa), sudra-s will become a leader of all (minister), etc. and vedic dharma will decline. In such case, varNa-Sankara prajA will be created i.e. inter-caste marriage will

increase for e.g. a brAhmin will wed a vaiSyA. Their children are not considered as brAhmin. They are called as varNa-Sankara and they cannot perform what a pure brAhmin can do.

Since the traditional path of vedic karma kANDa and other vocations related to varNa will get deteriorated (but not become extinct), and the path of GYAna (advaita) is not for all, a simple cross-varNa solution for spiritual progress was recommended. It is the path of bhakti. Chanting of mahA mantra *hare rAma, hare rAma, rAmA hare hare, hare krShNa, hare krShNa, krShNa krShNa hare hare* was given. Chanting of any mantra except *OM*, is recommended like *OM namaH SivAya, OM namo bhagavate vAsudevAya*, etc.

There is no restriction based on caste, creed or gender, nor there is any strict ritual and discipline needs to be observed for chanting mahA mantra. Anyone can chant any the mantra for any period of time, either in group, or individually. One can chant loudly (sing in group) or chant it silently with or without rosary bead (japa mA). It is a simple approach to progress spiritually. Reading purANa-s, itihAsa and singing glories of the Lord, chanting his names is the most effective method for Self Realization. As one progresses, mind becomes introvert and does not demand and material objects. Attachment with loved ones decreases and attachment with a form of God increases. Gradually, the conditional surrender to the Lord changes to unconditional surrender. bhakti (devotion) increases with constant chanting of Lord's name. Then God himself will show his / her true nature and give his beloved devotee what best suits him / her. Unlike advaita, bhakti has a capacity of being a mass-movement. As per Sri Ramakrishna, bhakti is the best that suits us in this age.

18.18. The present scenario and practical approach of brAhmin-s

In our shAstra-s it is said that there are two types of dharma. First is dharma to be followed in normal situation and second is dharma to be followed in any kind of emergency. This second type of dharma is called as ApAta dharma. In situation is like floods and similar natural calamities or when country is under foreign invasion, one has to act accordingly. Similarly, when there is decline of dharma, then too one can and should take steps that are necessary for the protection of shAstra-s and dharma in general, as it is said that *dharma protects one who protects dharma*.

The present scenario is that only 5 % of veda-s are extant. Out of them only 1 % is said to be properly preserved with all svara-s. 6-7 shAkha-s or max 12-13 shAkha-s are said to be alive.

brAhmin-s have themselves abandoned vedic chanting and karma kANDa. *Ours is a demanding mind. Once which was a luxury is now a necessity.* brAhmin-s can no longer sustain their family and raise their kids and give them good quality education with the alms and gifts received during any religious ceremony. Instead of giving a panDita what he needs, a rigid custom is prevailing to give brAhmin-s similar things in donation like plain cloth, little food, along with little money. In a month, they may have more than 15 pairs of plain cloths which they are not going to use. Repetitive Gifts keep piling month by month without being used. On the other hand, the elite class has always been under attack from Mughals and Muslim rulers for 800 years. Then britishers in 200 years destroyed entire gurukul system, corrupted some scriptures like grihya sUtra-s and gave convoluted interpretations. Hence more and more brAhmin-s are leaving their vocation by birth and doing job or business for their survival in today's world. 1000 years of foreign rule which made every attempt to break our culture and spirituality has also made big impact on the minds of Hindus. It is becoming difficult to find good brAhmin-s for religious ceremony like housewarming (griha pravesha), marriage or death ceremonies. This extraordinary situation which resulted in decline in living vedic way of life made many brAhmin groups to open the gates of vedic learning and karma kANDa to all including shudra-s. This shows the practical approach of Hindu society.

18.19. Problems with new converts and possible solution

Hindu way of life and it's contemplative nature has attracted many westerners and other non-hindus. While they happily accept SD, they find it difficult to adjust into the SD. The main problems are

- Will traditional Hindus accept us and let us enter into their temples and let us perform vedic rites?
- Which varNa should I adhere too?

The answer cannot be given in one word i.e. Yes or No. The answer depends upon the local community, priests, temple authorities and saints preaching philosophy that new converts follow.

There are two types of converts, one who were originally Hindus but before some years or centuries have converted to other religion. Another ones are those who claim that their ancestors were not Hindus.

For the first ones, if they know their varNa, the problem is solved. For second type, there are various ways to be a Hindu. Most westerners are not interested in varNa dharma or in becoming vedic or temple priests. They are more inclined towards philosophical, contemplative part of SD. The best way would be to adhere to any philosophical school like gauDiya vaiShNava, Saiva SiddhAnta, Kashmir Saivism or triKA, nAtha yoga, Kriya Yoga, Sri upAsanA, gaNapatya or an advaitin. All these philosophical schools and other vaiShNava sects like visiSTAdvaita, dvaita, dvaita-advaita, puShTi mArga of vallabhAchArya require that in order to practice siddhAnta, they must be initiated by a guru. Apart from smArta, visiShTAdvaita, dvaita, bheda-abheda and Suddhadvaita (puSTi mArga), other schools do not require one to know their varNa. However, priestly duties are reserved only for brAhmins, unless in exceptional circumstances when a recent convert is entrusted with priestly duty. We have excluded gauDiya vaiShNava (GV) as it's preacher Prabhupada and his successors do not believe in varNa is by birth. Recently, ISKCON has also initiated non-hindus to become temple priests on their belief that varNa is by guNa only. This may not be accepted by GVs. Srila Prabhupada who brought Krishna bhakti as a mass movement to the west and hence he has gained a lots of followers.

varNa dharma has been opposed by some medieval saints like maharShi basavaNna. nAtha yogi-s do not adhere to varNa dharma. They initiated anyone interested. Similarly, modern reformer saints like Sriram Sharma Acharya of Gayatri Parivar has also condemned varNa dharma and initiated all those interested to chant Gayatri mantra. They teach veda-s to women and women independently perform vedic rituals. Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati of Arya Samaj also held similar view. He was an advaitin at heart and opposed varNa dharma. All these saints were respected for their contribution and knowledge. They are not rejected like in other religions. Hindu Society is very tolerant society and accommodates all.

These days, sanyAsa is given to all those who show commitment. Once you become a monk, you are above varNa. Few foreigners have managed to get honorific title of 'mahAmaNDaleshvara' (Mahamandaleshwar). Only the title of SankarAchArya is above mahAmaNDaleshvara. There are many popular ashrams based on advaita like Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Chinmaya Mission and Divine Life Society of Swami Shivananda. Other notable saints are Swami Sukhbodhananda, Swami Ramsukhdas ji of Gita Press Gorakhpur, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Many Yogi-s like Paramhansa Yogananda, Paramhansa Hariharananda, Paramhansa Prajanananda and other saints of Kriya Yoga lineage of Mahavtar Babaji have spread yoga in the west. There is also lingAyat sect known for Siva bhakti. These saints have

influenced many intellectuals through their writings, teachings and discourses. These saints have not stressed on varNa dharma, but emphasized on spreading GYana, bhakti and yoga.

Alternatively, if anyone who wishes to practise SD after reading bhagavad gItA, upanishads, purANa-s, listening to discourses and books written on Hinduism, they too can start practising. Start going to temple, start reading gItA, listen to discourses and start to chant God's name.

If anyone asks you what is your varNa, you may simply reply - 'I am a gauDiya vaiShNava', 'I am a vaiShNava', 'I am a Saiva', 'I am a Veera Saiva or LingAyat', 'I am a nAtha yogi', 'I am a Kriya yogi', 'I follow teachings and principles of Arya Samaj', 'I am a member of Gayatri Parivar', and so on. If you do not have any varNa, don't panic. There is no need to become upset. Our doors are always open.

South India has rigidly hold on to traditional SD. They do not allow even Hindu Males including Brahmins to enter into temple without traditional dress of dhoti or dhoti and angavastra. Women cannot enter without wearing sarees. For that we cannot do anything. In some places, separate temples for Sudra-s and dalits are made and they have priests and even sanyAsins initiated to take care of them and answer doubts regarding religion or customs. Do not worry too much, in most places in India and in Abroad, temples are open to all irrespective of their varNa, even to non-hindus. You will not be rejected. All are welcome to practice Hinduism. If you do not have a varNa, your work (actions and behaviour) and your nature will reflect your varNa. Ultimately we have to purify ourselves inwardly. Your positive vibrations will change the mindsets of Hindus and you will make a place in their hearts.

Sri rAmAnujAchArya ji, Sri caitanya mahAprabhu ji, Sri vallabhAchArya ji, Sri GYAnasambandhar (a Nayanar) and other Acharya-s have converted many Muslims and Jains. Many Gujarati Jains were converted by Sri vallabhAchArya ji. They call themselves as puShTi margi-s. There are many vaiShNava-s who do not adhere to any sampradAya and prefer to call themselves simply as 'vaiShNava-s'.

We do not cheat people by spreading false information on our dharma i.e. in the introductory discourses we teach something else and later on you realise that the actual Hinduism is completely different. Of Course there are and will be different opinions, sects

and philosophies, but we do not draw our swords against each others though at times there will be verbal duels, but that's between two pandits and traditional scholars of respective sampradAya-s. We didn't kill basavaNna and Lord Buddha for rejecting veda. Another atheist philosophy is chArvAka, we do not kill them as they do not believe in veda-s or in reincarnation. We do not fight with Jains. Maharshi Dayananda and Sriram Sharma Acharya may have some critics, but they did not face life threats as there are no Hindu Extremists. Extremism is not our culture. Ours is a journey of evolution of consciousness.

18.20. dharma cannot be rigid, discipline is not rigidity

dharma cannot be rigid, as rigidity makes one narrow minded and stubborn. Ultimate goal and our dharma and our birthright is moksha, eternal freedom. As one progress on spiritual path, all kinds of superstitions, rigidity, narrow mindedness, pride about our varNa, kula, family, business etc and other attachment towards material objects and person drops. Ishvara is not jaDa (gross matter), Ishvara is chaitanya (subtle), in fact subtle of the subtlest. In front of Isvara everything is jaDa. Meditation on that which is subtlest will not make on jaDa, rigid.

dharma allows our mind to think, discriminate, choose and act accordingly. We cannot simply shut down our mind and blindly act in the name of dharma. Wayward thinking does not help, hence when it comes to dharma, we are taught to think in a way that helps us increase our faith in God without getting superstitious or compromising our intellect. dharma does not asks to brainwash ourselves and others in it's name. Mere parroting does not help. An ounce of practice is thousand times better than tons of theory.

18.21. Why are some Atheists better than Theists?

This is a very genuine question from the practical observation. Atheism means 'Lack of Belief in God'. An atheist will read, understand, analyse scriptures rationally and then reject it as s/he is not convinced by the answers or solutions given in scriptures. An atheist will not believe in Īśvara (Ishvara). Hence s/he will be ready to face the situation. An advanced theist will also accept any situation as it comes and face it calmly. But in case of most theists, the problem is that we are all God fearing people and not God loving people. Let's understand why people believe in God.

In Bhagavad Gītā, Bhagavān says that there are four types of devotees (bhakta) - ārtho, arthārthī, jijnāsu and jnānī (GYAnI).

- Ārtho bhakta is the one who remembers Īshvara or worships him only when in time of trouble.
- Arthārthī bhakta is the one who worships Īshvara only for the sake of money.
- Jijnāsu bhakta is the one who is interested in Divine vision of Īshvara and in moksha. Such a devotee worships Īshvara for the sack of Īshvara and not for any personal benefits. Most of the sādha-s (seekers of truth, spiritual aspirants, renunciates) fall in this category.
- Jnānī bhakt is the one who is always one with Īshvara and so is in constant communion with him while still living in physical body. Such a devotee is the best amongst four and is the dearest to Īshvara.

These days, 99.9 % do not want moksha. Only one in lakh (lac) walks on spiritual path. Hence majority of devotees fall in first two category. They worship Īshvara out of fear so that Īshvara keeps them safe and gives less trouble. Such people, admittedly, have a weak mind. Instead of facing situation, unable to accept with smile, they can't bear the consequences and blame Īshvara and their fate for all the mess in their life.

18.21.1. The power and working of Subconscious Mind

There is a saying that, 'It's all in the mind'. Another popular saying is, 'You become what you think'. This is absolutely true. Spirituality is not about getting some supernatural power by worshipping Īshvara. Spirituality is direct dealing with your own mind. Intention behind action is more important than the action itself. Similarly, intention behind worship is important. We get what we demand. Results or rewards of fruits of actions is in accordance with our 'demand'. Outcome of results and spiritual progress is directly proportional to the intensity of faith, surrender and dedication. The outcome is also dependent upon the conviction with which one prays to Īshvara, clarity of thoughts, and no presence of contradictory thoughts or emotions. This means that if you pray for getting job, but in the background you have fear of not getting selected, then you yourself are contradicting your own wish. Both hope (of getting job) and fear (of not getting / losing job) are the creation of our own mind. What matters is which thought is stronger, how much consistently you keep thinking about it, are you positive about outcome and leave it to Īshvara to grant your wish in his own way and not by the way you wish it to happen. Indeed Īshvara has his own

ways of getting things done. What matters is which thought enters your subconscious mind. Conscious mind has 10 % power while subconscious mind has 90 % power. Conscious mind thinks rationally, while subconscious mind does not discriminate, but accepts thoughts as they are. Once a thought reaches subconscious mind and gets strong, subconscious mind will make it sure that this thoughts gets manifested, be it success or failure, be it positive or negative. In this way, we ourselves are the creator of our destiny. What you keep thinking, becomes your habit and then your habit takes control over you once it enters into subconscious mind. No thought can influence you. But the moment you start to contemplate on any thought or incident, it becomes *your* thought. After that, whatever you think is entirely your own creation and for that you and only you are responsible. Keep thinking and get what you want.

18.21.2. Destructive thoughts are harmful to you, stops your progress

Subconscious mind is linked with infinite wisdom, infinite grace. It's nature is to be in harmony with nature. If you keep cursing your destiny or Īshvara or if you envy anyone, are jealous and does not want to him/her to get success, get promotion or get recognized, or you feel that you are left behind in race and though you deserve, you do not get promotion, but less performing colleagues get promotion, it produces unrest in mind. You keep thinking negative about yourself and others. This though is your entirely your own. Constant thinking about one topic sink into subconscious mind, which does not think rationally and so does not recognize whether a thought is positive or destructive. It will make sure that your 'wish' whatever it may be comes to a pass. If thoughts are destructive, subconscious mind, whose tendency is lifewards and to stay in harmony with nature will manifest your wish as some disease or as a failure. You yourself are blocking the infinite power of subconscious mind which is linked with cosmic mind, the mind of Īshvara. Your subconscious mind has created your physical body. So it knows perfectly how to heal it, but only if you pray to Īshvara through it. If you keep thinking negatively, you block your progress and connection with the infinite. Subconscious has many ways to communicate, in dreams, in meditation, appear in lucid dreams as any person that you respect or you revere or you are comfortable with, it can manifest as thoughts that whisper in your ears, or by projecting an image in a dream. Many scientists had experiences this phenomenon and many successful people used power of their subconscious mind to get a solution write a novel, do something creative, or invent something.

So it does not matter whether you are a theist or an atheist, what matters is how you tackle your situation and which thoughts sink into subconscious mind.

In order to communicate with subconscious mind, one has to be calm with no thoughts in background to weaken our thoughts i.e. what we intentionally think presently i.e. rational thinking. An average mind is not peaceful, as it demands that it wants to fulfill. Average mind is not calm and stable. Hence it takes help of someone else, builds hopes, believes in something or someone, fears of not achieving desires or losing what is achieved. It clings to a higher power, fear induces superstition in us.

Since human birth is given to us in order to fulfil our dis-satisfied desires and to progress spiritually, we cannot complain to people who demand specific thing to Īshvara. After demand is fulfilled, it will calm mind and instil faith in Īshvara Mind now accepts that is a higher authority much powerful than us. With calm mind, which is necessary for spiritual progress, one can chose to walk on spiritual path. Success ratio of calm and stable mind is very high for spiritual progress. Inner purity and not sharp intellect is the main requirement for spiritual progress. An advanced sādḥaka has stronger mind than atheist, but not many have unconditionally surrendered to Īshvara.

As said earlier, we all fear for failure. Fear is our driving force to do things that we do. Let's discuss the 'Fear factor'.

18.21.3. Fear - The driving force of worship

A weak mind no matter whether s/he is an atheist or a theist will not be able to face tough situation. A weak mind will be ready to do anything in order to escape from the situation or get rid of sorrow. Most worship is due to fear of losing or for 'avoiding sorrow (dukkha)' or to 'ward off possible dangers'. It is more of a psychology that works than faith in Īshvara. It is this fear that generates superstitions within our mind. Spirituality asks us to remove fear. Spirituality asks us to dive deep within and find the reason or cause of fear. Devotions asks us to surrender all the fear and leave everything to Īshvara and accept things as they come and accept all people '*as it is*' with positive and negative qualities. No one except Īshvara is perfect, not even saints. They too are human, but society expects very high moral standards of living from them.

As said earlier, an atheist, having strong mind, is ready to face fear. Hence an atheist can overpower '*fear*' with '*courage*'. With ability of overcoming fear with courage, an atheist,

who does not believe in havan-s and karma kāṇḍa, will not fall in trap of getting fearful if a havan or yajna is not performed properly. Due to courage, an atheist will not feel compelled by the force of fear to quickly come out of tough or hostile situation (pratikula paristhiti) by performing a havan.

On the other hand, a weak minded theist will want to perform a havan to get rid of obstacles. If fear is background while doing a havan or yajña, chances of materialisation of havan is little. When everything happens in the way we want then we say that situation is favourable (anukula paristhiti). When everything is fine, we are too busy to remember Īshvara. Only in hostile situation (pratikula paristhiti), in order to make things happen in their way, and get the work done, theists take refuge in Īshvara. If things do not happen in 'my way' and this continues for a long time, then a person, be it a theist or an atheist, s/he will sooner or later take extreme step. Either one will become very aggressive or one will develop inferiority complex and sink into depression. In rare case, either one kills another person or one commits suicide.

It is easy to induce fear than to remove fear. Mind is easily influenced by negative qualities than positive qualities. In other words, negative emotions and thoughts have more impact on us than positive ones.

Theist do not worship Īshvara for the sake of Īshvara or just because s/he likes to worship Īshvara, but for his own vested interested. In other words, it is not interested in spiritual progress or is s/he interested in Īshvara. Īshvara bhakti and Īshvara himself is a tool to get their work done. They may worship any form of Īshvara that can help them fulfill their demand.

When it comes to mental stability and ability to facing situation, it is of little importance whether a person is a theist or an atheist. What is more important is how one sees life, how one tackles situation, 'adjust, adapt and improvise', 'readiness or willingness to compromise', remain calm in hostile situation.

A weak mind will remain weak and not remain steady in hostile situation. Such a person cannot excel in any field.

An atheist can be a good person with a big heart and strong mind.

18.21.4. Can Atheist progress Spiritually?

Yes, an atheist can progress spiritually, if an atheist is a thinker (tatva-chintak). Even if atheist does not believe in Īshvara s/he can be a good human being and of helpful nature. S/he can be an influential social worker. Good (or bad) karma i.e. deeds will never go waste. We must bear their fruits. Person doing good karma will be rewarded good fruits. A noble men can ascend in heaven. But that's as far as an atheist can go - in heaven. Sooner or later after the merits of good deeds are exhausted, a noble soul will again fall back on earth and take human form.

Spirituality takes us one step further. It asks us to remove the 'I'-ness, the attachment towards the world, its objects and people. Shāstra-s asks us to renounce the very desire that makes us do what we do. When there is no desire, there is no fear of losing what we have achieved nor there is fear of failure. Desires produces attachment with objects mentally. Desires either induce rAga (liking) or devasha (dislike) in mind for objects or persons. If one does not achieve what we want, then comes anger. In either case, whether one gets desired result or not, ego increases. Shāstra-s teach us to renounce ego, renounce desire and melt individual identity (consciousness) into Brahman (God Consciousness). This is done by detaching ourselves from our mind, thoughts and actions by being a witness (sākshi) to all of them. Detachment and state of being a witness happens by the grace of Guru and God.

Since atheist does not believe in Īshvara, nor in subtle bodies nor in existence of jīva as separate from physical body, atheist cannot detach himself from his ego, physical and subtle bodies and desires as detachment is not possible without surrendering to a higher authority. Hence s/he cannot get moksha. Noble atheist can at best ascend to higher worlds in the strength of his good deeds. Maybe in next life, by the grace of Īshvara, s/he may develop faith in Īshvara and develops a longing for him. There may be a deep sense in him that tells him that life is not just what we see or hear. Life is not limited to five senses and his heart longs for searching beyond five senses. Such a soul searches for the real purpose of life and keeps contemplating on the unseen force that is pulling him like a magnet. All this can be credited to the ripening of good deeds in past lives.

Lets now start a new topic. sanAtana dharma is different that abrahamic religions.

18.22. sanAtana dharma is not about DOs and DONTs - No extreme view

sanatAna dharma is different from other religions. It does not believe in strict DOs and DONTs. **Life is all about evolution. It is about gradual progress of soul, Ascension of consciousness to higher planes, to higher levels of reality.** Holding onto extreme view is harmful. SD does not believe in 'All or none theory' as far as evolution of consciousness is concerned. dharma helps increase thinking capacity, dive deep into any subject, analyze logically and then take a decision. Certain concepts and instructions are not easy to comprehend. Hence help of AchArya is necessary. Later on after practising certain instruction for some time, one can understand the reason behind certain rules and regulations. One understands that they are created for our own spiritual benefit and are not to be looked with suspicious eye.

It is wise to build up our capacity step by step. It is like training someone to become a heavyweight builder. One the first day, he is not asked to lift 100 kgs of weight. The increase in weight is gradual. But from the first day, he has to follow certain rules and regulations like sticking to certain diet, adopting certain breathing exercise, etc which he will understand their importance later on.

An example of gradual increase in mental capacity is fasting method called chandrAyana. Initially the quantity of food intake is reduced, then one is asked to stick to fruit diet, later on shift to only living on water and lastly only on air. The renunciation of food is connected with the phases of moon. The fasting might start with new moon and end up on full moon or vice versa.

19. There is no rejection of Non-believers, it's always an effort for improvement

Unlike Islam, Hinduism does not consider a Non-believer or Non-Hindu as a second class citizen nor does it reject such a person. Hinduism believes that evolution of Soul (Consciousness) is an ongoing process and even an atheist is progressing towards God.

Hence efforts are made to logically make an atheist understand the importance and advantages of theism and following dharma. Instead of rejecting an atheist, they are encouraged to study shAstra-s like sanskrit grammar, yoga, nirukta, sAnkhya, nyAya and any other philosophy that they are inclined to learn. Hindus strongly believe that GYAna (knowledge) is never destroyed. We hindus also believe in past and future lives, hence the knowledge gained will be carry forwarded in the next birth. As per bhagavad gltA, chapter 15, mind along with 5 senses leaves the body and enters another body i.e. womb of mother. Mind is not destroyed until Self Realization, hence the knowledge is also retained along with merits and demerits.

20. Advantages of believing in past lives, future lives and temporary stay in Heaven and Hell

We Hindus strongly believe in past lives and after life. This belief helps us to give us logical reason of many questions

Why a new born innocent child suffers even though s/he has not done any negative karma, as s/he is not capable to think and act decisively. The answer is, though they have not done anything wrong in this life, they are suffering due to ripening of fruits of demerits of past lives.

Why are innocent people are drowned or buried or killed in natural disasters like flood, earthquake, tsunami, etc.

Why new born child shows a particular characteristics and has a particular nature, leaning towards any form of art or strong faith in God since childhood, why some people progress faster than others, etc.

Belief in past lives and future births helps us understand the behaviour by taking into account past lives.

Even the logical answer based on Science is acceptable. Malnutrition, birth defects, natural calamities all can be explained based on verified proofs. Even though the answer does not contain the word 'God', it is perfectly acceptable. We have an entire school dedicated to learning Logic. It is called as Nyaya.

Let's understand basic texts of Hindu dharma

21. What are basic texts of Hindu dharma?

Many Hindus are ignorant of the scripture that is the very source of their religion - they do not know even its name. Here it is an attempt to atleast give brief introduction of the heart of our religion.

There are fourteen abodes of knowledge that constitutes SD. The fourteen dharma-pramANa-s (authorities of dharma) are called "caturdasa-vidyA". caturdasa means fourteen (catur means four and dasa means ten), vidyA means knowledge.

The fourteen "abodes" of knowledge are:

- **Four Vedas:** rgveda, yajurveda, sAmaveda and atharvaveda
- **Six Angas:** SikshA, VyAkaraNa, Chandas, nirukta, jyotiSa and kalpa
- **Four Upangas:** mimAmsA, nyAya, purANa and dharmashAstra

Religious knowledge is encompassed by these fourteen branches of learning.

Vedas are top most authoritative texts and are the most important. Vedas are symbolized in the form of human body as a veda purusha.

There are four more vidyA-s. If you add them to the fourteen already mentioned, you will have eighteen vidyA-s - asTAdasa-vidyA which are all-inclusive. Of them, the fourteen already mentioned are directly concerned with dharma.

The remaining four are -

1. Ayurveda,
2. arthashAstra,
3. dhanurveda and
4. gandharvaveda

These vidyA-s do not directly deal with dharma.

While there are four up-veda-s, known as anga-s, there are also six upanga-s. (upa-anga). Man possesses a number of angas or limbs. vedapurusha has six limbs. (It must be noted

that the veda-s are also spoken of as vedamAtA (mother of knowledge.) The six upangas (sub-limbs, secondary parts), though not integral to the veda-s, are supporting limbs of the vedapurusha.

Place of anga-s in veda purusha is:

- sikshA is the nose of the vedapurusha,
- vyAkaraNa his mouth,
- kalpa his hand,
- nirukta his ear,
- Chandas his foot and
- jyotiSha his eye.

We have **two itihAsa-s, mahAbhArata and vAlmiki rAmAyaNa**. 'itihAsa' means 'history'. Adi Sankara considered both of them as authentic but when he used to simply mention itihAsa, he would mean only mahAbhArata. Both of these epics are given a special status of 'history'. There are purANa-s, but they may have an element of imagination and moral of the story is generally considered as important than the story itself. They do not enjoy the status of being called as 'history'.

There are **18 purANa-s and 18 upa-purANa-s** (subsidiary or secondary purANa-s). 'purANa' means history or that which is ancient. There are also 'sthala purANa-s'. 'sthala' means place and purANa means history. Hence sthala purANa-s glorify ancient historic places.

There are 18 dharma shAstra-s, which are called as smriti-s. There are some other dharma smriti-s too. There are also 18 up-smriti-s (secondary smriti-s).

Earlier it was said that Veda-s are pillars of SD. The question arises –

21.1. What are veda-s?

It would be difficult to define veda-s in a way that it covers the content and the purport of veda. Still we will try to understand what veda-s mean. The word 'veda' means 'vidyA' or knowledge. There are many great saints who have tried to explain veda-s by writing commentary on them. Out of them the one written by sAyanAchArya (Sayanaacharya), who was an advaita vedAntin, is considered as the most authentic by all. According to him, the veda-s are a collection of mantra-s and their explanation or how they should be applied. veda-s are called unauthored (apurushya) as they are beginningless and endless. They teach highest truth.

Hence veda-s can be defined as a collection of mantra-s, their explanation & application, their inner meaning and teaching of the highest truth to be directly experienced. veda-s are unauthored, beginning-less and are divinely revealed mantra-s to great rishi-s (Seers) as a flash in their heart or as intuition.

Four veda-s are

- rig veda
- yajur veda (divided into two, Sukla and krShNa yajur veda. Sukla yajur veda was lost SAKhA, revived by sage yajnayalkya)
- sAma veda
- athara veda

Kanchi Paramahcharya says

The Rgvedic sakhas contain hymns to invoke the various deities; the Yajurvedic sakhas deal with the conduct of sacrifices; the Samaveda sakhas contain songs to please the deities; and the Atharvaveda sakhas, besides dealing with sacrifices, contain mantras recited to avert calamities and to destroy enemies. The Samaveda had the largest number of recensions, 1,000. In the Rgveda there were 21; in the Yajus 109 (Sukla-Yajur veda 15, and Krsna Yajur veda 94); and in the Atharvaveda 50.

While, according to one scholar, the Visnu Purana mentions the number of sakhas to be 1,180, another version is that there were 1,133 recensions- the Rgveda 21, the Yajurveda 101, the Samaveda 1,000 and the Atharvaveda 11. (Note: This categorization is also mentioned later)

Considering that people in the age of Kali would be inferior to their forefathers, Krsna Dvaipayana thought that it should be sufficient for them to learn one sakha of any one of the four Vedas. It was the Lord that put this idea into his head. Vyasa assigned the Rgveda sakhas to Paila, the Yajurveda sakhas to Vaisampayana, the Samaveda sakhas to Jaimini and the Atharvanaveda sakhas to Sumantu.

Krsna Dvaipayana came to be called "Vedavyasa" for having divided the Vedas into four and then having subdivided them into 1,180 recensions. "Vyasa" literally means an "essay" or a "composition". Classifying objects is also known as "vyasa".

According to Krsna Dvaipayana's arrangement, though it is obligatory for a person [that is a Brahmin] to learn only one recension, it does not mean that there is a bar on learning more. The intention is that at least one sakha must be studied.

In order to distinguish verses of different veda-s, verses in each veda are called differently

rig vedic verse is called as rik (rk),
yajurvedi mantra as yajus,
sAmavedic mantra as sAman and
atharvavedic mantra as atharvan.

sAmaveda has most verses similar to rig veda but they are sung in a different way so as to please deva-s. It is believed that sAma veda has 95 mantra-s not found in rg veda. Singing originated from sAma veda. The sargama (7 basic sounds used in traditional Indian singing), sA, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni originated from sAma veda.

Some historians believe that ṛg veda is oldest and atharva veda is youngest amongst veda-s. Kanchi Paramacharya says this is not true. ṛg veda manDala 10 contains the name of atharva veda and hence atharva veda is as old as ṛg veda.

Vedas are divided into four parts – samhitA, brAhmaNa, AraNyaka, upanishad (vedAnta)

samhitA-s are collection of mantras used for vedic rituals. They form major part of veda-s. Traditionally when one says 'veda' it means samhitA part.

brAhmaNa-s explain which and where a mantra or a collection of mantra-s are to be applied. They are further split into AraNyaka-s and vedAnta.

AraNyaka-s give inner meaning behind any ritual or practice. It is more connected with inner or mental practice.

vedAnta, i.e. veda-anta, as the name suggests is the end part of veda-s. anta means end. Here 'end' does not literally mean the 'end part' or the 'last portion of veda'. It means the core or essence. Certain section found in samhitA and brAhmaNa-s are known as upanishads (vedAnta). For e.g. IshA upanishad is in the samhitA part, still it is called as an upanishad. samhitA-s are collection of mantra-s used for vedic rituals (yaGYA-s).

There are many upanishad-s, technically 1180. Out of them some say 220 are extant. Out of this 108 are listed in muktikA upanishad. Out of 108, 10 are considered to be principal upanishads. These 10 upanishads are important as many AchArya-s have chosen them to write commentary. Earliest known extant commentary on top 10 upanishad-s are written by Sri Adi shankarAchArya ji.

svAmI SankarAnanda of ChinmayA mission, while commenting on panchadaSI 7.100 in hindi says,

In muktikA upanishad it is said that vEda-s has 1180 SakhA-s. In that

840 SAKhA-s are related to karmakAnDa
232 SAKhA-s are related to upAsanAkAnDa and
108 SAKhA-s are related to JnAnakANDa (GYAnakANDa)

(Total is 1180)

Another explanation can also be given

21 SAKhA-s belong to rgvEda (Rig veda / Rug veda)
109 SAKhA-s belong to yajurvEda
1000 SAKhA-s belong to sAmavEda

50 SAKhA-s belong to atharvavEda

(Total is 1180)

In karmakANDa various types of karma-s are given and different vEda-s give different instructions, but in upanishads only one thing is given i.e. unity of AtmA and brahma. Hence seeing differences in various upanishads, mumukshu should not get confused. To gain aparOksha GYAna, he must listen to one or more upanishads more than one time from gUrU.

The original verse which svAml jI is commenting can be translated as

Difference in vEdic SAKhA-s and due to multiplicity of of desires different types of karma-s are prescribed in vEda-s. But one should not doubt about brahmaGYAna given in vEdAnta and one must practice shravaNA. - PanchdaSI 7.100

Top ten upanishads are listed in a form of a verse so that they are easy to remember.

ईसकेनकथाप्रश्न मुण्ड माण्डुक्य तैत्तिरी ।
एइतरेयं च छान्दोग्यं ब्रह्मदारण्यकं दश ॥

*Īsha kena kathā praśna mūṇḍa(ka) māṇḍukya taitirīya
aitareyam cha chāndogyaṃ bṛhdāraṇyakam daśa*

For convenience they are put as Numbered List:

1. IshA / ISa / IshAvAsya Upanishad
2. Kena Upanishad
3. KaTha Upanishad
4. PrashNa Upanishad
5. muNDaka Upanishad
6. mANDukya Upanishad
7. taittiriya Upanishad
8. aitareya Upanishad
9. ChAndogya Upanishad
10. brihadAraNyaka Upanishad

Other popular upanishads studied are

1. Svetashvatara upanishad

2. mahAnArayaNa upanishad (different from tripAda vibhuti mahAnArayaNa upanishad) - tenth chapter of taitiriya Aranyaka of KrShNa-yajurveda
3. narsimha tApanIya Upanishad (divided into purva and utara TApAnIya)
4. kaivalya upanishad – cited by Adi Shankara in Vishnu Sahasranama BhASya and in BhASya on Svetasvatara Upanishad, dipikA by Sri NarayaNa and Sri Sankarananda, vidyAraNya svAml has cited it in PancadaSI and has written dipikA-s on amrit bindu and kaivalya upanishad. A short intro from it is published by samata books titled 'THE TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD'
5. kauSitAki BrAhmaNa upanishad
6. JAbAla upanishad
7. atharvaSiras upanishad
8. atharvashikhA upanishad
9. maitrAyaNIya or maitrI upaniShad - belongs to Maitrayaniya SAkhA of Sukla yajUrvEda

mahAnArayaNa upanishad contains popular hymns to many deities including rudra (Siva) and viShNu. It also contains various variants of gAyatrI mantra.

In order to protect veda-s, they must be chanted. To understand the reason, yogic approach must be taken into account. *We will discuss about the importance and necessity of oral recitation of veda-s in later section after we understand the basics of yoga, tantra, chakra-s, nADI-s and subtle bodies.*

21.1.1. pranthAntrayI

In order to realize highest truth and to be free from cycle of birth and death, along with 10 principle upanishads, study of bhagavad gItA and brahma sUtra-s (topmost canonical text) is prescribed. Together they are called as prasthAntrayI. To explain the concepts in simple and clear way, many AchArya-s have written commentaries on prasthAntrayI. Out of them Adi SankarAchArya's commentaries are oldest that are extant today. After reading many upanishads, one may be confused by the contradictory views or finding a consistent method of vedAnta. In order to clear contradictions, refute other alternatives and establish one truth, brahma sUtra was composed by bhagavAn veda vyAsa. Commentaries written by great AchArya-s is written in question and answer format.

bhagavad gItA is an essence of what upanishads say. Hence its study is made compulsory. bhagavad gItA has to be interpreted in accordance with upanishads so that it does not contradict them. Since it is a part of mahAbhArata, that is no varNa based restrictions like studying of veda-s by traditional AchArya-s. Still, like all shAstra-s, bhagavad gItA in chapter 18 itself places restrictions on whom it has to be said. Most common thing to keep in mind is that we must offer water to those who are thirsty. Likewise, those who are receptive and wish to learn should be given first hand information about the contents of gItA in brief.

When we talk of prasthAntrayl, we remember Adi Sankara bhagavadpADa, the oldest commentator on prasthAntrayl. We will go a little off topic to correct the misconception that Sri Adi SankarAchArya jI single handedly defeated Buddhism and restored the glory of sanAtana dharma. Let's clear this wrong belief.

21.1.2. Adi Sankara didn't single handedly caused downfall of Buddhism.

First of all, the word 'defeat' is not correct. In general, masses are not inclined in the technical aspects of any philosophy (siddhAnta). They just follow men of lofty character. We must also remember that saints preach keeping in mind the then prevailing customs and beliefs amongst masses. Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavir were all men of lofty character. Many times their teachings were wrongly interpreted and over a period of time misconceptions prevail amongst masses. Saints only remove misconceptions.

There is another feeling that comes along with the statement that Adi Sankara single handedly won debates and restored glory of sanAtana dharma. People tend to believe that Buddhism was once the dominant religion of India. This was not the case. Though Buddhism had great effect on minds of people and people were highly influenced by the magnetic personality of Lord Buddha, it is not necessary that people will leave sanAtana dharma. For example, animals used in sacrifice were replaced by wheat flour. It is a mistake that the whole or majority of India was 'converted' into Buddhism.

The downfall of Jainism and Buddhism was mainly due to the combined effort of kumArila bhaTTa, udayanAchArya, and Adi Shankara. Buddhists had three main logical oppositions to SD.

1. Non-acceptance of veda-s (rituals).
2. Non acceptance of Ishvara
3. Non-acceptance of vedAnta, the philosophical part by establishing Sunya vAda (AtmAn is a blank, zero state)

The glory of vedic rituals was re-established by kumArila bhaTTa, a mimAmsaka or karma kANDin, who is considered as an avatAra of skanda bhagavAn

Existence of Ishvara by logical way was re-established by an adept in tarka, udayanAcArya, who by logical reasoning established the existence of Ishvara

The final purport of vedAnta, which is Self- Realization and that brahman is the substratum of entire universe and is not a SUnya avasthA, a blank, zero state, was established by Adi SankarAcArya.

On the other hand, the second avatAra of skanda bhagavAn, one of the great 63 nAyanAra saints, had many debates with Prominent jain AcArya-s, who too were very strong and even had great spiritual powers, refuted their objections and defeated them in debates thereby

stopping conversion and re-establishing the glory of bhagavAn Siva. Under his influence, Siva bhakti spread far and wide in South India.

We have known what are veda-s, upanishads and prasthAntrayl. We will now continue to understand six anga-s and upa-anga-s of veda-s.

The six Angas are

- sikshA (Phonetics); Concerned with pronunciation
- vyAkaraNa (grammar); Learn in accordance with rules of grammar like in pANiNi sUtra.
- nirukta (lexicon, etymology); splits sanskrit word and gives deep meaning.
- kalpa (manual of rituals); Application of mantras in rituals, size of yajna kund / havan kund
- Chandas (prosody); singing in a particular tone.
- jyotiSha (astronomy-astrology). Perform any ritual or begin any work in auspicious time.

Their place in veda purusha is:

- sikshA is the nose of the veda purusa,
- vyAkaraNa his mouth,
- kalpa his hand,
- nirukta his ear,
- Chandas his foot and
- jyotiSha his eye.

To know the reason for each shAstra being identified with a part of the body, each anga has to be individually studied.

A brAhmin is expected be acquainted with all anga-s. That he must be well- versed in the veda-s goes without saying. He must first learn to chant them and proficiency in the six Angas will later help him to gain insights into their meaning. For todays age, learning all four vedas is difficult, so only one shakhA (a part) of one veda is expected to be learned and memorized.

Four Up-angas are -

mimAmsA, nyAya, purAna and dharmashAstra

mimAmsA could be defined as, to perform rites and rituals according to the injunctions laid in veda-s. People following mimAmsA (pUrva mimAmsA) believe that veda-s are supreme authority. Veda-s themselves give fruits of actions. There is no concept of God in mimAmsA.

21.2. nyAya and vaiSeshikhA

nyAya means logic. People following nyAya believe in Ishvara. They are philosophically oriented and do not find any need to directly experience God. nyAya is important but dry philosophy and adherents of nyAya do not find any need to mediate in order to realize shAstra-s.

Further notes for interested readers (can be skipped):

An extension of nyAya is vaisheshikhA developed by maharShi kaNNaDa. vaisheshikhA takes the enquiry further from where nyAya left it. It is the nyAya school that Adi Sankara and later on AcArya Srl harSha attacked in their commentaries. Adi Sankara refuted some of its concepts stating that nyAya though useful is not end of road. There is need of meditation and the knowledge of Brahman by direct experience is necessary for liberation. Srl harsha attacked the basic concepts of nyAya school including who deserve to take part in debate in his khanDAn-khaNDa-khAdya. This led to the entire collapse of nyAya system until a Gangesha Upadhyay revived it by establishing navya-nyAya (new school of nyAya). All traditional AcArya-s who were actively involved in svamata vistAra and para mata bhanga i.e. expansion or spreading of own siddhAnta (principles) and refuting opponents siddhAnta were all adept in nyAya and later navya nyAya. Navya nyAya is now simply referred to as nyAya.

21.3. itihAsa - mahAbhArata and rAmAyaNa

Unlike purANa-s, mahAbhArata and vAlmiki rAmAyaNa both enjoy the status of being itihAsa. Hence they are considered as real historical event.

21.3.1. mahAbhArata

There are many editions of mahAbhArata depending upon who has preserved manuscripts. Some editions are kumbhAkonam edition and Andra edition. Some scholars have collected many manuscripts, some not even complete, and then compiled a critical edition. which was published by BORI (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune). Kisari Mohan Ganguli was the first translator who has translated full 1 Lakh verses of mahAbhArata. His translation is very popular and considered authentic, faithful and close to original sanskrit. His translation is preferred especially against those made by western scholars like Wendy Doniger who has written books 14-18 of Mahabharat Collection.

It is said that what is found nowhere can be found in mahAbhArata, but what is not found in mahAbhArata is not found anywhere else. From this saying, one can understand the importance of mahAbhArata. and the range of topics it covers from politics to moral living to importance of dharma, to expounding highest spiritual truth.

How to read mahAbhArata

mahAbhArata is very vast and it takes a year to finish 1,000,00 verses. Hence not many read it. The first book to be read is C. Rajagopalachari's 'Mahabharata', which is an abridged version or a concise version of Mahabharata in about 200 pages. C. Rajagopalachari was the last Governor-General of India. After him the position was abolished and a new position of 'President of India' was created which was taken by Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Then comes popular writings of multi volume K. M. Munshi's 'Krishnavtar' series, which are stories of different prominent characters connected with the life Krishna Bhagavan. This is same K.M. Munshi who was one of the foremost contributor and a member of team headed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar dedicated to creating 'Constitution of India'. Munshi's contribution cannot go unnoticed, however, since Dr. Ambedkar was chairman of the committee, it is he who is remembered as 'Father of Indian Constitution'.

After reading these two books, one can start reading the original mahAbhArata. Here too initially one may think of reading selected short stories and famous samvAda-s (dialogs) like Bhishma-yudhisthira samvAda, yaksha-yudhisthira samvAda (dharmadeva in the form of yaksha), vidur-yudhisthira samvAda before the commencement of the great mahAbhArata war, and other popular stories glorifying sAttvika qualities of main characters of mahAbhArata. In general dialogs between main characters like krShNa, yudhisthira, vidur, bhiShma, drona, kunti, karNa and others are very valuable.

This approach can be adopted for reading longer texts like rAmAyaNa and purANa-s.

21.3.2. rAmAyaNa

rAmAyaNa has many versions like Ananda rAmAyaNa, kamban rAmAyaNa, AdhyAtma rAmAyaNa, tulsidAsakrit rAmAyaNa and yoga vasisTha rAmAyaNa, but the most authentic version from historical angle is **vAlmiki rAmAyana**. There are other versions of rAmAyana in local language which has stories not found in original rAmAyaNa.

tulsidAsakrit rAmAyaNa (tulsidAsa jI's rAmAyaNa) written in avadhi, a dialect of Hindi, is the most popular of all versions and widely used for recitation, either in full or in part during festival days. Most famous part is sundarkANDa singing glories of rAma bhakta hanumAn jI. tulsidAsajI's hanumAn chAlisA is also very famous. Devotees of rAma and hanumAn often chant it daily, especially on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

AdhyAtma rAmAyaNa is a part of brahmANDa purANa. It concentrates on spiritual aspects than historical events. Hence it is to be interpreted accordingly. It's discourse is of advaitic nature.

Sri rAma gItA

AdhyAtma rAmAyaNa contains famous gItA by the name **Sri rAma gItA** which is often glorified an essence of vedAnta (vedAnta sAra). This gItA has only 62 verses, but each verse of high value. It is discourse between rAma and laxmaNa i.e. it is rAmA-laxmaNa samvAda.

pUrvabhUmikA that led to the composition of rAma gItA is interesting. After victory over rAvaNa, rAma was happily ruling ayodhya. One day, a washerman questioned moral character of sItA mA. rAma, who knew that sItA is as pure as gold, just for the sake of his subject ordered his beloved wife sItA to live rest of her life in exile. He ordered his devout brother laxmaNa to escort her to the nearby jungle. laxmaNa after dropping mA sItA in jungle returned with heavy heart. With the intention of knowing the reason behind such decision and to remove the pain and distress in his heart, laxmaNa approach his elder god-like brother rAma and opened his heart. This lead to the teaching of the highest truth as expounded in vedAnta which talks about the nature of brahman, which is formless, transient nature of world made from mAyA and rAma's true form which is pure brahman, pure consciousness.

Yoga vasiSTha is an excellent shAstra, popular among advaita vedAntins. It is authored by Adi kavi maharShi vAlmiki.

Scholars say that rAmAyaNa consists of two parts - kathA-upAya (the story part) and moksha-upAya (method for Spiritual Liberation). According to yoga vAsiSTha, Both these two constitutes the entire rAmAyaNa. kathA-upAya is traditional rAmAyaNa and moksha-upAya is yoga vAsiSTha.

Many commentaries are written on yoga vAsiSTha, but the famous one is by Sri Ananda bodhendra sarasvatI (ABS), which closely follows advaita vedAnta of Srī Ādi Sankarāchārya jī.

Yoga vAsiSTha has adopted a unique method of teachings in the form of beautiful stories full of deep meaning. yoga vAsiSTha consists of 6 parts. yoga vAsiSTha is said to have 32000 verses. Only 28000 are available today. Some say there are only 25000 verses. Sometimes this larger version is called as brihad yoga vAsiSTha. brihad means large or big. This version has equal number of verses as commentary i.e. each verse has been commented making total of 50,000 verses including commentary.

Shorter version, called laghu yoga vasisTha (laghu means small). It contains 5000 verses. Still shorter version contains 1000 verses. There is still a shorter version called as 'Yoga Vasistha Sara'. Swami Chinmaya has selected about 100 verses in his translation of Yoga vAsisTha sAra. yoga vAsiSTha sAra is also published by Sri Ramanashram.

This Gita is not recommended for all.

Future prediction of bhagavat gltA by guru vasiSTha

In the sixth part, there are 267 verses which are called as arjunopAkhyAna. These are sarga-s 55 to 58 of nirvANa prakaraNa - I (There are two nirvANa prakaraNa-s in yoga vAsiSTha). This version of bhagavad gltA is the anticipated version to be spoken by krShNa in dvApAra yuga.

Sri rAma asks questions as to what will viShNu give upadeSa in future (dvApAra yuga) in his krShNAvtara. guru vAsiSTha, being a trikAladarshin (knower of past, present and future all at a time) describes in brief the updesha given by nArAyaNa (krShNa) to nara (arjuna), both are the parts of bhagavAn viShNu. **This version is also called as vAsiSTha's version of bhagavad gltA.** This is an essence of vedAnta and a treat to read. It gives us a lot of clarity. Some even go on to say that study of bhagavad gltA is incomplete without study of vAsiSTha's version of bhagavad gltA. Commentary written by Sri Ananda bodhendra sarasvatI is popular among advaita vedAntins.

Recently, a commentary by Swami Ved Bharti under the title of '[Song of The Lord \(Gita in Yoga-Vasistha\)](#)'. The book also has commentary by ABS.

21.4. purANa-s

purANa-s describe about important events of glorious past which may not belong to the current eon. Unlike history which we learn in school, purANa-s aim to impart moral, religious and spiritual instructions. They convey the message of veda-s in a very friendly manner through stories, so that laymen can understand it.

Eighteen purANa-s are

viShNu purANa
nAradiya purANa
padma purANa
garuDa purANa
varAha purANa
Srimad bhAgvata purANa

brahmANDa purANa
brahmavaivarta purANa
mArkanDeya purANa
bhavishya purANa
vamana purANa
brahmA purANa

matsya purANa
kUrma purANa
linga purANa
Siva purANa
skanda purANa
agni purANa

In addition to the above 18 there are other subsidiary purANa-s called as upa-purANa-s. Some important purANa-s are

Devi bhAgavat purANa - important purANa of shakta-s (devi worshippers). Devi bhAgavat along with the Devi Mahatmya of the Markandeya Purana forms principal text of the worshippers of Adi Sakti / devi / durgA / kAlI. Saundarya lahiri of Adi SankarAchArya is another important composition explaining Srl vidyA upAsanA.

harivamsha purANa - an appendix of mahAbhArata

gaNesha purANa - for gaNapatya-s (worshippers of gaNesha as supreme brahman)

Mudgal purANa - for gaNapatya-s (worshippers of gaNesha as supreme brahman)

Siva-rahasya purANa - for Saiva-s. Contains ribhu gltA, highly revered by Sri Ramana Maharshi

Narasimha upa-purANa

Surya purANa is revered by saura-s - worshippers of sUrya deva as supreme brahman.

Other upa-purANa-s are sanatkumara, narasimha, brihad nAaradiya, durvAsA, kapila, vAmana, bhArgava, varUNa, kAlIkA, sAmba, nandi, Parasara and Vasishtha.

Total upa purANa-s sometimes exceed 19. Some are of the opinion that devi bhAgavat is one of the original 18 mahA purANa-s while others are of the opinion that it is srimad bhAgavad purANa.

Several purANa-s list pancha lakshana (pañcalakṣaṇa) or 'five characteristics' or 'five signs' that purANa must contain. They are:

1. *sarga*: First or primary creation. Major creation followed by maintenance and destruction of all worlds, lower and higher spiritual worlds. Cosmogony. How universe was created.
2. *pratisarga*: secondary, subsequent creation and maintenance followed by partial destruction of lower worlds. Cosmic cycles.
3. *vamśa*: Vamsha means family dynasty or clan or kula or lineage. Lineage of deva-s, rishi-s and mahArAja-s (kings). Genealogy.
4. *manvantara*: Period or age of manu. One cosmic cycle.
5. *vamśānucharitam*: Legendary stories of popular kings and their lineages. Genealogical list of popular clans.

purANa-s describe four types of pralaya - naimittika (नैमित्तिक), prAkRtika (प्राकृतिक), Atyantika (आत्यंतिक) and nitya (नित्य). Interested readers can refer to viShNu purANa VP 1.7.41-48 i.e. ansha 1, adhyAya 7, verses 41 to 48.

VP 1.7.42: Naimittika pralaya: pralaya that happens when brahmadeva goes to sleep is called as naimittika pralaya. It is the only brAhma-pralaya.

VP 1.7.42: prAkRtika pralaya: When brahmANDa (universe) merges into prakRti (mAyA), it is called as prAkRtika pralaya.

VP 1.7.43: Atyantika pralaya: When a yogi, as a result of knowledge (direct experience of his true nature) merges in paramAtman, it is called as Atyantika pralaya.

VP 1.7.43: Nitya pralaya: The destruction of bhUta-s (bodies of living beings) day and night (i.e. every moment) is called as nitya pralaya.

[Verses 1.7.44-48 to be translated - explains that three guNa-s and the cosmic elements also present inside our body and how a yogi can overcome triguNAtika mAyA and merge in paramAtman]

Another purANa, Siva purANa (SP 2.6.4-8) talks about mahApralaya, the great dissolution.

When the time of Mahapralaya (great dissolution) commenced, all the mobile and immobile creation got destroyed, when there was darkness all over because of the absence of planets, constellations, stars, and sun. When there was neither moon, nor day, nor night, nor fire, nor wind, nor earth, nor water, and neither was pradhana and Sky nor any other luminary. There was neither sound, nor touch nor any dear substance, smell, rupa, taste, directions etc., everything were concealed. In that very dense darkness there existed He the Brahman denoted by 'Sat' (satbrahman). When in that way there was neither 'sat (existence)' nor 'asat (non-existence)' that state which Sages always contemplate inside the Akasa (sky) within their heart - *Śiva Purāṇa 2:06:4-8 (courtesy Shri Santosh Ayalasomuyajula)*

Note: Different purANa-s talk about different pralaya-s. Since viShNu purANa is the most widely quoted purANa, we have taken extract from it. Further discussion on cosmology, geonology and other pancha lakshana will unnecessarily extend the length of already long article. Author Amrut finds it difficult to explain panch laxaNa without making things complicated as the study on this topic is limited. Perhaps Amrut is not much interested in studying cosmology but prefers to concentrate on spiritual meditative aspect. It is a separate study in itself which requires comparative study of various purANa-s and itihAsa which glorify main characters, duration of cosmic cycles and talks about lineage (kula) of great kings, rishi-s and devatA-s.

21.5. Over 30 types of gltA-s

Reading all purANa-s is not possible for all. Hence reading only the essence is recommended. This essence is sometimes called as gltA. There are more than 30 different types of gltA-s. Most of them are a part of purANa, while some like utara gltA, avadhUta gltA, jivanmukta gltA, ashTAvakra gltA (not recommended for masses) are independent composition. There are gltA-s like Siva gltA, rAma gltA, devi gltA, hamsa gltA, gaNesha gltA, avadhUta gltA, uddhava gltA, kapila gltA, etc which are part of various purANa-s. Gita Press, Gorakhpur, has published a collection of 25 gltA-s by the name 'gltA-samgrah'. It is bilingual edition in Sanskrit-Hindi. Some gltA-s have more than one version i.e. they are called by same name.

Important gltA-s are

- bhagavad gltA - kRShNa-Arjuna samvAda - part of mahAbhArata
- Siva gltA - Siva-rAghava samvAda (Siva-Rama samvAda)- part of padma purANa
- uddhava gltA - (KrShNa-uddhava samvAda - part of bhAgavat purANa
- kapila gltA - kapilA muni-DevahUti samvAda (devahUti is bhagavAn kapila-s mother) - part of bhAgavat purANa

Other gltA-s that are popular are

gaNeSha gltA - part of gaNesha purANa - popular among gaNapatya-s, a sect devoted to gaNapati. This gltA is similar to bhagavad gltA and has many common verses found in bhagavad gltA

Uttara gltA - This gltA is of yogic nature

avadhUta gltA and jivanmukta gltA of datta bhagavAn. It is of tAntrika-advaitic nature.

GYAneshwarI gltA - This is not a gltA, but a famous commentary on bhagavad gltA by sant GYAneshvara (Jnaneshwar, Gyandev). It is originally written in ovi chanda of marathi. It is highly revered and very popular in Maharashtra and Gujarat and amongst advaita vedAntin-s.

21.6. How to use purANa-s and itihAsa for character building

purANa-s and itihAsa have many great stories, stuti-s and discourses. Contemplating on them helps cultivate sAttvika qualities in us. purANa-s speak like a friend in the form of stories. Moral of the story is given importance than story itself. Stuti-s make us realise supernatural power of bhagavAn and instil faith and devotion in our heart. It makes us accept the existence of 'higher authority'.

Alternatively some stories can be used to change the mindset of children and induce positivity in them.

If a child is possessive, you can teach him stories of renunciation like that of maharShi dadhichi donating his bones to make vajra. For showing strength of truth we have rAjA harishchandra and yudhisthira. For having big heart and donating wealth, we have the great mahArAja bali and karNa. Likewise we have stories which test some or other qualities like devotion and faith in Ishvara as in case of prahlAda and druva. We can impregnate such divine qualities in our children by narrating such incidents. Stories are easiest way to teach moral and spiritual lessons to young kids. Instead of simply finding faults, it also helps generate faith and pride in our culture and tradition.

When one wants to narrate stories or contemplate on the spiritual essence, the question comes, which publications and authors are to be trusted. Let's address this question.

21.7. Publications and authors recommended for reading shAstra-s

There are many good publishers and authors who have done great job to publish larger works. Before moving ahead, we must understand in which language we must read our shAstra-s.

21.7.1. Mother tongue - a preferred language

It is universally accepted by leading scientists, linguists, scholars and saints that reading or studying in our mother tongue is the best way to cultivate our mind and intellect. Mental, emotional and intellectual growth is best when studying and contemplated in mother tongue. Besides, when paramAtmA has given us birth in any family, then it is best suited for

fulfilling our prArabhda and spiritual quest. Hence the language spoken to by the family is the best way to communicate. Mother tongue effortlessly touches our heart. Prayers are more effective when sung or prayed in mother tongue. All poet saints have composed poetry in highly spiritual ecstatic, trance state, in communion with Ishvara, in their mother tongue or in deva bhAshA sanskrit. The udgAra, spontaneous words, that originate from God-intoxicated heart sung in mother tongue have deep impact on hearts and mind of all those who listen to it with devotion. bhagavAn resides in our heart too and GYAnI bhakta is the best amongst all bhakta-s. It is bhagavAn who speaks through them. Hence words of such great saints have deep impact. their works are protected through generations due to their shear impact and popularity.

sanskrit is very powerful language and hence it is recommended for all those to need to take up study of shAstra-s either for academic, scholarly comparative study of more than one philosophy or religion, spreading our dharma, critical study or even for own spiritual upliftment.

However, not all have knowledge of sanskrit. In this case translation in mother tongue is best option. It is always better to have a bilingual book with sanskrit as first language. It is better to have books that break up sanskrit words and give their meaning.

If some works are not available in mother tongue, then select a language that is similar to your mother tongue. Last option is to study in English. Studying in foreign language takes time to enter into heart. It is superficial knowledge and one reads intellectually. There is little bhAva that is generated by reading works in foreign language, of course there are some exceptions. Since we are not habituated to read in our mother tongue especially those who have done education in English language, it will be initially difficult to read books in our mother tongue. Give yourself some time and you will enjoy reading in your mother tongue than reading in English. Though you may not read with same speed as in English, mother tongue is more effective as far as spiritual evolution is concerned. We do not need to race as fast as we can. Go slowly and steadily.

After understanding importance of mother tongue or native language, lets come back to discussion, as to which publications and authors are to be trusted.

21.7.2. Some trusted publications and authors

Please note that recommendations given here are purely subjective and based on authors limited reading and knowledge and are not exhaustive.

Gita Press, Gorakhpur

In general, in traditional circles and among sincere readers the first name that is synonymous with unbiased, faithful, correct translation free from sectarian bias done by publication is that of **Gita Press, Gorakhpur**. Gita Press is managed by Gita Bhavan. The sole purpose of it's creation was to spread shAstra-s to the common man at an affordable cost. Even today, they are selling a 1000 page book under Rs. 250.00 - Rs. 300.00. It does not even cover cost of blank pages and printing cost, forget binding, cover page, designing of cover and back page, etc. Gita Press does not get subsidy in paper or on anything that they use to publish books. They do not even accept donations. It is said that Gita Press, as a company, is always in loss due to selling books in low prices. Some pocket size books like Sri Hanuman Chalisa, are available from Rs. 2.00. Gita with sanskrit-hindi translation with excellent page quality and solid half-bound cover is available at Rs. 16.00 as on 2015, whereas softbound or paperback Gita is available at the cost of Rs. 5.00 (Rupees Five only). It's authors are very knowledgeable, some like Swami RAMSUKHDAS ji Maharaj and Shri Jaidayal Goenka ji are said to be Self Realised and were uncontroversial during their entire life. All saints used to respect them. Other authors are well versed with shAstra-s and are scholars in one or other branch. No author takes any money to write, compile, translate, proof read or writing forward from Gita Press. Gita Press does not publish any photo on cover or title page to avoid publicity. There are no ads in any of the publications of Gita Press. Still they manage to publish works in such a cheap rate.

You can understand the dedication and the amount of effort Gita Press is putting so that even poor people can buy and distribute books.

Publications of Sri Ramakrishna Mission and its branches

Sri Ramakrishna Mission has grown exponentially in recent years with large number of centers. It is known for its service to humanity. Sri Ramakrishna Mission has many branches and sister concerns like Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, Vivekananda Foundation, etc. Monks of

Ramakrishna order are known to be uncontroversial and unbiased towards politics. There are no allegations of corruption or sexual exploitation or any other charges.

Sri Ramakrishna Ashram has published many works in English and other languages than most of other foundations that too in a very cheap rate. One 1000 page book, which is Swami Madhusudan Saraswati's Commentary on Bhagavad Gita is available for Rs. 300.00. It also publishes shorter 50-70 page books for beginners and busy people. Some rare books like Uttara gltA with gauDapadAchArya's Commentary, vedAnta, sAra, vedAnta paribhAshA, gltA with translations of different traditional commentators like Sri Adi Sankara, Sri rAmAnuja, Sri Madhusudan SARasvatI, Sridhara svAmI's tikA, etc are available.

Books written by Swami Madhavananda and Swami Gambhirananda are considered as good.

Translations are fairly unbiased, but we must keep in mind that Monks of Sri Ramakrishna adhere to advaita tradition. Though they accept all other traditions and revere their AchArya-s, they consider advaita as final truth.

Chinmaya Mission's Publication

Chinmaya Mission has published many books in English and Hindi and few books in Gujarati and Telugu. Like Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, their main focus is translating shAstra-s in English. Their books and audio CDs are worth considering.

Swami Brahmananda's rendering of Bhagavad Gita and Guru Gita is soul touching. His voice is very sweet. There is little music and there is rhythmic chanting of verses.

Bhartiya Vidya Bhavans Publication

Bhartiya Vidya Bhavans has published many gem of works like 'Hindu Dharma' by Kanchi Paramacharya Shri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati Mahaswami and publishing works of Kanaiyalal M. Munshi and C. Rajagopalachari.

Gita Press, Ramakrishna Ashram, Chinmaya Ashram and Bhartiya Vidya Bhavans has many bōks for beginners. They have huge collections of stories from our shAstra-s.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Arsha Vidya Gurukul

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (different than Maharshi Dayananda of Arya Samaj) has published some works and audio discourses. Some of popular saints like Swami Tadrupanand Saraswati, Swami Chinmayananda and Swami Sukhbodhananda were his disciples who went on to establish their own ashram.

Swami Sivananda's Divine Life Society

Divine Life Society has also published books covering wide range of topics.

Swami Tadrupapand's Works

Swami Tadrupanand ji works are well known among Gujaratis. His discourses and commentaries are appreciated by all. Swami ji has received many awards and acknowledgements by various foundations recognising his contribution to Gujarati language.

Other Publications

Books published by Chowkhamba Press and Motilal Banarasidas and Sons (MBS) as well known among traditional circles. Works are mostly available in Hindi and Sanskrit. They also publish books in English. MBS has large collection of English Books.

Other publications are Parimal Prakashan, Samata Books and Randhir Prakashan. Works published by **Randhir Prakashan** of **Sri Nandlal Dashora** are of good quality. Nandlal's works are available in Sanskrit-Hindi. Some of his works are Guru Gita, Shiva Gita, upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras.

Among Gujarati Publications, the first name that comes to mind and is synonymous with faithful and honest transaction free from sectarian bias is that of **sastu sAhitya**. Like Gita Press, it was established by a revered saint Shri akhaNDAnand bhikshu. His translations are pragmatic, soaked in full of devotion and knowledge. Sastu sAhitya also sells books in very cheap rate. Next comes **sAhitya sangam**, which, as per their intro, was setup as sastu sAhitya was about to shut down and discontinued many publications. Harihara pustakAla has also done translation of many shAstra-s especially purANa-s, but it is not apt. It somehow lacks spiritual vibrations. Some say that it's translations are a times grammatically inaccurate.

Among other publications are **Sriram Sharma Acharya's Gayatri Parivar and Maharshi Dayananda's Arya Samaj**. These saints have done enormous work and are acknowledged even by the critics and traditional AchArya-s who have opposed their revisionist preachings like abolishment of caste system, giving dikshA to shudra-s and asking women and shudra-s to perform vedic yajna-s. Keeping aside philosophical differences, works of these saints are worth studying.

After briefly touching the subject of practical application of purANa-s and which publications and authors are to be taken up for study, we will continue our understanding of our shAstra-s. After veda-s, itihAsa and purANa-s comes dharma shAstra-s.

21.8. dharma shAstra-s (Civil Laws)

dharma shAstra-s are created by great saints. They are called as smriti-s which means 'recollected from memory'. They are based on veda-s. In terms of authority, they are considered secondary to veda-s. dharma shAstra-s are called as 'law books'. They give moral and ethical code of conduct.

"smriti" is what is remembered. "vismriti" is insanity. Manu observes : "There is smriti for the Vedas in the form of notes. The sages who had a profound understanding of the veda-s have brought together the duties and rites (dharma and karma) mentioned in them in the form of notes and they constitute the smriti-s. They are written in a language that we can easily understand. Read them. They tell you about your duties in detail, the do's and don'ts, and how the rites are to be performed. "

We have seen that the sixth vedanga, kalpa, contains instructions about the vedic works. The grhyashAstra-s, dharmashAstra-s and SrautashAstra-s of kalpa deal with sacrifices and

other rites. The smriti-s elaborate on them and contain detailed instructions with regard to the rites one has to perform through one's entire life. There are rituals to be conducted from the time of conception until death. The smriti-s also lay down the daily routine to be followed by all of us.

manu, parAshara, yajnavalkya, gautama, harita, yama, viShNu, Sankha, likhita, brhaspati, dakṣa, angiras, pracetas, samvarta, acanas, atri, Apastamba and shatapata are the eighteen sages who mastered the Vedas with their superhuman power and derived smriti-s from them. Their works are known after them like manusmriti, yajnavalkya-smriti, parAshara-smriti and so on, and they contain all that we need to know about all the dharma-s to be adhered to and all the rituals to be performed during our entire life.

Apart from these eighteen, there are eighteen subsidiary smriti-s called upasmriti-s. It is customary to include the bhagavadgItA among the smriti-s.

manu Smriti is most popular among intellectuals. Later comes Apastamba, gautam and yajnavalkya smriti-s. parAshara smriti is considered to be suitable for kalayuga. What which is not covered by parAshara can be found in other smriti-s. In India, mitAksharI, a commentary on yajnavalkya smriti was prevailing all over India. dayAbhAga, which is a digest of all smriti-s was prevailing in Bengal.

21.8.1. Hindu dharma has the most flexible civil laws

The most practical part of parAshara smriti is that it says that old obsolete law can be removed or replaced with a newer law. 5 brAhmin-s who are knowers of veda-s can form a council and create new law that is suitable at that time in the current circumstances.

Please find some quotes from parAshara smriti

paraAshara smriti (PS) which it says it is best suited for kaliyuga (PS 1.1-25) gives revelations like

1. Laws are made depending upon deSa, kAla and paristhiti (time, space and present circumstances). (PS 1.22)
2. You can practice as much as you can (no rigidity) (PS 1.33)
3. 5 knowers of SAstra-s (or even 3 incase of shortage) i.e. knowledge of 4 veda-s and 6 veda-anga-s can form a council and create new laws (PS 8.6-13)
4. Widow remarriage (PS 4.30): Even if husband has permanently abandoned, still women can marry.
5. Brahmins can accept food from Sudra-s* (PS 11.13)

6. Sudra-s can trade (PS 2.13)

7. In the Krita yuga sin is incurred by one who converses (with a sinner) ; in the Treta by one who touches (the sinful man) ; in the Dvapara by taking the sinner's food ; in the Kali by a (sinful) act (alone). (There is nothing like untouchability in kali yuga) --> Manu smriti was for Krita (satya) yuga. It cannot be followed completely. (PS 1.26)

*bhagavAn svAminArAyaNa (Swaminarayan) in his SixA-patri (SikshA-patri) i.e. manual of instructions, has mentioned two types of sUdra-s - sUdra-s and sat-sudra-s. sat-sUdra-s are good people and they follow our SAstra-s and have strong faith in God, while lower sUdra-s live to just pass the days with little faith in God and do little or no religious activity without understanding the meaning of what they are doing and why they are doing.

21.8.2. Views of SankarAcArya-s on Civil Laws

Both Kanchi Paramacharya and Sringeri Shankaracharya (Now Mahasannidhan, after [anointment](#) of his successor on January 23, 2015) has advised to keep practising shastras as much as you can. Both received complaints that in present times they are very difficult to be followed. Kanchi Paramacharya has said that “if I feel that some parts needs to be deleted or replaced, then someone else too will change another part which he thinks is obsolete. If this goes on, finally noting original would be left.”

Kanchi Paramacharya says, “Adi Sankara didnt appoint us to change shastras but to safegaurd them. I am not here to change them but to follow the teachings of our Acharya (Adi Sankara)”

21.8.3. Reason for reluctance to change dharma shAstra-s

It is true that Parashara Smriti allows to change few civil laws. Madhavacharya who has written a commentary on Parashara smriti by the name ‘Parashara Tatparya Nirnaya’. Hence Parashara smriti is to be accepted as authentic.

Note: Generally, Tatparya Nirnaya series like Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya and Bhagvat Tatparya Nirniya are traditionally attributed to Dvaita guru Madhvacharya (notice absence of 'a' after 'Madh' in both names Madhvacharya and Madhavacharya). Madhava (Acharya Madhava) is pre-monastic name of Vidyaranya Swami, 12th peethadhipati of Sringeri Sharda Peetham)

In our opinion, with all humbleness, in order not to contradict the knower of SAstra-s specially of the stature of Shankracharya, and the direct passage of Parashara Smriti, we can say that when something is practised which is highly unhuman like Female foeticide, then some draconian laws declaring strict punishment to the offender(s) needs to be created until the situation becomes normal. Later samaritan laws can be created or old laws can be followed.

Obsolete laws like staying giving 10 cows and one bull as repentance of some crime is not practicable and so these rules which are no more possible in present circumstances, can be abolished. Yajnavalkya Smriti has described an alternative to this punishment.

There might be other reasons due to which Shankaracharyas have not allowed any change in Civil Laws. The questioner(s) might have also asked different question like living traditional life of a Brahmin is not possible, etc, as today cost of living has gone up and just on the basis of donations, they need to take care of their family and educate their children in modern education which is not cheap.

May be some brahmins might simply change rules to suit their needs. If everyone begins to create laws, then it would be a mess, hence to arrest this trend, the Shankaracharyas might have advised us to follow rules as much as you can. India has it's own laws working in villages. An example is Khap Panchayat where sarpanch (panch means 5 and sarpanch means head of 5 keeps of laws). They make decisions to solve some issues. Villager, if not satisfied with the verdict can approach higher court.

Most of the people do not follow dharma in a systematic way. Interest in spiritual values is constantly declining with the passage of time. Western influence is on the rise. Demands of free speech and similar western concepts is gaining popularity. Though we are not against them, there is great danger if the mind is kept unchecked. Ours is a demanding mind and desires are like oil, they keep fueling the fire called as mind. Modern education is more of a machine making and based on rote reading. There is no dedicated training mind. Hence intelligence and retention power are the only criteria upon which further education and future lies. In order to arrest this trend, Shankaracharyas must have refused to allow any change in SAstra-s. They know that if they let things loose, people will forget to keep a check on mind and on traditional values.

yajnavalkya smriti along with commentaries mitAksharI and bAllambhatta is very famous and widely accepted due to it's practical approach. dayAbhAga, which is digest of all smriti-s was popular in Bengal. Britishers also accepted these smriti-s as they were prevalent during

their times. They did not want to bring in completely foreign Law system, hence they promoted the already prevailing Civil Laws acceptable to the society.

The number of dharma smriti-s and up-smriti-s indicates broad mind of our ancestors who have covered all aspects of our life.

The idea of presenting quotes from parASara smriti is that our dharma is so practical that even if a revolution takes place and the need for new laws arise, one need to stray away from our SAstra-s. Staying within the frame of SAstra-s, one can create a new law. We need not reject SAstra-s. The only condition is that new law should not be non-vedic. It goes without saying that SAstra-s help us progress spiritually and hence creating barbaric laws is out of question. Humanity is the pillar upon which dharma stands. It is the teachings of dharma which makes one 'human'. Not following dharma is one of the reasons for inhuman behaviour says Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyateertha Mahaswami, Paramacharya of Sringeri Peetham.

Other laws like widow remarriage are already morally accepted by many Hindus. It is a personal choice of a widow whether to re-marry or not.

Change in Civil Laws, if at all is done, should not be done for our convenience, but because it has become a necessity.

It should be noted that dharma shastra-s are not the only place where dharma is taught. grihya sutras, purANA-s and itihAsa too teach dharma, whether individual or for entire society.

Lets understand six philosophical systems of sanAtana dharma

21.9. Six Philosophical systems of sanAtana dharma

Orthodox systems are those which accept the authority of the Vedas, while the heterodox systems are those which reject it. To the latter group belong the three systems of Charvaka, Buddhism and Jainism.

The 'shaddarshana-s', or the six systems of Indian philosophy belong to the former group. These systems are called

1. Nyāya.
2. Vaiśeṣika.

3. Sāmkhya.
4. Yōga.
5. Pūrva Mimāmsā
6. Ūttara Mimāmsā or Vedānta.

The nāstika (athiest) schools are (in chronological order) They reject vedas:

Cārvāka – Believes only what can be perceived. Rational thinking.

Jainism – offshoot of Hinduism, now an Independent system. Some say, actual Jain Dharma is thiest and talk about Brahman as Jina Tatva.

Buddhism – offshoot of Hinduism's Sāmkhya yōga, now an independent system. Interpretation of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, as interpreted by many scholars, does not accept vedas or God, is based on theory of Shunya (zero), nihilism. Ātmā is nothing but zero state.

They generally deal with four topics:

- Existence and nature of Brahman
- Nature of the jīva or the individual soul
- Creation of the jagat or the world.
- Moksha or liberation and the disciplines that lead to it.

22. yoga, haTha yoga, nAtha yoga, aghora, tantra and kriyA yoga

Let's understand the basic difference between different types of yoga-s

22.1. yoga

The basic or classical text of yoga is 'patanjali yoga sUtra'. There are other books like Siva sUtra and dattatraya sUtra. yoga is an ancient meditative technique practised along with vedAnta and vedic karma kANDa. Though yoga was an integral part of life, wise say, it was maharShi patanjali who had compiled basic principles of yoga into a systematic structure.

Many are of the opinion that the word 'yoga' means as some sort of physical exercise. However this definition is not true. **maharShi patanjali in his sUtra-s has defined yoga in his patanjali yoga sUtra (P.Y.S 1.1) as 'chitta-vritti-nirodha'.** vritti means tendencies,

behavior, or thoughts and desires. *vritti* is mental agitation that is caused while meditating. *chitta* means 'mind' or *antakaraNa*. *nirodha* means 'to negate'

The sUtra (aphorism) '*chitta-vritti-nirodha*' means - yoga is to negate or remove tendencies of mind. In other words, yoga is to still the mind and make it free from thoughts and emotions.

yoga is derived from root word '*yuj*' meaning 'to join'. Hence yoga means 'union', union of incarnated soul with God i.e. *union of jIvAtman* (जीवात्मन्) *with paramAtman* (परमात्मन्). Merging of *jīva* into *paramātman* results into enlightenment. Empirically yoga means meeting of two or more people or objects.

haTha yoga pradIpikA (haṭha yōga pradīpikā) and in general all yoga schools, gives high importance to guru and his grace, without whom, the kunDalini cannot be activated and the yogic process (of union of *jīvātman* with *paramātman*) cannot be completed.

Preservation of semen is also necessary to progress spiritually. Hence celibacy (brahmacharya) and austerity (tapa, sādhanā) are given importance. Adherence to these qualities becomes strict as one progresses on the path of yoga.

22.1.1. The path

Unlike popular belief that yoga includes practice of *āsana*-s (body postures), maharṣi (maharShi) patanjali has not mentioned any *āsana*-s. *āsana*-s are found in manuals of haTha yoga. maharShi has just mentioned, 'Sit in a posture that is comfortable'. yoga is control of mind and body via *prāṇa* (physical breathing and breath of energy) as, mind and breathing are connected. Later, mind is directly controlled. Any yogic process is not fully explained in books. They are to be learned only through an adept in yoga, a *yogī* who has achieved mastery over mind. Still further, a *yogī* becomes aware of various subtle bodies and *tatva*-s. By tuning with them achieves mastery over them and then transcends them to rise above *māyā* and merges in brahman resulting in enlightenment.

In this process, a yogi, according to the mental make-up and impressions of past lives achieves siddhi-s (super natural powers), maharshi patanjali cautions yogi-s against getting overwhelmed by siddhi-s as they cause hindrance to the spiritual progress.

The reason why āsana-s are given importance is due to the fact the yoga believes that for healthy mind, a healthy and strong body is necessary. āsana-s and bandha-s (blocking of psychic nerves called as naḍī-s) help build strong body that is capable to withstand the divine outpour of divine energy that flows through the entire body. This energy is used for yogic process and then stored in prāṇmaya kośa (kosha) or energy body.

Surrender to īshvara and having firm faith in him is also mentioned in yoga sūtra-s, though no particular form of Isvara is mentioned.

To a sādḥaka (meditator) this world is real, but for the siddha (Self Realised / God Realised), this world is unreal says patanjali in his sūtra P.Y.S. 2.22

Note: Here siddha means 'ātma siddha' meaning 'God realised' and not the master of siddhi-s, the supernatural powers.

22.2. haTha yoga (haṭha yoga)

haṭha generally means 'stubbornness', here it means strict discipline. The most popular manual for haṭha yoga is '*haṭha yoga pradīpikā*'. It is in haTha yoga that various āsana-s (body postures), bandha-s (blocking of subtle energy channels) and breathing patterns are mentioned. Though not compulsory, haTha yoga is generally taught to all neophyte yogi-s.

Āsana-s and prāṇāyama-s help one's body to become strong, healthy and disease free. It also helps cleanse nāḍī-s, activates chakra-s and cleanse subtle bodies. Mostly it is prāṇāyama kośa (energy body / aura) that is cleansed, as beginners are not aware of other subtle bodies. Hence they may not be cleansed to the extent that prāṇāyama kośa is cleansed. It makes body 'ready' for meditation.

But before practising meditation, certain kriyā-s are practised. These are breathing techniques to cleanse subtle bodies and cleansing of chakra-s by directing energies. After the body becomes sufficiently pure, and mind calms down and turns introvert, meditation on supreme brahman is practised. The ways might be bhakti marga, Jñāna marga (philosophical enquiry or meditation on OM ॐ) or kuṇḍalini yoga i.e. activating kuṇḍalini shakti from mulādhāra chakra and raising her to sahasrāra chakra via three main nāḍī-s, initially through idā & pingalā and later on through suShumNa. Subtle bodies, chakra-s, nāḍī-s and kuṇḍalini are explained later.

According to haṭha yoga pradīpikā, four upadesha (fourth section), samādhi-upadesha says,

राज-योगः समाधिश्च उन्मनी च मनोन्मनी |
 अमरत्वं लयस्तत्त्वं शून्याशून्यं परं पदम || ३ ||
 अमनस्कं तथाद्वैतं निरालम्बं निरञ्जनम |
 जीवन्मुक्तिश्च सहजा तुर्या छेत्येक-वाचकाः || ४ ||

rāja-yogaḥ samādhiścha unmanī cha manonmanī |
 amaratvaṃ layastattvaṃ śūnyāśūnyaṃ paraṃ padam || 3 ||
 amanaskaṃ tathādvaitaṃ nirālambaṃ nirañjanam |
 jīvanmuktiścha sahajā turyā chetyeka-vāchakāḥ || 4 ||

Raja Yogī, Samādhi, Unmani, Mauonmanī, Amarativa, Laya, Tatva, Sūnya, Aśūnya, Parama Pada, Amanaska, Advaitama, Nirālamba, Nirañjana, Jīvana Mukti, Sahajā, Turyā, are all synonymous. 3-4.

सलिले सैन्धवं यद्वत्साम्यं भजति योगतः |
 तथात्म-मनसोरैक्यं समाधिरभिधीयते || ५ ||

salile saindhavaṃ yadvatsāmyaṃ bhajati yoghataḥ |
 tathātma-manasoraikyaṃ samādhirabhidhīyate || 5 ||

As salt being dissolved in water becomes one with it, so when Âtmâ and mind become one, it is called Samâdhi.

यदा संक्षीयते पराणो मानसं छ परलीयते |
तदा समरसत्वं छ समाधिरभिधीयते || ६ ||

yadā saṁkṣhīyate prāṇo mānasaṁ cha pralīyate |
tadā samarasatvaṁ cha samādhirabhidhīyate || 6 ||

When the Prāṇa becomes lean (vigourless) and the mind becomes absorbed, then their becoming equal is called Samâdhi. 6.

तत-समं छ दवयोरैक्यं जीवात्म-परमात्मनोः |
परनष्ट-सर्व-सङ्कल्पः समाधिः सोऽभिधीयते || ७ ||

tat-samaṁ cha dvayoraikyaṁ jīvātma-paramātmanoḥ |
pranaṣṭa-sarva-saṅkalpaḥ samādhiḥ so'abhidhīyate || 7 ||

This equality and oneness of the self and the ultra self, when all Saṁkalpas cease to exist, is called Samâdhi.

[Credits and Source](#)

22.3. nAtha yoga, aghora yoga and tantra (Sakta, shakta)

nAtha yoga is an ancient yoga which was popularized by the great mahA siddha-s Guru maChChinder nAtha (also spelled as maChChindra nAtha, matsyendra nAtha) and his great disciple Guru gorakhanAtha (also known as gorakshanAtha). They are worshippers of Adi guru bhagavAn Siva. There are 9 mahA-siddha-s called as navanAtha-s (navnaths) and 84 siddha-s who are highly revered in nAtha sampradAya (tradition).

Guru gorakshanAtha had given to the world laya yoga, which is merging in brahman by tuning with the divine sound often heard in right ear like sound of damaru or flute. In general, it can be any mantra too. Mind merges (laya) into brahman by tracing the origin of these divine sounds. Sounds themselves establish yogi into samAdhi and thereby one realizes brahman (paramAtmA or patamAtman).

There are many works attributed to Guru goraksha nAtha / gorakh nAtha like gorakh bodh, gorakh shaTak but one of the most important work is siddha siddhAnta paddhati.

22.3.1. sAbara mantra-s - simplification of sanskrit mantra-s, grace of mahAdeva

The Legend, according to Shri goraksha mahApurANa, a revered scripture of the order of nAth yogi-s which describes lives of 9 great nAtha-s of the tradition, says once Siva and Sakti were roaming and found one tAnrika chanting mantra-s that were formulated by Siva himself in a wrong way. Siva concluded that this tAnrika will be doomed due to the ill effects of improper chanting (as vibrations produced by his chanting will downgrade his consciousness). Adi Sakti, the compassionate mother, blamed Siva for formulating such hard mantra-s and she said that Siva should give mantra-s in simpler form. Agreeing to Adi Sakti, Siva took form of aghori and went into the cave where tAnrika was chanting mantra-s in wrong way. He corrected him and gave him mantra-s in a simplified way. By chanting these mantra-s the tAnrika become a siddha and the first nAtha of the navanAtha sampradAya ('nava' means nine). These mantra-s came to be known as shAbara mantra-s. shAbara mantra-s are not in sanskrit. Many are in Hindi or it's dialects.

Unfortunately, by the passage of time, due to selfish nature of human beings, these mantra-s were corrupted. Indians must have seen a fakir or a beggar who roams door-to-door with a dhoop (incense releasing lots of smoke) and waves peacock feathered broom chanting weird mantra-s. These are corrupted form of shAbara mantra-s. Originally, these mantra-s were used as an act of compassion by the siddha-s and nAtha yogi-s for the good of all. There are mantra-s to ward off evil effects, mantra-s for protection and well being of all, mantra-s for removing poison injected by scorpion bite (also found in atharva veda), and so on. gosvAmI tulsidAsa has also glorified sAbara mantra-s in one of his chaupai (four line verses in avadhi, a dialect of Hindi)

अनमिल आखर अरथ न जापू ।
प्रगट प्रताप महेस प्रतापू । ।
कलि बिलोकि जगहितहर गिरिजा ।
साबर मंत्र जाल जिन सिरिजा । ।

chaupai says, that for the good of mankind, maheSa (Siva), gave Sabara mantra-s.

An example of corrupted SAbara mantra in Hindi is

हनुमान पहलवान, बारह बरस का जवान
हाथ में बूंदी मुख में पान ।
हा! हा! हा!

It would be difficult to translate in proper English. Nevermind, lets try -

Hanuman, the body builder, 12 year old youth
bundl (boondi) [1] in hand, pAna (Paan) [2] in mouth
Haa! Haa! Haa!

[1] bundl or boondi is an Indian sweet. It is orangish coloured small balls either spicy or sweet. They are eaten as balls or are pressed together to form a bigger ball (laDDu, Laddoo). It is a generally seen as being offered to Lord gaNesha. boondi Ladoos are a common sweets distributed while celebrating good occasions like finalizing date of marriage, birth of child, passing in exams or scoring good marks in exams, celebrating graduation, becoming doctor, inaugurating a shop or a factory or office or clinic. etc.

[2] pAna or [Paan](#) is an ethnic Indian chew usually served at the end of an Indian meal and ceremonies such as weddings, receptions. Paan can be bought in nearly every street

corner in India. They are believed to help in digestion of curried foods and also act as mouth fresheners. It may or may not contain tobacco.

You could see the rubbish in this verse. Did Hanuman ji ate Paan during the days of Ramayana :)

Lets see another example, which is actually a slang language, in fact giving bad words to the refugee who has come at your door to solve his personal problems.

रे भाई तू कहा से आया ?

तुझे किसने बुलाया ? तू किसका जाया ?

तेरी मां बहन की जिना करूं ... ।

Can't translate this so-called SAbara mantra. First two lines enquire about the person who has approached a nAtha or an aghorI. Last line is a slang word.

There are even many muslims who practice these mantra-s and have got dikshA in nAtha or aghorI lineage. Now you must have understood the level of corruption and what kind of mantra-s are SAbara mantra-s.

SAbara mantra-s were meant to ward off evil influence, evil spirits and bad fortune. In addition to these, there are mantra-s to relieve pain in tooth, eyes or in general body pain, to cure diseases, heal wounds, removing of poison, protecting the womb (of pergrant women), vashikaraNa (controlling the mind of another person), etc.

Fortunately, there are some yogi-s who have protected the real mantra-s and are engaged in the spiritual quest for Self Realization. They rarely use these mantra-s, as they are not central part of yogic kriyA-s. Rightly, these true nAtha yogi-s stay away from society and live in isolated places like jungles.

(Note: Many may not agree with such practices and may discard them as primitive, nevertheless, we thought these mantra-s should be displayed not with the aim of practising, but just to get an idea of the nature of SAbara mantra-s)

The author finds it difficult to translate the mantra. Hence they are typed in Hindi.

An example of correct SAbara mantra is

Mantra for healing the wound

सार-सार बिजैसार बांधूं सात बार, फुटे अन्न उपजे घाव, सार राखे श्री गोरखनाथ ।

This mantra is to be chanted 31 times and then one has to blow air on the wound. It is expected that the pain should vanish and wound begins to heal.

Mantra for mahAlaxmi (Mahalaxmi)

श्री शुक्ले महाशुक्ले कमल दल निवासे भी महालक्ष्मी नमो नमः लक्ष्मी माई
सत की सवाई आओ चेतो करो भलाई, भलाई नाकरो तो सात समुद्रों की दुहाई,
ऋद्धि उखगे तो नौ नाथ चौरासी सिद्धों गुरु गोरखनाथ की दुहाई ।

A businessmen just after opening the shop, before sitting on his chair should recite this mantra and then start his work, then s/he can benefit from this mantra and may find increase in his business.

Credits: *The above mantra-s are listed by Tantrik Bahal, Page 370 and 371 in Goraksha Mahapurana. Tantrik Bahal worked hard for years to find correct SAbara mantra-s.*

It is to be noted that one may not find any effect of these mantra-s if one tries it. We are not nAtha yogl-s nor were we initiated into nAtha sampradAya. The mantra-s are displayed only for educational purposes for getting a feel of nature of SAbara mantra-s.

SAbara mantra-s cannot be pronounced by anybody. The basic principle is - Energy Follows Thoughts. Energy forms a particular shape in manomaya kosha (mental body). More concrete and clear the thought, better is the shape of thoughts and more is the energy in them. As the person raises his / her consciousness and progresses in spirituality, s/he can generate more powerful thoughts. These thoughts are then directed towards the target which they reach and then make our wish to manifest.

So the process of chanting mantra can be divided into two parts

1. Creating a thought or an idea or a wish
2. Directing it to it's target

The in between part can be energizing the thought. This can be done by repeating the thoughts or chanting certain mantra-s several times or simply passing the energy in them. This is a complex science and a yogl is cautioned not to practice without getting initiated, as a guru is necessary to cover your mistakes and imperfections while chanting the mantra or directing them. **Hence it is strongly recommended NOT to practice them even though they look simple.**

These mantra-s are first to be mastered. One must be initiated by a nAtha yogl, who is an adept in such practised and also is an enlightened master.

22.4. The philosophy of nAtha yoga

SAbara mantra-s used for welfare of mankind do not form the core of nAtha philosophy. The path of a nAtha yogl is an inner journey, a kind of inner engineering. Practicing it results in control of 5 elements (air, water, etc) and transformation of physical body into body of light, creation of indestructible spiritual body. This achievement is called as *pinDa siddhi*.

The philosophy of nAtha yoga is similar to Kashmir Saivism. Though a dualist school, it ends in non-duality. Brahman of the upanishads is referred to as Siva or para sAmbit, or para bhairava. Siva and Sakti are inseparable. Siva cannot do anything without Sakti. Sakti is the dynamic potency of Siva. The world is considered as real and as an extension of Siva himself via his potency, Sakti. Siva who is unchanging and formless and Sakti, the dynamic power interpenetrate each other. This ultimate state is called as sAmrasya. This is something different than sAnkhya and vedAnta which says that the reality or Brahman is untouched by prakriti (or Sakti or mAyA) and one has to transcend or sublimate prakriti (mAyA) to experience it. The path of nAtha yoga is not only to experience this non-dual state, but to permanently stay in it without ever coming down to the dual plane. The process involves strengthening of physical body and the subtle bodies, activating chakra-s and raising kunDAlini to sahasrAra. Intense yogic practises are taught to select few which result into transformation of our body into indestructible spiritual body. In the process, a nAtha yogi comes across many siddhi-s, masters them and proceeds further. nAtha yogi, may also experience and, in his subtle body, even enter into subtle higher worlds like Indra-s heaven or even visit nether world by his own wish and return back to earthly plane and return to his physical body. After achieving perfection, a nAtha yogi roams the whole world (bhArata) for the good of mankind spreading peace and Siva's grace on all, while continuously enjoying the divine play of Siva-Sakti. nAtha yogi also experiences and explores the relation between microcosm and macrocosm and the effect on each other. Every microcosmic event has its reflection in macrocosm and vice versa. A nAtha yogi is in constant communion with Siva, the supreme reality.

There are differences between the yogic schools of patanjali, kriyA yoga and tantrika buddhism. The difference lies in the method used to reach the highest truth.

After understanding nAtha yoga, let's understand who are aghori-s.

22.5. aghori-s

aghori-s are branch of nAtha yogi-s. They are worshippers of Siva. Due to contemplative nature of nAtha yoga, many yogi-s who had divine experiences, which depends upon one's own understanding, spiritual evolution of consciousness and temperament, began spreading the teachings based upon their experience. During course of time, many nAtha

yogi-s began teaching yoga in their own way and in process they ended up creating their own sects. gorakhnAtha in order to distinguish his lineage from other nAtha yogi-s made piercing ears compulsory as a distinguishing mark. nAtha yogi-s generally wear ear rings. Since their ears are pierced, they are called as '*kan-phaTA yogi-s*' (Kanphata Yogis). 'kAna' means ear and phADanA means to tear or pierce. phaTA means torn or pierced. Hence kan-phaTA yogi-s would translate as 'Yogis with pierced ears'.

Aghori-s do not pierce their ears. Every nAtha yogi is an aghori before piercing his ears. matsyendranAtha and gorakhanAtha pierced their ears and hence they were known as kanphaTA yogi-s while jAlandharanAtha remained aghori for the life time (as he did not pierce his ears and wore earrings).

Among sub-sects of aghori-s, aughada (औघड), sarvaMgi (सर्वगी) and dhurai (धुरै) (pronounced dhurei) are known. Most of the information that is written about aghori-s is that of aughada-s. aughada-s by nature are angry. Due to this reason, common people stay away from them as the common perception is that if they are displeased and get angry, they are capable of destroying their futures and bring bad fortunes in their life. Hence whenever they beg for alms, they are not allowed to leave empty handed. However, the reason of their anger is to keep away people for mainly two reasons - (1) to stay in solitude and (2) to keep secret meditative procedures secret so as to avoid the danger of them falling in wrong hands. They do not intend to harm people. Anger is constructively used, as it is like fire which can give life (cook food and give warmth) or give death (burn to ashes). It all depends upon how the fire of anger is used. They do not want to get carried away with respect and following of leymen which they begin to get as people experience their divine power to transform their life.

aghori-s are like kapAlika-s. They achieve siddhi-s and are believed to use them for the good of all. aghori-s live in cremation grounds, as they can get all their requirements from cremation grounds. They are not allowed to have any connection with their family or with society. They do not have their homes. They eat anything fresh or rotten, animal and human flesh, animal and human feces, and finally human brain, as they believe that, 'nothing exists which is not Siva'. Hence there is nothing like 'good' and 'bad', 'permissible' and 'forbidden'. aghori-s take this philosophy to the extreme. For them, veg or non-veg is just a matter. A dead animal body and a dead human body are one and the same. Whatever we eat, finally becomes blood. A person requires very strong mind to follow the path of aghori-s. They do not represent mainstream Hinduism and are not interested much in veda-s meaning they do not apply them in their daily life.

gora means 'fear' or 'terrifying'. *a-ghora* means that which is *not ghora* i.e. 'that which lacks fear' or 'that which is not terrifying'. aghori-s are taught to detach themselves to the processes they do, especially those which are forbidden by civilised society and considered as taboo. They break the barrier between 'shishTAcAra' (good behaviour) and 'durAcAra' (bad behaviour). By the grace of guru and Siva, they are themselves not affected by them, as they say that they can see through the illusion (of good and bad) and stay focused on the supreme truth 'Siva'. They are masters of energy and kuNDalini. A famous aghori kenArama was believed to have powers to control 5 principle elements like air, water, fire, etc. They use their powers for good of humanity. However these sects are the most feared ones by society and no one wishes to mess with them.

True aghori-s never does evil on others and are always immersed in meditation on Siva. True aghori-s are 'inner scientists'.

22.5.1. nAgA sAdhu-s are not aghori-s

nAgA sAdhu-s are well known in India as haTha yogi-s and martial monks. nAgA sAdhu-s are different than aghori-s. The difference is in their spiritual practice and philosophy they follow. nAgA sAdhu-s follow traditional advaita vedAnta and haTha yoga. They are ardent practitioners of haTha yoga. nAgA-s do not eat rotten flesh or human flesh. nAgA-s follow their own rules which were set up by great sankarAcArya-s like madhusudan sarasvatI. aghori-s roam anywhere and live in cremation ground, whereas nAgA-s live collectively in their akhADA-s. Few roam in the outside world. While living outside their akhADA-s, they are forbidden to roam completely naked. They have to wear 3.5 meter cloth as SishTAcAra (good moral conduct as expected by the society) is necessary when they are roaming in society.

Birth of nAgA-s was to provide military assistance to kings. They are Hindu martial monks trained in combat skills, Guerrilla warfare, fighting in open, conducting surprise raids on enemies and fighting in extreme conditions like desert or in cold weather like himAlaya-s. aghori-s are not martial monks, though nAtha yogi-s also practice martial arts, the very purpose of creation of nAgA sAdhu-s was to defend the attacks on sanAtana dharma in 14-15th century. There may be martial monks prior to madhusudan sarasvatI, but may be they

were scattered. It was madhusudan sarasvatI who is credited to bring them under one roof and give a definite structure to their way of life.

Life of nAgA sAdhu-s is discussed later.

22.6. tAntrika-s (Sakta-s)

While aghori-s and some nAtha-s are worshippers of Siva, tAntrika-s are the worshippers of SAkti. They consider Adi Sakti as Brahman and all Gods and avatAra-s comes under her sway.

The most popular and also the most difficult tAntrika sAdhanA is 'Sri vidyA upAsanA'. It is said that only a handful of people (around 12-14) in entire world, all living in India, have full knowledge of Sri vidyA and Sri yantra. SvAmI brahmAnanda of jyotir maTha (also known as joShI maTha) was considered as an authority on Sri vidyA upAsanA.

A yantra is used as it is difficult for new practitioners to directly meditate on chakra-s, kunDalini, and perform intense tAntrika practice.

An accomplished Sri-vidyA upAsaka in his forward to a book, which is an english translation of saundarya-lahiri by Swami Tapasyananda of Sri Ramakrishna Mission has written much about the shAkta cult. Please find an extract from the same.

bhAskarAya mAkin, has written commentary 'setu bandha' on nitya-SoDaSikArNava of vAmkesvara tantra, lalitA-sahasranAma bhAshya, a commentary on lalitA-sahasranAma and varivasyA rahasya. These three texts are called as prasthAntrayI (three most important starting points) of shakti worship.

The worship of SrI-chakra is set forth by SrI Adi SankarAchArya in his prapanchasAra tantra and saundarya lahiri and this form of worship as described in these texts occupies high places in the traditions of the matha-s organized by

him through his disciples. In Tamil, we have expositions of shakti mantra-s and upAsanA-s in great works like thirumandiram of a siddha thirumUIAra nAyanAra. shakti worship is spread throughout India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. In Kashmir she is called as ambA. An entire city, Srinagar (SrI-nagar) is named after devi. as viSAlAkshI in Varanasi, as gaurI in kanya kubja, as bhavAnI in Maharashtra, and as kAlI (Kali) in Bengal. In Madhurai, she is worshipped as mInAkshI, mantrinI or SyAmIA, at Jambukeshvaram as akhilANDeSvarI or dandinI and at Kanchipuram as kAmAkshI or mahA-tripurAsundarI. She is worshipped in Sringeri as SARadA or SARadAmbA or simply ambA (generally in form of sarasvatI, but more as a fusion of all three). In Kanyakumari, which is extreme south of bhArat varsha, she is worshiped as bAlA. One of the main Hindu festival, navarAtrI, festival of nine nights is dedicated to the worship of all three devI-s, kAlI, laxmI and sarasvatI.

Some are of the opinion that shakti worship is relatively new. However this is not true. Traces of shakti worship is found in veda-s. There are stotra-s dedicated to female form of God like bhu-suktam, devi-suktam and durgA-suktam. lalItA-sahasranAma is found in brahmANDa purANa, devi-mahAtmyam is found in mArkeNDeya purANa. An entire purANa srimad devi-bhAgavat mahApurANa is dedicated to the glories of the divine mother, who is not only the feminine power of mAyA, the creative power of God, but she is verily the formless nirguNa brahman, the substratum of entire universe. All avatAr-s including rAma and krShNa are under the sway of tipurAsundarI, the divine mother.

shaiva-s worship devi, Adi shakti, as the creative power of God, as kunDalini shakti or kunDalini devi and arouse her from mulAdhAra chakra until she meets and is in communion with Siva, in the sahasrAra chakra. It is Siva who is supreme brahman according to them. Both Siva and Sakti are inseparable. Siva has divided himself into two parts for the purpose of creation and works through shakti. In reality, they both are one.

The process of worship of a shAkta consists of bhuta siddhi nA Tha sampradAya-s try to achieve piNDa siddhi). several kinds of nyAsa, prANa-praTisThA, japa, mAnasa-pujA, AvaraNa-pujA, archana, dhUpa, pIpArAdhana, naidedya, nIrAjana, stotra, kAmakalA-dhyAna, homa, balidAna, suvasini-pujA, samayika-pujA and tatva-Sodhana. The worship is done in the imafe of the devI as well as in the SrI-chakra otherwise known as SrI-yantra.

SrI-vidyA upAsaka should follow certain disciplines. He should not find fault with other paths or criticize them, while being steadfast in his own. The practice of japa should go on as an under-current at all times. He should not ask for favours or accept them. He should do his duties in the world and the worship of the deity without attachment to fruit. He should be fearless. He should not acquire wealth and possessions with the motive of selfish enjoyment and she should consider nothing as higher than realization of the Self.

22.7. Saivism - vedic and yogic (tAntrika, Agamic)

Saiva-s are the devotees who worship Siva as the Supreme Brahman.. There were many prominent Saiva (shaiva) saints from bhakta-s (nAyanAra-s, Nayanars) to vedic (SrikAntAcArya) to Agamic / tAntrika Acharya-s (Abhinavagupta of Kashmir Shaivism). AcArya-s of Saiva order are called as either 'SaivAcArya' or 'SivAcArya'. Those having mastery over Saiva Agama-s and engaged in either teaching Saiva Agama-s or practising procedures of temple worship, according to Saiva Agama-s are called as AgamAcArya or Siva yogI. Siva yogi-s are the temple priests of Siva temple.

Though Saivism has its support in veda-s, most of the Saiva-s adhere to 28 Agama shAstra-s. There are independent works like thirumandiram and kural which are highly revered by Saiva-s of South India, especially Tamil Speaking people. siddhAnta Saiva-s (Saiva siddhAnta is a kind of Saiva philosophy) have been extensively dependent upon thirumandiram written by a great siddha, thirumulAra (Thirumoolar, Thirumular). The legend says he wrote one

verse every year when he descended from samAdhi only for one day during the whole year. Thirumandiram contains more than 3000 sUltra-s of yogic-devotional genre. While patanjali's yoga sUltra-s asks yogi to believe in ISvara, but does not specify the form of ISvara, Thirumandiram contains verses devoted to glorifying Siva.

Kashmir Shaivism of Sri Abhinavgupta (AG) is also called as kaula or trika or spandan kArikA is another Saiva philosophy. AG has written a masterly treatise on tantra by the name tantraloka, a mystical, cryptic text containing more than 55000 verses suited for practice by advanced tAntrika-s. AG has also written a commentary on it. This unique Acharya has given 3 different interpretations of same verse which are experienced by tAntrika-s and yogi-s who has raised their consciousness to that particular level. Only a practising tAnrika can actually understand tantraloka or rather experience the teachings of tantraloka.

It was AB who had given the now popular symbolic interpretation of the battle of kurukshetra, mahAbhArata, in his gltA commentary 'gltArtha samgrah' on chapter 1 verse 1. Acharya has defined kurukshetra as 'mind', pANDava-s (Pandavs) as positive divine qualities and kaurava-s as negative qualities. It is the war inside every one of us.

Agama-s are called as tantra-s. There are Agama-s for Saiva-s, Sakta-s, Saura-s, gaNapatya-s and vaiShNava-s. Though vaiShNava-s have adopted pure bhakti to reach the supreme Godhead, there are vaiShNava Agama-s which talk about yogic processes. The most famous popularised by Sri rAmAnuja and Sri mAdhva is pancharAtra Agama. Another Aam considered close to veda-s is vaikhAnAsa Agama. Like veda-s Agama-s too have a karma kANDa (rituals) and philosophical part.

Conventionally, Saiva-s though they adhere to Agama-s (tantra-s) are simply called as Saiva-s. Sakta-s are called tAntrika and nAtha yogi-s are called as 'nATHa-s'.

It must be mentioned that there are vaiShNava-s who also practice tantra. Not much is known about them. They prefer to practice in secret.

22.8. kriyA yoga

kriyA yoga is an ancient yoga, revived by a deathless saint Mahavatar Babaji, an immortal yogi, who initiated some great yogi-s like Lahiri Mahashay, considered as 'fountainhead of Kriya Yoga'. There are great yogi-s like Yuktेशwar Giri, Paramhansa Yogananda, Sanyal Mahashay, Paramhansa Hariharananda and his disciple Paramhansa Prajnanananda (paramahansa praGYAnanda, परमहंस प्रज्ञानन्द).

Mahavatar Babaji - An immortal Saint

It will not be off topic to describe about a shining example of kriyA yoga, the survivor and revivalist of kriyA yoga Mahavatar Babaji. The word 'Babaji' means respect in Indian language. 'Mahavatar' means the great avatar. Marshall Govindan in his book, *'Babaji and the 18 Siddha Kriya Yoga Tradition'* writes that Mahavatar Babaji controls and directs the activities of avatars or siddha-s.

Mahavatar Babaji is said to have transformed his physical body into light body and achieve immortality. He is believed to be more than 1800 years old as on 2010. Mahavatar Babaji or Nagaraj (his childhood name) practised intense meditations and did a penance for many months so as to have the great rishi agastya as his guru. Finally agastya rishi appeared in front of him and taught him advanced kriyA-s and yogic practices which he was told to practice in himalayas as the energy generated due to these processes would be too much to handle by the people living in vicinity. At the age of 16, Mahavatar Babaji says that Siva made his physical body immortal i.e. Siva freezed the life of his physical body. Babaji says, 'Siva never made me 17'. His physical body stopped aging any further making Babaji to remain eternally young. He then continued his spiritual practice to successfully transform his physical body into light body. Babaji wished to leave his spiritual body, but upon intervention of his sister, who herself is a great kriyA yogi and a siddhA of the stature of Babaji, he decided to stay till earth exists and help guide souls ready to progress on spiritual path.

Mahavatar Babaji was first introduced to this world by Paramhansa Yogananda, an exponent to Kriya Yoga and founder of Divine Life Society through his autobiography, 'Autobiography of a Yogi'. After that many have claimed to have seen or met this great siddha yogi.

Let's understand the meaning of the word 'kriyA yoga' as said by masters themselves.

22.8.1. 'kri' and 'yA'

Generally kriyA is understood as 'action', but kriyA yogi-s explain the word kriyA (kri+yA) as kri = action and yA = (indwelling) soul. yoga means 'to unite'.

We, incarnated soul / jIva / jIvAtmA are separated from the Supreme Self (Cosmic Self / God / Brahman / paramAtmA) and trapped in the cycle of birth and death. Our journey is to return back to the original source of our creation i.e. jIvAtmA returns to paramAtmA.

Hence kriyA yoga could mean the journey of incarnated soul back to it's source and merge in it.

Initially, mind is not prepared to meditate on the Supreme Self. Hence it must be purified. Breath, mind and body are interconnected. Breathing and physical heart are also connected. Calmer the breath, slower and rhythmic is the pulse, faster and shorter the breath, faster is the pulse. Both heartbeat (and so pulse) and breath are with us from birth till death. But getting hold of heartbeat and controlling it is not very easy. Breathing is easy to feel and control. Hence in yoga, breathing exercises, called as prANAYam, and later on energy based kriyA-s are taught. They help yogī to calm mind and purify mind, gross and subtle bodies. Mind cannot stay without work. Hence kriyA-s help one to achieve concentration and purity. They keep mind engaged. They directly do not lead a yogi to ultimate state. Until one gets sufficient purity to hear inner sound, or the cosmic divine sound OM and find it's source or one can be aware of the entire yogic process like being aware of kuNDalini, chakra-s and subtle bodies and observing the whole working of this cluster of mind-body as a witness, one has to do kriyA-s. Later through the grace of God and Guru and through the power of discrimination, dispassion and ability to be a witness of everything that is going around, one can merge into paramAtmA. kriyA-s help cleanse and integrate bodies, synchronize them, remove blockages in subtle energy channels (nāḍī-s) and chakra-s. By being witness and awareness fixed to the source of breath, thoughts or the mantra OM, one can unite with paramAtmA. This is the common approach of yoga schools.

Here is the definition of the word kriya yoga given on [one website](#)

Kri and Ya

The word Yoga comes from the root yuj. It has 32 meanings in Sanskrit, but the most appropriate here is to unite. The union of the individual Self with the Cosmic Self, the child of God with God, the Father. Therefore, the union Soul with God is Yoga.

Kriya Yoga is a supreme science of Self-realisation. It is a scientific technique of action with constant God-consciousness, which ultimately leads to realisation - going beyond the body, mind, intellect, thought, and even the world, to Soul-consciousness.

To perceive the Soul in every breath, in every moment, in every action, in everything and every being is Kriya Yoga. By the practice of Kriya Yoga meditation, one aspires to lead a life of divine consciousness, which ultimately brings love, purity and joy.

“You are to reach God in two steps, kri and ya.

Remain concentrated at the top and observe your own work from morning till you go to bed”

- Paramahansa Hariharananda

“Meditation is the silent art of withdrawing yourself into the source of life. It is as if your body is completely burnt to ashes. Meditation is going beyond mind, thoughts, ego and body sense; it is going to the supreme state, the formless state.”

- Paramahansa Hariharananda

22.9. Difference between nAtha yoga and kriyA yoga

The difference between nAtha yoga and kriyA yoga is that kriyA yoga is not a mantra sAdhanA. As per our knowledge, there are no various mantra-s taught to achieve various siddhi-s. siddhi-s come unexpected. In nAtha yoga, there are mantra-s are specifically aimed at achieving siddhi-s like ability to protect oneself from negative or malice effect of others thoughts or from Planetary Gods, ability to destroy enemies, protect against ghosts and ways to control them, mantra-s to help people prosper, mantra-s to spread peace and harmony to all, power to mesmerize, etc. These type of siddhi-s often obstruct spiritual path. Hence there is greater risk of falling. Learning these mantra-s may not be compulsory

and only highly purified nAtha yogi-s use them for good of mankind, still the risk of being diverted from spiritual path remains.

While nAtha yogi-s surrender to Siva, kriyA yoga does not adhere to any particular form of God. The choice is left to the individual.

kriyA yogi-s as per our knowledge do not practice Srl yantra upAsanA, nor do they roam naked or smear ash on their body. kriyA yoga is not known to have any off shoots that practice vAmmArga, the left hand paths.

Mahavatar Babaji knew that there are many souls in the west who are ready for spiritual upliftment but do not have guidance. Hence one of his mission was to send kriyA yogi-s to the west. A notable work in this respect is a book written by Sri Yukteshwar Giri, 'The Holy Science' In which the great Yogi has written similarities between bhagavad gltA and Bible. There attempts made to bridge the gap between the two philosophies and bring in the harmony of east and west through the principles of yoga.

In yoga and tantra, there are secret ways to enter into other worlds, different types of heavens and hells and other higher spiritual worlds like meher loka, tapa loka, siddha loka, rishi loka, etc in their subtle bodies.

Great yogi-s achieve great siddhi-s and they can choose to use them for the benefit of mankind or not to use them at all. In order to stay oneself focused on spiritual path, we have vedAnta and gltA (bhagavad gltA) which warns us against dangers of acquiring siddhi-s. vedAnta re-establishes a yogi-s focus on paramAtmA as the only goal of life. patanjali also warns against getting obsessed with such siddhi-s and asks us to move forward in our spiritual progress in his yoga sUtra-s. However, it is vedAnta that gives us the clear description of Brahman and shows us the straight path towards the supreme in a pure way.

Note: rAja yoga is often understood to be another name of patanjali's yoga. patanjali's yoga is simply termed as yoga. rAja yoga, as mentioned by svAml vivekAnanda is different than traditional patanjali yoga. rAja yoga is laya yoga as mentioned in haTha yoga pradIpikA.

According to traditional scriptures, we have five subtle bodies. Let's have a brief overview of them.

23. Five bodies in sanAtana dharma

According to SD, we not only have physical body, but we have five bodies. In yogic life, they too are nourished along with physical body. Other 4 subtle bodies are of great importance. Bodies are called as kosha-s.

23.1. Subtle bodies

Five bodies (kosha-s are) annamaya kosha, prANamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, viGYAnamaya kosha and Anandamaya kosha.

- a. **annamaya kosha** - Physical gross body
- b. **prANamaya kosha** - Energy body or aura or bioplasmic body. This body is the bridge between annamaya kosha and manomaya kosha.
- c. **manomaya kosha** - mental body. Some modern energy based techniques have split manomaya kosha into astral body and mental body. Astral body is emotional body, handling emotions and mental body handles thoughts.
- d. **viGYAnamaya** kosha - Causal body. viGYAnamaya kosha has all the impressions of past lives. It is said that ego is situated in this body. While other bodies have their own life, this body does not die until the ignorance of duality and sense of individuality is destroyed. In other words until one attains moksha, this body is not destroyed.
- e. **Anandamaya kosha** - buddhi body or body of Bliss. Anandamaya kosha is the body of intuition. A person living in this body i.e conscious of this body lives in intuitions. There is no need to think before doing anything. Mind is so pure that it can tap into cosmic mind or universal consciousness.

Similarly, the five kosha-s are classified into three bodies.

- a. **sthula sharira** - physical gross body

- b. **sukshma sharira** - subtle body (energy body and manomaya kosha)
- c. **kAraNa sharira** - causal body (viGYAnamaya kosha and Anandamaya kosha)

'kAraNa' means 'cause'. This body is identified with *antakaraNa* and it's four sub-divisions, *mana* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahaMkAra* (ego, sense of individuality) and *chitta* (memory or recitation power). This body does not die until *moksha*.

Each body has it's own chakra-s. Not much is being said about chakra-s in higher bodies like manomaya kosha, etc. However Our shAstra-s say that we have seven major chakra-s. In gltA BG 5.13 it is said 'navadvAra' 'नवद्वार' meaning nine doors. bhAgavat purANa (canto 4, chapters 25-29) also describes city of nine gates. There is also description of nine doors in *Guru Granth Sahib*. There is also the mention of tenth door. A great yogi, a mahAsiddha, guru gorakshanAtha has described that there are nine chakra-s. If we take these doors in physical body then they are - 2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 nostrils, 1 mouth, 1 anus, 1 genital. However, if we take literally take it beyond physical body, then we can count on nine chakra-s.

23.2. chakra-s

Seven chakra-s are

1. mUlAdhAra chakra - root chakra or base chakra or basic chakra
2. svAdhiSthAna chakra - sacral chakra
3. manipura chakra - navel chakra
4. anAhata chakra - heart chakra
5. vishuddhi chakra - throat chakra
6. AGYA chakra - 3rd eye, chakra of will power (sometimes spelled as ajna chakra)
7. sahasrAra chakra - crown chakra

guru gorakshanAtha in *siddha siddhAnta paddhati* mentions two more chakra-s:

8. tAlu chakra - Palette chakra (from where nectar flows)
9. AkAsha chakra - Inverted crown chakra (one chakra faces upwards and another (sahasrAra downwards)

T. Krishnamacharya in his Yoga Makaranda has given the names and location of 10 chakra-s. This makes the total of chakra-s to be 12. The additional chakra-s are

10. sUrya chakra - about 5 angula-s below anAhat chakra

11. laLATa chakra - above AGYA chakra on forehead

12. manas chakra - exact location is not given, but this chakra is not on surface of prANamayakosha it is inside it.

prANamaya kosha of laymen starts from the center of body (from within) and protrudes outwards 8-9 angula-s (5-6 inches approx). All chakra-s has stem starting from suShumNA nADI and the flower petals extend on the surface of prANamaya kosha i.e. 5-6 inches. manas chakra is inside prANamaya kosha and hence it's stem and petals do not stretch upto 5-6 inches but extend only upto 3-4 inches (approx)

For detailed explanation about chakra-s by Paramhansa Prajnanananda, please visit [here](#). For explanation of 10 chakra-s by T Krishnamacharya, please visit [here](#).

Personal notes: (these are not extracts from shastra-s).

As one progresses spiritually in any path, be it bhakti, GYAna or yoga, prANamaya kosha gradually keeps expanding from 5-6 inches to 1 meter or even more. Same is the case with other subtle kosha-s. In rare cases, siddha yogi-s have developed this kosha so much that it may even expand to cover a few hundred kilometers. They are capable of bestowing spiritual energies to thousands of people thereby elevating their consciousness. This is one of the reason why when we enter any divine place, where a saint has meditated for many years, we immediately feel the divinity of place. One can easily enter into meditation almost effortlessly. Worldly thoughts do not disturb our meditation. This is the reason why it is said that one must visit saints as much as possible and be physically present in their vicinity. They may cover entire hall and though you may not grasp all of their discourse, their prANamaya kosha and other kosha-s influences all those present in the vicinity thereby embedding spiritual qualities in us and awakening the divinity within us.

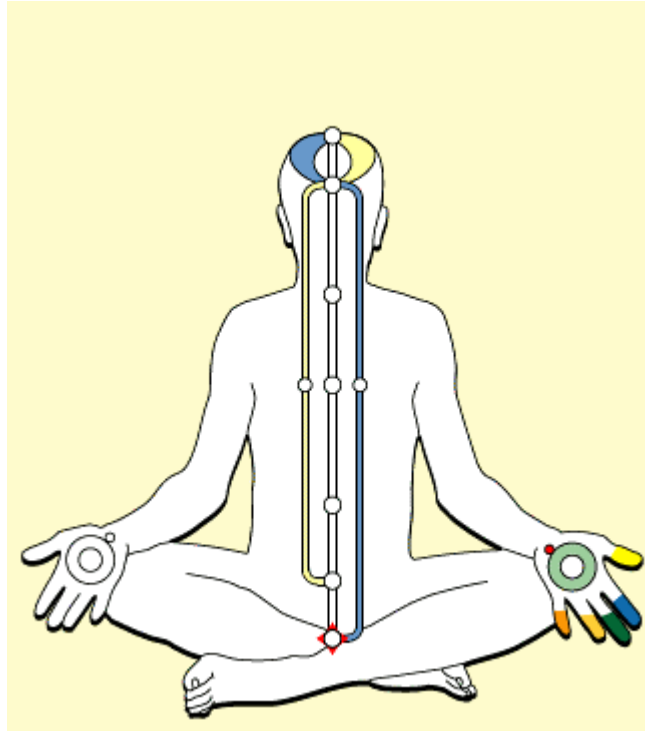
However the size of petals of chakra-s do not expand in proportion to the increase in prANamaya kosha. Though they still expand on the surface of prANamaya kosha, the diameter of petals does not expand that much. A yogi who has a chakra with diameter of 1 meter is considered has a great yogi and achieving this size is not possible for all.

Some texts mentions number of chakra-s to be 10, 12 or even 13. Traditionally only seven are given importance and are considered as 'major chakra-s'. These seven chakra-s are also connected with other worlds like heaven of meher loka or tapa loka, etc. These chakra-s are considered as doors to these worlds where a yogi can travel into these worlds in their subtle bodies. Others are considered as minor chakra-s. Each body part like eyes, ears, glands like thymus gland, pancreas, etc have their own energy counterpart and a minor chakra. There are chakra-s in palm, sole (foot) and in fingers, but their size is smaller than major one. Since this science is very complicated and one needs to practice any kind of energy based meditative technique in presence of a master yogi, many things are kept private.

23.3. kuNDAlini, nADI-s, prANa-s and brahmaDanDa

kuNDalini shakti, nADI-s and brahmaDANDa are of great importance to yogi-s. yoga is very practical and meditative approach or control and master the mind and other subtle bodies so as to rise above them and unite with Siva (brahman). Lets discuss them in brief.

For better understanding, a picture will be helpful.



[Source and Credits](#)

23.3.1. kuNDalini shakti

yogi-s texts and yoga upanishads talks of kuNDalini shakti. It is located near the base of spine. Some say it is in the form of inverted triangle. yogi-s, specially those following tantra-s (energy based techniques) activate kuNDalini shakti and rise her until she touches sahasraAra chakra (crown chakra). Of course, prior to activating and raising kunDalini prANamaya kosha and chakra-s are needed to be cleansed. Hence this process must be practised under the guidance of a master yogi.

kuNDalini shakti is highly revered. She is not just a shakti, but a devi. Yogi-s reverse her as mother, Adi shakti. She is associated with uMA, or pArvatI devI, the spiritual consort of bhagavAn Siva. Siva is situated at the crown. Hence a yogis process is to merge or unite shakti with Siva. Merging of Siva and shakti results in enlightenment.

23.3.2. nADI-s and vAyu-s

According to *uttara gItA* and *Siva gItA*, we have 72000 nADI-s. *jIvAtmA* or soul which resides in heart (chakra) spreads the consciousness through 72000 nADI-s. Some texts like *Siva samhItA* mentions that we have 251000 nADI-s. Since *prANamaya kosha* (energy body) is connected with *annamaya kosha* (energy body), *jIva* becomes aware of physical body through them.

Out of 72000, 14 are important. Out of 14, 3 are important. Among 3, *suShumNA* is the most important. 3 nADI-s are *iDA*, *pingalA* and *suShumNA* nADI. *iDA* and *pingalA* are located in the center of energy body in the spine and start from *kuNDAlini shakti*, they touch *sahasrahAra chakra* and end in two nostrils. They end in center of each side of nose. *suShumNA* goes straight to *sahasrahAra chakra*. *iDA* and *pingalA* either spiral *suShumNA* or go parallel with *suShumNA* or are in the form of a bow i.e. curved bulging in center and converging at the two ends. Three different shapes of *iDA* and *pingalA* are found in yoga *upanishad-s*. They are related to the mental make-up of a person. It does not matter which form you see, seeing, feeling and experiencing them indicates a certain level of spiritual development. Such visions are taken as signs of spiritual progress.

iDA is related to moon, it cold in nature i.e. energy passing through *iDA* feels cool, while *pingalA* is related to sun and is warm in nature i.e. energy passing has warm feeling. These nADI-s are also connected with left and right side of brain and eyes.

As we are aware, only one nostril and hence only one nADI is open at a time. In order to activate *kuNDAlini*, one must activate both *iDA* and *pingalA* so that *kuNDAlini* may pass through both of them. Hence before starting meditation or any yogic *kriyA* (process), yogi-s make sure that they are breathing both nostrils. They do so by doing *prANAyama* and repeating some breathing patterns along with postures. When *kuNDAlini* flows through *suShumNA*, the life force, which flows through all the 72000 nADI-s is pulled back and flows through *suShumNA*. The result is that a yogi does not feel his physical body. As the *prANa* is gradually pulled out of these nADI-s, a yogi feels the his / her body parts are getting paralyzed or become dysfunct and lifeless. You have no power to move them. Later even their existence cease to exist. As *kuNDalini* rises through each chakra through *suShumNA* and touches *sahasrAra*, mind is completely absorbed in this blissful state of enlightenment. *kuNDalini* has seven layers and it is said that each layer has 7 sub-layers (sources needed to confirm).

As per haTha yoga pradipikA, H.Y.P. 3.4, suShumNA is also called as other names such as Sunya Padavî, Brahma Randhra, Mahâ Patha, Śmaśâna, Śambhavî, Madhya Mârگا, are names of one and the same thing.

As a result of kuNDalini touching sahasrARA, consciousness rises high and merges into cosmic consciousness and yogi is completely unaware of his / her body. Since AtmA (Atman) is the source of all and it empowers the body to function, when AtmA, the consciousness, leaves the body, breathing and so heartbeat stops. This breathless, pulseless state is the ultimate state of enlightenment.

During this process of ascension of kuNDalini and consciousness, a yogi undergoes divine experiences that indicate his spiritual development. These divine experiences are better kept within the circles of advanced yogi-s.

Please find names of different nADi-s, their location and their functions in tabular form. All credits to the translator of the book. Shri A. C. Mohan, a disciple of a great Yogi, T. Krishnamacharya. It was T. Krishnamacharya who has revived and popularized the ancient book of Yoga 'Yoga Yajnavalkya'. Yoga Yajnavalkya (YY) is unique in it's own way, as it does not stress on various bandha-s or mUdra-s though it mentions some mUdra-s. It stresses on prANayama and says that prANayama is capable of purifying one's body. YY also mentions different types of meditations, meditations on personal deity, on nirguNa brahman, and the vedAntic approach of 'neti, neti'. This book is more clear than other books.

Fourteen nADi-s, their name

Note. Some details are not clear. Need to refer to other sources like yoga upanishads for better location.

Sr. No.	Vayu	Location	Region of the nADi
1	suShumNA	In the middle of the kandasthAna	Extends up to the top of the head.

2	iDA	On the left of the suShumNA	Extends up to the tip of left rose on the left side
3	pingalA	On the right side of the suShumNA	Extends up to the tip of right rose on the right side
4	sarasvatI	On the side of suShumNA	Extends upwards to the tongue
5	kuhu	On the side of suShumNA	From the front region of suShumNA up to the end of the generative organ
6	gAndhArI	Back of iDA	Extends up to left eye
7	hastijivA	Side of iDA	Extends up to the tip of the big toe of the left foot
8	vishvodara	Between kuhu and hastijivA	In the middle of the belly
9	vAruNI	Between yashasvinI and kuhu	Spreads everywhere and is above and below kunDalini
10	yashasvinI	-----	Extends on the right side up to the tip of the toe
11	payasnini	Between pUShA and sarasvatI	Extends up to the right ear
12	pUShA	At the back of the pingalA	Extends on the right side up to the eye
13	shankhini	Between gAndhArI and sarasvatI	Extends upwards up

			to the left ear
14	alambuShA	Below the center of the kandasthAna	Extends downwards to the bottom of the auns region

vAyu-s

Like nADI-s, each body has different types of vAyu-s responsible for carrying out different functions. Yoga Yajnavalkya (YY) mentions 10 different types of vAyu-s. YY 4.47-49 says Ten vayus viz prANa, apAna, samAna, udAna, vyAna, nAga, kurma, krkara, devadatta and dhananjaya. Among these, the five vAyu-s, beginning with prANa are considered important. Among those [five vAyu-s], these two - prANa and apAna are most important, [Gargi], best among women! And of these two, prANa is the most important in all living beings, always (YY 4.47-49).

Yoga Yajnavalkya chapter 4 describes different types of vAyu-s along with their locations and functions. Locations of five vAyu-s are not found clearly. Function of vyAna is said to be 'taking in and taking out'. It is not clear what exactly does it mean. In general, all vAyu-s continuously undertake excretion of waste products, urine, etc in the entire body, through the roots of hairs and the nine openings. Hence vAyna vAyu would be generally connected with any type of 'in' our 'out' activity.

Please find names of different vAyu-s, their location and their functions in tabular form.

Sr. No.	Vayu	Location	Functions
1	prANa	Between nose and jaws, center of the heart, center of navel, big toe, surrounding kunDalini	Inhalation, exhalation, coughing,

			sneezing, etc, Separates food, rasa, etc
2	apAna	Anus, generative organ, thighs, knees, stomach, testicles, knee cap, hip, navel	Excretion
3	vyAna	Center (Between) of ears and eyes, sides of the neck, ankles, nose, throat, posterior region	Taking in and giving out
4	udAna	All joints, in legs and hands.	Taking in and giving out.
5	samAna	Distributed throughout whole body	Nutrition and growth of the body
6	nAga		Belching, vomiting, etc
7	kUrma		Opening and closing of the eyes
8	krkara		Sneezing.
9	devadatta		Drowsiness, sleepiness.
10	dhananjaya		Swelling, etc.

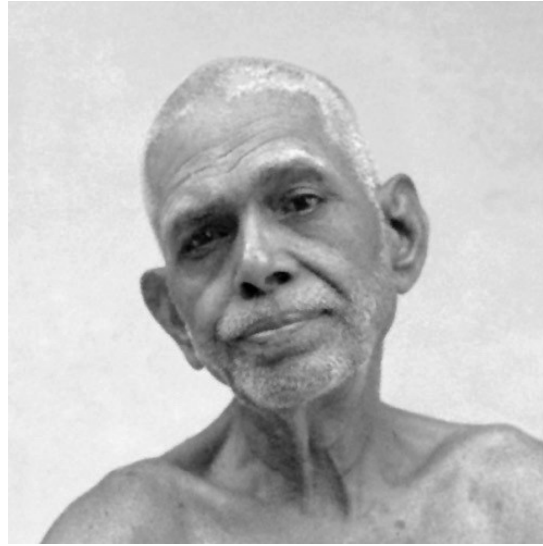
Note: Secondary vAyu-s are present in skin, bones, etc says verse YY 4.58. This verse is a one line verse and does not give location details of each secondary vAyu

23.3.3. brahmaDaNDa / meruDaNDa

When kuNDAlini is fully activated and reaches sahasrahAra, most yogi-s see the whole spine as a tube of bright light. This passage is called as brahmaDaNDa or meruDaNDa. Though physical spine is not straight, it is curved, yogi-s see only energy counterpart of spine. Generally energy counterpart found in energy body (prANamaya kosha) has similar shape as that of physical organ. However in case of passage of kuNDalini, which is said to rise through spine, I have not heard of any yogi having the vision of spine as having curved shape. It looks like a tube light filled with brilliant white light. As said earlier, these visions are taken as signs of spiritual progress. Hence difference in shape, form, colour, shade, type of energy are not taken too seriously.

23.4. Gauging spiritual progress

As a yogi or any spiritual aspirant progresses in spirituality, his / her prANamaya kosha it's chakra-s and other subtle bodies also expand in size. The spiritual progress of a person is gauged by the activation of chakra-s, their size and the type of energy one has. As sattva guNa increases, the energies become very subtle and soft. Advanced meditator has a constant feeling of bliss and peace. Since bodies develop, subsequent change in nature is seen in yogi which a yogi himself may not be aware of as the change is so natural and smooth than one hardly recognizes when and how one has changed. One can only notice the 'change' but not the way in which he has changed. sAttvika (divine, spiritual) qualities like calmness, peace, feeling of bliss (happiness), humility are reflected on a yogi-s face, his actions, his deeds and form his body language. Similarly, not being aware of body conscious is also reflected in eyes as seen in case of Sri Ramana Maharshi.



24. Why are there different mantra-s for different people?

One gets fruits (of actions) in proportion to the strength of bhakti (devotion) and samarpaNa (surrender). What matters is the intention behind chanting God's name.

Each mantra is a vibration (as sound has vibrations). Our subtle bodies, chakras and our mind, chitta, etc also has vibrations. We have a definite personality.

When one's basic nature tunes with the character of any form of Lord, one finds it easy to surrender to him and chant his name. The mantra is so formulated that it's vibrations will also tune into the vibrations of subtle bodies and chakras and cleanse them.

Just like we have a liking for some food and dislike of other food does not mean that what you like is the best food and rest is not. We can say that certain type of food is suitable to us. In the same way certain vibrations attract you. Have you noticed that when you are standing near a stranger, at times you feel that you are not comfortable in his/ her presence. Sometimes, we become friends in the very first meeting. It's all due to vibrations.

If the vibrations are not of similar frequency, then you might not feel comfortable with him / her. Your thoughts might not align with him / her.

In the same way, a certain mantra is more effective on one person and lesser effect on another.

OM mamo bhagavate vAsudevAya is considered as bija (beej) mantra (corrections welcome) and so it is powerful than a purANika mantra like *Shri kRuShNa sharaNam mama*. But some get more joy in chanting krishna's mantra than vasudeva's. It is because the vibrations of these mantra tune with our vibrations of our subtle bodies and chakra-s

In the same way, some experience great joy in chanting '*Shri rAma, jaya rAma jaya jaya rAma*' while '*OM Shri rAma chandrAya namaH*' is considered as more potent as it corrects one with heart. It is bija mantra.

OM increases potency of any mantra and hence most mantra-s have OM in the beginning. Some also prefer to close or end any mantra by chanting OM, but kRShNa's mantra (*Shri kRuShNa sharaNam mama*) does not have OM in it (atleast not the present version, which is chanted by most).

So it all depends what suits you.

But bija mantras are technically more potent than other mantras or puranic mantras.

25. How Hinduism covers people of all types of temperament?

sanAtana dharma says that there is only one reality of non-dual nature. This supreme reality is called as *brahman*. However, unlike Abrahamic religions, SD offers many paths that lead to one reality. One can be one with *brahman* via the path of yoga, bhakti or GYAna. There are many ways to purify our mind. It can be by vedic chanting, singing bhajans, glories of God, stuti-s, stavan-s, haTha yoga, serving saints and guru to name a few. To add to this, one God,

brahman, can take any form for the benefit of devotee. Each form of God be it rAma, kRuShNa or Siva have a definite character, perform miracles, and there are many devotional songs and mantra-s dedicated to them. It is left to the liking of an individual to select a form of God of his / her choice. As explained earlier, the character and vibrations of mantra should tune in with the vibrations of energy bodies.

Path of bhakti is better suited to person of emotional temperament, while a path of GYana to a person having a bend towards logical reasoning who have attained sufficient inner purity. The path of yoga is for those who like to have control over each situation. yoga is mastery over mind and senses. The path of karma is for inner cleansing.

The three paths in brief are

1. bhakti (emotional temperament)
2. GYana (logical reasoning)
3. yoga (trying to control situations and every aspect of life)

Path of karma is for chitta shuddi.

After understanding Hinduism in Brief, lets understand why Hinduism is the most systematically organized religion.

26. How is Hinduism the most systematically organized Religion?

As said earlier, Hinduism covers all walks of life.

There are different types of collections of Hindu Scriptures that are written in a different way or different purposes. Accordingly they are called as a SAstra, sUtra, siddhAnta or samhitA.

SAstra is that covers all aspect of life, it is the word of God.

sUtra or aphorism is that which means to explain anything in the most precise and shortest way.

siddhAnta is generally a rule or a principle or an established theory.

samhitA is any methodically arranged collection of established texts or verses

We will try to briefly understand in what way Hinduism covers all aspects of life.

- veda-s – Topmost Authority covering mantras and where to chant a particular mantra or personal and universal well being.
- vedAnta (upanishads) – Philosophical Part of veda-s unfolding the highest truth.
- bhagavad gItA and other gItA-s independent and from purANas- and itihAsa
- brahma sUtra – Topmost canonical text clearing contradictions, refuting multiple views and establishing truth (This text is to be studied last after studying Gita and Upanishads)
- itihAsa (history) – rAmAyaNa and mahAbhArata
- purANa-s – Speaking of God in a friendly way through stories
- yoga – control of mind, body and breath. Texts like patangali yoga sUtra, thirumandiram, etc – for meditative purposes
- dharma smriti-s – civil codes
- nATya SAstra – Doctrine of Drama and Acting
- nritya SAstra like bhArata NATyam, and other dance forms
- niti SAstra-s – vidur niti, chANakya niti
- haTha yoga – haTha pradipikA, gerANDa samhita
- yaska's nirukta – splitting of sanskrit words and giving multiple meaning
- amarkoSa – sanskrit dictionary
- pANini's aShTAdhyAyi – sanskrit grammar
- patanjali mahAbhASya – commentary on pAnini's aShTAdhyAyi further explaining sanskrit grammar
- grihya sUtra-s – describing day-2-day activities of house holders
- vAstu SAstra – Art of house and temple building, city planning
- Silpa SAstra for idol making and temple construction.
- jyotiSa SAstra-s – Texts on Astrology like brighu samhita and rAvaNa samhita
- paulisa siddhAnta, surya siddhanta, arya siddhAnta of Arya bhATTa and others for Astronomy
- ank SAstra – Science of Mathematics, mystery of numbers
- nyAya and tarka SAstra – School of Logic
- chAyA SiddhAnta – Problem solving through the science of shadow
- tantra – external, internal and mixed form of worship of God, related to awakening of kuNDalini and activation of chakra-s and other subtle bodies.
- vimAnika SAstra – science of aeronautics.

The Taboo

- kAmasAstra - vAtsyAyana's kAmasUtra and nandi's kAmasAstra – study of sexual behaviour. Contrary to popular belief, it's not 'sex manual' and has spiritual elements.
- VamachAri mArg - Left Hand Paths which are generally considered as taboo by common man crossing the human and civil limits, moral and ethical codes and do what is prohibited and still get enlightenment. KamasUtra is not a manual of tantra sex.

An e.g. is aghori sAdhu-s. They are masters of energies and subtle bodies and do not consider anything as unholy as Siva is present in everything and is everywhere. Nothing exists that is not Siva.

Other paths which are corrupted from pure paths are secret techniques invoking ghosts, and Gods invisible power either for personal gain or for destructive purpose.

latA sAdhanA-s found in 64 bhairava tantra-s are connected with spiritual gains via sexual pleasures. They are rejected even by Saiva-s, sects worshipping Lord Siva as supreme, probably due to being born as a result of corrupted understanding of tantra.

- tantra-s were designed so that men and women of all varNa and jAti can practise them. There is no restriction to anyone as far as practising them it concerned. Only advice is to learn them under the guidance and care of an enlightened Guru or a well veresed AcArya.
- Lokayata / brihaspatya / cArvAka of prajApati daksha – An athiest doctine supposedly founded by prajApati daksha of athiest nature which emphasizes on materialism. CarvAka-s consider lust as the cause of creation. According to pancAdaSi and sarvadarSana samgrah of Sri vidyAraNya svAmI, there were two types of cArvAka-s – (1) those who thinks Atman (Self or 'I') is physical gross body and (2), those believing that jlva is 'I' or Self or Atman.

Four upa-veda-s (sub veda-s or secondary veda-s)

- Artha Sastra – kauTilya's artha Sastra for Financial management
- dhanurveda – martial arts and art of war planning using different forms like cronch vyuh, chakra vyuh
- Ayurveda – Science of medicine e.g. charaka samhita, dhanvantari samhita, Sushruta samhita (plastic surgery). It is said that there was also blood transmutation in Ancient Indian technique.
- gandharva veda – Science and art of singing and music. Music originated from sAma veda (sargam – sA, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni)
- **Oral traditions** – many things not covered for changed according to the demographics and local culture
- **Independent compositions** – poetic, prakaraNa grantha-s and related to and complimenting upanishads, bhakti sUtra-s like nArada and SanDilya bhakti sUtra-s are highly revered.

- **Advances in Engineering** – non-rusting Iron pillar in Delhi called viShNu stambha (Qutub Minar) was an astronomical observatory. Zinc distillation was carried out in India in Ancient days which no other country could replicate it at that time.

From the above we can conclude that Hinduism is a religion which covers all major walks of life and is the most organized religion.

27. Religious Tolerance and Religious Acceptance

The very existence of various philosophical schools of thoughts in vedic times and in post-vedic period independent religions sprung out from SD, we can understand that Hindus by nature are very tolerant people and lived in harmony with those adhering to opposite siddhAnta. Though history suggests that there was blood shed in the name of religion, it was mostly between vaiShNava-s, advaitins and shaiva-s. Still this was very area specific and an entire nation cannot be blamed for this. Religious intolerance was not India's culture and Hindus do not believe in the spreading their religion by deceitful manner, by way of sword or by accusing non-believers of their siddhAnta of being possessed by demons. Hindus would argue and win battles on philosophical grounds and this was restricted to the intellectual class and not a mass movement.

As described earlier, there are many systems within the SD which have different and rather contrasting philosophies. All hindu-s live in harmony.

nAth yogi-s do not adhere to varNa dharma. They teach yoga to all. baSeSvara concentrated on Saiva Agama-s and worshipped Siva. He worked for the downtrodden and spread the glories of Siva.

Other religions like Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism are also tolerated though there might be philosophical differences and this respect is mutual as we all share common land and common culture.

We not only tolerate other sampradAya-s and religions but we accept the difference and live comfortably with them often encouraging them to practice their faith and help them in celebrating their religion. Sometimes we participate in other religious ceremonies. We Hindus do not feel that by taking prasAdam of other deity one will go to hell or by visiting a Church or by respecting Jesus Christ we have strayed from our path. We respect all religions and their prophets, but at a personal level practice our very own. However, we are not cowards. If someone would try to defame our religion or attack our religion, we do not hesitate to draw sword for Self Protection. No Hindu King in the entire History has ever destroyed a Church or a mosque or any of the religious place just because it is a non-hindu site. This in itself speaks of tolerance of different faiths. Tolerance, living in harmony with those worshipping another God is in our blood, world does not need teach us what tolerance is, pecially those believing in the philosophy of One God One Book and Salvation only through One Prophet.

27.1. Tolerance and acceptance of other religions

Due to multiple philosophies (siddhAnta-s nad ways life life practiced by Hindu-s, we have inherent quality of revering all religions which are not of Indian origin.

The main reason liberal views are

1. No belief in One God One Book
2. Not adhering to a view that salvation is possible through only one messenger of God who is a historical person.
3. Yogic approach to gauge spiritual progress
4. Viewing other religions to the lens of 'Hinduism'
5. Rig vedic Hymn RV 1.89.1 "A no bhadrAH kratavo yantu vishvataH: (meaning: Let noble thoughts flow from all directions)
6. Rig Vedic hymn RV 1.164.46 "ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti" (meaning Truth is one, but the learned refer to it in different names).

Let's understand each of these beliefs in brief.

27.1.1. No belief in One God One Book

Hindus do not denigrate deities of other religions and do not believe in one God, One Book philosophy, which is the main reason for being liberal.

27.1.2. Not adhering to a view that salvation is possible through only one messenger of God who is a historical person.

Hindus also do not believe that one can get freedom only through Jesus or Muhammad, though we believe that for moksha, one must have a guru which can be said to be a messenger of God. Jesus was messenger of God, but not the only one.

27.1.3. Yogic approach to gauge spiritual progress

In addition to this, the yogic way of thinking is another way to believe that all paths lead to one destination. Spiritual progress of a person is guages through the development of chakra-s and other subtle bodies. Great saints have noted that people of other religion are also spiritually developed than laymen or a non-practising person.

27.1.4. Viewing other religions from the lens of 'Hinduism'

Another approach is to see other religions including Abrahamic with the lens of 'Hinduism'. We read lot of Hindu Scriptures. Repeated reading and practising makes a foundation of 'way of thinking'. Though Hindu-s revere non-Hindu messengers of God, the respect has to be mutual. It is also important know the philosophies of other religion from their POV. i.e. to know how they interpret their scriptures and what are their beliefs about their and our religion.

An example is the belief of Christians that 'All Humans are born Sinners'. It is believed that human race originated from Adam and Eve. Since they sinned, God cursed them and the cursed is passed on to each and every human being. Hence we are all born sinners. Based on this logic, only the one who is not a born sinner can liberate a sinner. One sinner cannot liberate another sinner. It is their belief that Jesus Christ is born out of virgin (Mother Mary). God himself has send his own part to this world for the salvation of mankind through Mother Mary. Since Mother Mary didn't begot Jesus through another human, but was a blessing of God himself, hence Jesus is not a born sinner. Hence only he can liberate souls and ascend us to heaven to enjoy the company of God. Hence Christians must have in Jesus christ. Virgin Birth was a necessity for Jesus Christ. The whole logic gave rise to 'Christian Good News'

Hindu-s SAstra-s have a different view. We are not born sinners. We are originally divine, but the soul has forgotten it's divinity. Heaven is not the ultimate goal of human life, it is Self Realization. Self Realization is possible in this life itself. Due to this fundamental difference, we do not believe in what they believe, hence Christian Good News is not applicable to us, nor do we have to pledge our belief in only one saviour, Jesus Christ. It is upto individual to respect him as a holy saint and the messenger of God, but Jesus, according to the Hindu-s is not the only messenger of God.

27.1.5. Let noble thoughts flow from all directions - RV 1.89.1

आ नो भद्राः करतवो कष्यन्तु विश्वतो.अदब्धासो अपरीतास उद्भिदः /
देवा नो यथा सदमिद वर्धे असन्नप्रायुवो रक्षितारो दिवे-दिवे //

*ā no bhadraḥ kratavo kṣyantū viśvato.adabdhāso aparītāsa udbhidaḥ |
devā no yathā sadamid vṛdhe asannaprāyuvo rakṣitāro dive-dive //*

[00189] HYMN LXXXIX. Visvedevas.

1. MAY powers (thoughts / intelligence) auspicious come to us from every side, never deceived, unhindered, and victorious,
That the Gods ever may be with us for our gain, our guardians day by day unceasing in their care

In veda-s, each hymn is dedicated to devatA (God). This hymn is dedicated to visvedeva-s, which are 33 in number.

This hymn conveys the meaning that all we should accept all thoughts. This indicates that we accept good thoughts and logic even from enemies.

Classic example is found in rAmAyaNa where bhagavAn rAma asks his brother laxmaNa to learn niti SAstra at the feet of dying rAvaNa. ravaNa goes on to teach niti SAstra after laxmaNa on second attempt approaches rAvaNa with humility as a disciple. rAvaNa's Siva tANDava stotra is accepted by bhagavAn Siva himself and is still sung reverentially by devout Hindu-s as a great piece of devotional composition. rAvaNa's other works like rAvaNa samhita, a treatise on astrology is considered as text book on Indian Astrology along with other popular compositions like brighu samhita.

Medieval example is the popularity of Lord Buddha and Mahavira. We have philosophical differences with them, but we admire them for their exemplary character. Buddhists revere and even worship guru gorakhnAtha and guru matsyendranAtha as mahAsiddha-s. Hindu-s revere Sikh 10 gurus and Guru Tek-bahAdur Singh for his extraordinary contribution to save Hindu-s from the wrath of Muslims of Kashmir. The famous joke on sardAr ji-s that it's 12 O Clock indicating that they go dumb on seeing only one hand of clock (as both minute and hour overlap) is a cheap joke on their valour and sacrifice. Sikhs are also known to save Hindu and other children and women who were taken as prisoners by Muslims by attacking them at midnight. It was their slogan that sardAri ji (meaning leader), it's 12 O Clock (i.e. mid-night), lets attack Muslims and free our (Hindu) children and women. Every Hindu should be grateful to them.

Even though there were differences of opinion and philosophical differences on subtle topic like nature of God and soul and this world, still we all were united culturally. This was and is the strength of religious tolerance.

27.1.6. Misinterpretation of 'All paths lead to same truth' RV 1.164.46

*Indram mitram varuNam agnim āhuh,
atho divyah sa suparNo garutmān,
ekam sad viprāh bahudhā vadanti,
agnim yamam mātari'shvānam āhuh.*

[01-164] HYMN CLXIV. Visvedevas.

(They hail Him as Indra, as Mitra, as VaruNa, as Agni, also as that divine and noble-winged Garutmān. It is of One Existence that the wise ones speak in diverse ways, whether as Agni, or as Yama, or as Mātari'shvān.)

This hymn too is dedicated to visvedeva-s. Hence this hymn should not be taken out of context and applied to ALL religion including those which are not of Hindu origin. As we have seen that Abrahamic faiths have fundamental differences with SD such extrapolation is misleading in pure philosophical grounds. The gods mentioned in the veda-s are nothing but expansion or manifestation of the supreme brahman for carrying out a particular work. indradeva is also eulogized as brahman. Sometimes sUryadeva is considered as brahman. Supreme brahman is pointed out through different names. The names of Gods like varuNa agni, etc are mentioned in veda-s.

It was Swami Vivekananda, who made this verse popular indicating unity of all religions and the popular modern concept of 'all religions are true, equal and lead to same destination' which ofcourse is not true. The reason for saying this appears to be socio-political than religion. Swami Vivekananda wanted the youth to be united, as they would play crucial role in India's freedom struggle. This statement was for cultural unity of all Indians so that intra-religious and inter-religious fights are kept aside and all Indians unite for a common cause. It worked well for him and we got our freedom.

From philosophical POV (i.e. siddhAnta POV), there are a lot of differences even in religions of Indian origin.

1. Hindu-s following Adi SankarAcArya ji believe that brahman is formless and attributeless and permanently abiding in this natural state is the final ultimate goal of life. This state is possible in this life itself and one can retain physical body even after abiding in this ultimate state. Incarnated soul and brahman are one and the same. Others believe in staying in vaikunTha, an adobe of viShNu permanently. vaikunTha is different from heaven (svarga, devaloka). General belief is that Brahman is both with and without form.
2. Buddhists believe that the final state is SUnya i.e. zero state, the state of nothingness.
3. Both Buddhists and Jains believe in existence of demi-gods but not in supreme Godhead
4. Muslims believe that the final goal is to stay permanently in heaven (jannat) in the company of 72 virgins with big breasts (some say, 72 angels). It is unclear (to the author) that they want to stay in company of Allah (Supreme Godhead) or be in company of 72 virgins.
5. Christians, though they claim God to be formless, say Jesus Christ sits on right side of God and they want to enjoy the company of God, enjoy his intimacy and enjoy the pleasures of heaven.
6. Both Christians and Muslims believe that there is no salvation except to pledge support in their prophets and accepting God / Allah as the Supreme Godhead.
7. Jews too believe that only they will get salvation as they are special people selected by Yahvah (Yahweh) and so they do not convert anyone as they are not selected by Yahvah.

How can these religions, who have differ in final position of jlva (incarnated soul) w.r.t to ISvara (God) be all the same?

The nature of Supreme Godhead is different for different religions

1. Muslim Godhead Allah hates non-believers (kafirs) and considers pig as ugly (filthy) creature. Allah only likes Muslims (believers).
2. Christian Godhead (God) is formless but one cannot get salvation except through Jesus Christ. Christian God is a Jealous God. Jealous means not allowing worship any other God or to take partake food offered to other God.
3. Hindu-s consider that Godhead is both with form and without form. Whatever is offered to any form of God finally reaches the formless. It is infact an offering to infinite Brahman only.

and so on.

The nature of jIva is also not same in all religions. Islam believes that jIva has personality, Male and Female, as only males would enjoy the company of 72 virgins with big breasts. Hindu-s do not believe that soul has a gender. It is a form of energy. Major difference is belief in reincarnation of jIva until it manages to break free from cycle of birth and death.

Even if we take liberal stand, the respect has to be mutual. It cannot be one way traffic. It is a general consensus that you get respect in proportion you give.

Hence the phrase often quoted '*ekam sat viprA bahudA vadanti*', translated as 'God is one, wise call it by different names' is

- Not true either from philosophical POV
- Nor the nature of Godhead is same in all religions.
- Final destination of incarnated soul and his / her eternal life is not same for all religions.
- Nature of soul is also not same.

28. Two ways to live a life: Path of Action and Path of Renunciation

bhagavAn in gltA (BG 3.3) says that there are two ways of living a dhArmic life, path of action and path of knowledge i.e. path of renunciation.

In path of action, yogi-s perform action of selflessly without expecting fruits of action or surrender actions and their fruits to ISvara and attain inner purity. In path of renunciation, one does physical work as much as necessary to sustain body. They work with the knowledge of detachment i.e. they separate themselves from the actions and their fruits and from everything that is not 'I'. GYAna yogi-s try to detach themselves from what is not 'I' and in this way they live a detached life.

Out of the two, from laymen, path of action is best suited.

29. Idol Worship and Beyond - Why Idol Worship?

'Hindus worship Idol' or 'Hindus are idol worshippers' is the most common opinion. However this opinion is a result of incomplete knowledge about Hindu dharma which is so different from other religions especially those not born in India. **The truth is no Hindu ever worships any idol.** Idol is not God. There are two common procedures that are easily noticeable in so-called idol worship

1. prANa prathisTA
2. Closing of eyes while praying and bowing to any Idol

Lets understand what these means

29.1. prANa prathisThA

prANa prathisThA is the first ritual that has to be done before any idol can be worshipped. In this ritual, God which is formless, is invoked to be present in the idol and manifest his blessings on devotees through this idols. An idol is like a postman who is the 'middleman' between sender and receiver. A guru plays the same role. Since not all are fortunate to have a guru who can guide you, hence temples are created where devotees can gather and pray to God directly through an idol which represents him / her.

29.2. Closing of eyes while praying and bowing to any idol

We must have observed that after devotees offer their salutations to God, they bow down and close their eyes when they are in front of idol. The question arises - Why would you close your eyes when the very purpose you have come to temple is to have darshan of your beloved God? Meaning of darshan is generally taken as 'to see', however darshana in deeper sense means 'to know'. Eyes represent all five senses (eyes, ears, etc). Hence closing of eyes symbolically means to pull back all senses or to disconnect any external stimuli and see within. bhagavAn in gltA BG 18.61 says, 'I am in your heart' meaning that though ISvara is omnipresent and is present everywhere, the degree of manifestation is more in heart. Hear heart is not the physical heart. It is either taken as anAhat chakra or heart could mean 'core', 'center', 'source'. Hence this practice is an advise to look 'within'.

There are more reasons for worshipping idol. Mind is habituated of seeing names and form. EAch form has a name and vice versa. It is difficult to visualize an abstract God who is formless and present everywhere. How can mind visualize it? It is much easier to focus on a particular object. Hence idol is preferred.

Each form of God has his / her unique character. God performs deeds that no human being can replicate. They have various devotional hymns, compositions and mantra-s dedicated to them. bhagavAn in glta says, 'leave all types of dharma (and adharm) and (unconditionally) surrender to Me, the Brahman'. The order is given but one cannot produce bhAva (spiritual emotion) and attachment towards God. Here too a form and character of God help.s purANa-s help create a character of God. When glorious divine deeds of krShNa or Siva are known through purANa-s and other works, an entire scene of created. For example, when krShNa is playing flute and all cows and other animals get attracted towards him, and a pleasant, divine atmosphere is created, mind constructs the whole scene and stays immersed in it. Concentration becomes natural when one has natural liking for a subject. Repeated reading of such divine stories, inspiring incidences of their life, their unparalleled divine deeds, and listening and singing infinite glories will make one stay immersed in God and increase devotion to the all mighty.

After devotee becomes inwardly pure so much so that now s/he losses interest in worldly activities, external objects and loved ones and heart longs only and only for God, then one can either shift to formless aspect of God or can continue to worship his/ her IshTa devatA (form of God of personal choice). Later a devotee unconditionally surrenders to God and does not ask anything in return but constant company of beloved God, then God takes control of his / her life and gives what is best for the devotee. God himself shows his / her true nature.

30. jivan mukti, a unique concept of Hindu dharma

The uniqueness of Hindu dharma is that after permanently abiding in the 'natural state', which is the supreme state of pure consciousness, the substratum of the universe, Brahman is not bound by laws of nature, is free to live or quit physical or subtle bodies. Such a blessed soul is called as jivan mukta. Now there is no need to meditate in order to enter into samAdhi and abide in this blissful state, one is already abiding in this state without making any effort. There is no need to read scriptures, nor any need to concentrate on any form of God. By the grace of almighty, such a blessed soul is never detached from Brahman, sees everyone with an equal life, experiences constant bliss and deep peace. Such a rare soul, while still living in physical body has attained immortality. Such is the greatness of sanAtana dharma, the eternal religion. The goal is to attain immortality not by going somewhere but by abiding in the supreme state of consciousness. a jivan mukta has no longing for anything, not even for the vision of God, has a sense of completeness, lacks fear and looks to everyone with an equal eye without any discrimination of age, creed, gender or varNa, as s/he sees or experiences Brahman inside and outside everything. Each and everything is not different from brahman. But in such a state, teaching is this divine knowledge is not possible. Hence if God wishes to use such a blessed soul as his instrument, then God will lower his consciousness to a certain degree so that s/he may experience duality, but never allows the soul to detach from himself. jivan mukta is a perfect instrument through which God himself works for the upliftment of humanity, as there is no internal resistance to anything that God wishes to do through him / her. Such a blessed soul, a jivan mukta, never

returns back to this impermanent world which of transient nature and is an abode of sorrows. (Ref BG 8.21, 8.23, 15.6). This means that the pure consciousness rises high and becomes one with brahman. Now this consciousness never falls back into delusion and never gets trapped in mAyA, the illusory creative energy of the Lord, but stays in the state of knowledge of True Self.

31. Women and sanAtana dharma

(Credits: Article 23.3 to 23.6 are contributed by Shri Santosh Kumar Ayalasomayajula of [Mahapashupatastra Blog](#))

Unlike the unfortunate happenings in the recent era, women in ancient India used to enjoy equality with men and to be truthful, they used to enjoy higher reverence than men. With the invasions from other countries, under the ruler of Islamists and British; our sanātana-dharma suffered a lot of deterioration in terms of the decline of the morality, and change of social norms. In this paper (article related to women) we'll see through the telescope of our religion and look at the other side i.e., the status of women of the ancient era.

31.1. Summary in Brief - Women and sanAtana dharma

Paper on women, published here is a lengthy 7 page article. Here we try to give the summary in brief for those who do not wish to read the entire article.

The most important question about women is their freedom to choose work and equality amongst men i.e. sharing similar status with men. A two line response to this question is only authentic chanting of vedic mantra-s (samhitA-s and brAhmaNa-s) is prohibited. Other than this, women can do all things that men can.

- Women are not supposed to learn authentic chanting of veda-s as learning veda-s is a full time job. vedic mantra-s have specific vibrations which when properly pronounced cleanses our energy body, chakra-s and nADI-s. Hence in order to master them, one needs to completely dedicate himself at the feet of a guru for many years. Since women is entrusted with other responsibilities, protecting veda-s, which can only be done by orally reciting them in presence of an accomplished AchArya is left to male brAhmins. Books cannot teach one how to recite. Even svara-s and diacritical marks cannot teach us proper chanting. Verification of verses cannot be done via reading a book.

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- No restriction to learn sanskrit, grammar, yoga, tantra, civil laws (dharma smriti-s), philosophical contents of veda-s (upanishads) and any other form of art.
 - Can perform vedic ritual called AupAsanA (not upAsanA) says Shri Chandrashekharendra Sarasvati Svami. Aupasana is the only Vedic right that a woman is entitled to perform on her own (without her husband's company). Of course, there are so many pauranic vratas and pujas that she can perform according to the sastras, but these belong to a different category. Even shudra-s are supposed to chant certain parts of veda-s says Kanchi Paramacharya. Source [1](#) & [2](#)
 - Women are considered as ansha (part) of Adi shakti / durgA mAtA / laxmi mAtA and hence a sign of prosperity.
 - Our culture does not teach us to cast off women as useless stuff and get rid of them as fast as possible. Daughter is very close to the heart of father. But at the time of marriage, father donates his daughter to his son-in-law. kanyA dAna is the highest form of donation that a householder can ever give.
 - Mother is revered as equivalent to demi-god and hence she is worthy of being served.
 - Wife is called as dharma patni i.e. a life partner who accompanies you on the path of dharma. No yajna (vedic ritual) can be carried out without the presence of wife. Wife is not called as kAma patni i.e. a life partner just to satisfy carnal pleasure.
 - Wife and women in general play pivotal role in shaping child's psychic and hence are indirectly responsible for moulding of society, state and country as a whole.
 - It is said that a pious women practising chastity can save her husband even from the clutches of death. She can rise her husband from hell to heaven by sheer power of chastity.
 - 50 % of pUNYa karma phala (merits) done by husband goes to wife, but wifes pUNya karma does not go to husband. Her satitva (one-pointed devotion to husband) protects her husband.
 - Wife is called as 'gruhiNi' i.e. queen of house, husband is just called as 'grihasta' i.e. householder.
 - Wife is called as dharma patni and not kAma-patni, meaning she is equal partner in practice of dharma
 - Wife is called as ardhAngini. 'ardha' means 'half' and 'anga' means 'limb'. 'ardhAngini' means my other half. Husband and wife both make up a complete person who can follow dharma of grihasta ashram. Status of wife as equal to that of Husband.
 - Wife is devoted to husband, husband is devoted to his guru and guru is devoted to God. Hence technically there is no freedom for even husband. A husband is also bound by his commitments and responsibility towards his family including his wife.
 - A widow or a married women whose husband has left her permanently can remarry says parAshara smriti.
 - Women, children and cows are never to be disrespected as says parAshara smriti and manu smriti. The punishment or restrictions given in smriti-s are for those women

who do not follow moral or ethical codes or are not loyal to husbands or have a criminal mindset. Such laws (punishing women) are there just to caution them and not to oppress them. Our dharma shAstra-s allow us to create new laws in place of old obsolete laws.

With this outline, lets go deeper into the article. Reference from upanishads and mahAbhArata are given.

31.2. Women and veda-s

As per tradition, women are not allowed to chant veda-s. The reason is chanting veda-s is a full time job.

To master one veda with authentic chanting requires 10 years of dedication, person mastering one veda is called as vaidya.

Knower of 1 veda = 10 years = vaidya
Knower of 2 veda-s = 20 years = dvivedi
Knower of 3 veda-s = 30 years = trivedi
Knower of 4 veda-s = 40 years = caturvedi

Hence women are relieved from protecting veda-s. Other than this there is no restriction on women. No yajna can commence without the presence of wife. Hence wife is expected to know what the yajna is all about, what is the procedure and materials required for performing yajna. Without knowing the meaning of mantra-s and it's phala-shruti, simply sitting in a yajna makes no sense. In short, wife is well informed about vedic rituals. In order to know the contents of vedic rituals, knowledge of sanskrit is necessary. There is no restriction to learn sanskrit, sanskrit grammar, Agama shAstra-s (tantra-s). Women can learn other arts which are learned by men and that which men are not inclined to learn like handicraft, making of food materials and delicacies, healing through yoga, prANayama, Asana-s and ayurveda, music, singing & dance, etc. Certain important social functions like marriage are entirely handled by women and men are not expected to have any say in it. smriti-s say, during ApAta kAla i.e. during emergencies, when a brAhmin cannot live a normal life and carry out his duties, he can approach women and sudra in case of doubts. This indicates that even shudra-s can be knowledgeable in case of civil codes (dharma smriti-s). (There are certain portion of veda-s which even shudra-s are allowed to chant says Kanchi Paramacharya.)

Besides learning work traditionally being entrusted to them like house keeping, they can learn combat skills and martial arts too. Women can be great administrators. Since women

are entrusted to nourish and raise children not only with food but with emotional bond and mould them into good human beings by embedding good samskAra-s (good qualities), women are expected to have all round knowledge, atleast to some extent, if not every then in most fields. They also have to make kids incline towards spirituality. For this they will have to teach kids stories from purANa-s and itihAsa and give the purport of the stories thereby shaping their character. It goes without saying that women also have good sense of discrimination. Hence women were in no way being humiliated. Female foeticide is unthinkable and is a result of corrupted false understanding and such malpractices are and never were supported by veda-s or any of the shAstra-s.

The obvious image of a house wife is that she does boring repetitive work with no use of intelligence like dusting, sweeping, cleaning utensils, etc is not true. A women has to be all rounder having a good character, as only vira mAtA (brave mother) can give birth to vira putra (brave son), only pious and chaste wife can give birth to great personalities and saints who will one day guide the whole society and shine forth the name of their parents, family, caste (varNa), village, state and the country.

Spiritually speaking, ladies have a good gift of being receptive, and ability to adapt to new environment (which every wife does after marriage). Ladies are also gifted with emotions which are pivotal in nourishing young ones and in keeping loved ones bonded. Ladies, generally cook food and offer them to everyone in house and to guest before they themselves eat. This shows their big-hearted serving attitude. This is one of the reason why women get contented by eating little food. They have slim diet. We find that women are active in serving sick by becoming nurses.

If ladies are relieved from learning to chant veda-s, then why do we find references of discourses between learned female saints like gArgi and martri often called as brahmavAdini.

31.2.1. What about discourses by gArgi and maitri?

Yes, we do find references from upanishads and purANa-s in which female saints are highly revered and are engaged in spiritual discourses of the highest order. However, these discourses do not contradict our position. The answer is very simple. Women are highly respected, can be GYAni-s and can debate on subtle topics of the upanishads. They can learn upanishads too. sanyAsa is a state of mind and not a way of living. Hence they too can live a life of a sanyAsI while still living in society by staying mentally detached from worldly activities. The point often missed is that, as per our limited knowledge, high souled women of the upanishads do not ask questions related to doing vedic karma-kANDa. In the traditional discussions on dharma, whenever the word veda is used, it generally means the

samhitA part and not vedAnta or upanishads. samhitA is the hardcore part of vedic rituals like yajna-s (yaGYa-s) and havan-s. We do not find them asking a question how to perform a particular yaGYa. Again we restrict our opinion to only 'vedic' 'karma-kANDa' and not any other karma-kANDa and the fasts which they piously practice as a part of their spiritual progress and for the good of their husbands and for society as a whole. We are not even talking about Agamic karma-kANDa. We are not sure if they can do it or not, but we find there are various yogInI-s who perform havan-s from tantra-s as a part of tantra sAdhanA.

There may be a description of women even undergoing upanayana saMskAra (thread ceremony) in some Agama-s, but great saints like Adi Sankara has already mentioned that women do not have to chant veda-s. Perhaps these practises, even if they exists, were not popular, as AcArya-s of all sects following vedic way of life unanimously were of the same opinion as that of Adi Sankara. Agama-s are different than veda-s. The references of women eligible for upanayana are even found in dharma SAstra-s and grihya sutra-s, but many consider it as a later interpolation. Still this issue is not settled and there are modern groups who have considered these passages as genuine and are working hard to give women their right to chant veda-s and perform vedic yaGYa-s. If verses concerning varNa division and upanayana-not-for-women were completely absent in veda-s and other SAstra-s, then why would medieval saints like basavaNna completely discard veda-s and completely base their teachings and beliefs on only Agama-s? Why would such a great saint not fight citing verses from veda-s and dharma SAstra-s or compose a refutational work in support of their claim? Hence this topic is highly debatable.

Coming back to the topic, asking the very question about the nature of Atman / brahman and the way to attain it and guru considering them purified enough to be given answers strongly indicate they women can also attain a highly pure state of mind necessary for Self Realisation.

Hence, the question is only about not chanting vedic mantra-s, the hardcore part of veda-s the samhitA-s and brAhmaNa-s which gives us how mantra-s of samhitA has to be applied.

Lastly, we must always remember that in every field, there are always exceptions. Exception is not a Rule.

After understanding the reason for women being relieved to chant veda-s, lets understand veda-s

31.3. Woman in the form of a Mother

The very Taittiriya Upanishad while teaching about the duties and meritorious acts that one ought to perform, the very first invocation it does is to – the mother- as *'mātrudēvō bhava'*, which means, *'treat your mother as god'*. Only after this mantra it reveals other mantras as – *'pitṛudēvō bhava'*, *'āchārya dēvō bhava'*, and *atithi dēvō bhava'*. This is the first thing that should make us learn that the 'reverence' that is paid to a woman (mother in this context) is always of greater precedence than the rest all others.

Our sanātana-dharma teaches us –

"yō para dārētu mātruvat para dravyṣu lōṣṭvat sarva bhūtēṣu ātmavat paśyasi sah ēva paṇḍitaḥ |" which means, *"He who looks at women other than one's own wife as his mother, he who looks at others' valuables as mere lump of clay (i.e., doesn't desire to obtain them for himself), and he who looks at all other living beings as his own self – such a man is called a learned one!"*

The first part which recommends us to look at other's wives as one's own mother is best exhibited in Valmiki Ramayana by Lakshmana, the younger brother of Sri Rama! When Ravana abducts Sita in an aerial car, she throws down her ornaments one by one. A group of monkeys collect them and later, at the behest of Sugriva, they display those jewellery to Rama and Lakshmana. Rama's eyes get filled with tears and hence he asks Lakshmana to identify if they were the ornaments of lady Sita. Lakshmana says, "I can clearly identify the ornaments of the legs like anklets as belonging to Sita because I used to see them while touching her feet daily; but I cannot identify other ornaments". This clearly proves that Lakshmana never casted his gaze at her other parts of Sita's body except her feet. Our scriptures preach us to display this kind of reverence for the wives of others. However, only due to lack of knowledge of our grand sanātana-dharma, people are becoming filled with animal instincts and thereby doing heinous crimes against women which are even painful to think of.

Our religion gives such a paramount importance to a woman as a mother that – there is no *'śāṣṭāṅga namaskāra'* allowed for ladies. All women are allowed to prostrate in front of the God by following only *"pañchāṅga namaskāra"* alone.

'śāṣṭāṅga namaskāra' means prostrating in front of the God with eight limbs viz. – two hands, two eyes, forehead, chest, and two legs. This is the method a man should adopt to prostrate before a god. However, in that posture one's chest and organ of generation touches the ground, it is not prescribed for women – as our scriptures give the highest respect to the two vital parts of women viz. the womb and the two breasts. It is the womb of a woman which acts as the ground for creation to take place and hence it does *"sṛṣṭi"*. After giving birth to a child, it is the chest portion of a woman which carries two breasts which ooze with milk for the consumption of the child and thereby the breasts act as the means of sustenance; hence a woman is looked at as doing the sustenance *"sthiti"*. For this

reason, those two parts located at the bottom and upper portions of a woman's body are highly sacred organs and are not supposed to touch the Earth. For this reason women perform "panchāṅga namaskāra" alone, i.e., prostrating with their five limbs viz. - two hands, forehead and two eyes.

31.4. Regarding Woman as Wife

Our sanātana-dharma has placed wife at a very high pedestal with reverence. We'll understand the various glories of women as wives one by one now.

31.4.1. Wife is the Root of the Religion

It is said that every man carries three debts on him to be disbursed. They are –

1. Dēva-ṛṇam (debt to Gods),
2. Rṣi-ṛṇam (debt to Rishis), and
3. Pitṛ-ṛṇam (debt to Pitris / departed ancestors).

Out of these a man can payback only the 2nd debt without needing a wife. That is - by studying the scriptures handed over by the great Rishis of our lineage and by teaching the same (that is, transferring the knowledge to keep it rolling), to our descendants or disciples; one can disburse the debt to Rishis. This can be completed even by being a Brahmachari or a Sanyasi. It doesn't require a wife.

However, the remaining two viz. debt to Gods and debt to departed ancestors cannot be disbursed without the company of a wife. Debt to Gods can be paid off by doing Yajnas (sacrifices) and one gets an eligibility to do yajna only if his wife sits beside him. This is the reason why Sri Rama couldn't perform a horse sacrifice without Sita hence he had to create a golden statue of Sita and keep her beside him while performing the yajna.

With yajnas we offer havis (food) to Gods. Gods consume them and get pleased and then they pour timely rains on earth. With timely seasonal changes earth produces good crops, and people remain healthy and entire planet remains blissful. For all this to happen, only a 'gṛhastha' (householder) is eligible to do Yajnas.

Similarly, the debt to Pitris (ancestors) can be paid by begetting a son and keeping the race continuing. For begetting a son one needs to get into the wedlock and beget a son upon his wedded wife righteously. So, without a wife a man cannot repay the debt to his ancestors. therefore, it becomes mandatory for a man to sail through the āshrama called "gṛhastha".

Not only this. gṛhasthāśrama is the greatest of all other āshramas because the other āshramas depend on gṛhasthas for food. Food keeps all beings alive and nourishes them. Brahmachārīs, vānaprasthās, and sanyāsīs do not cook food for themselves, they seek food from the house of a householder only. Therefore gṛhastha is the pillar on whom all other ashramas lean and take rest! Keeping in mind the glory of Gṛhasthāśrama every man should seek to wed a virtuous, learned, and wise wife, because she is the support of the order of gṛhastha mode of life.

For this very reason Mahabharata in the section named 'Sambhava Parva' of 'Adi Parva' says –

"They that have wives can perform religious acts". (MBH 01: LXXIV)

31.4.2. Wife Bestows Four-Purushārthas on a Husband

In Mahabharata Shakuntala gives a beautiful discourse about the glories of a wife to Dushyanta. She says that a wife is the root of the four puruśārthās viz. – dharma, artha, kāma, and mōkśa. The excerpt from her speech is as follows.

"The wife is a man's half. The wife is the first of friends. The wife is the root of religion, profit, and desire. The wife is the root of salvation. They that have wives can perform religious acts". (MBH 01: LXXIV)

Even in the Aranya parva of Mahabharata Yaksha poses a great question to Yudhishtira asking how could the three mutually contradicting goals viz. virtue, wealth, and desire be kept in harmony?

"The Yaksha asked,--'Virtue, profit, and desire are opposed to one another. How could things thus antagonistic to one another exist together?" (MBH 3: CCCXI)

Yudhistihra gives a very learned answer to that query. He says that all the three opposite goals remain in harmony through the help of a wife.

"Yudhishtira answered,--'When a wife and virtue agree with each other, then all the three thou hast mentioned may exist together'." (MBH 3: CCCXI)

A wise wife knows what is righteous and what is unrighteous, hence she acts as a counselor, and as a minister to the husband and helps him in decision making as well as stops him from stepping into the road of unrighteousness. She holds the reigns of the household affairs and manages the household monetary transactions and all financial and economical issues with her quick wittedness. She also brings forth children which are the assets for their lineage. Hence she builds wealth in the home from all angles. She also fulfils all the desires (including the carnal ones) of her husband and keeps him satisfied. Also it is because of the wife who is duly wed, that a man doesn't accrue sins of carnal pleasures – seeking the same with women outside would accrue him sins thereby hindering his spiritual path here and hereafter. Thus, a wife is a savior for her husband. This way she keeps all the three goals viz. – dharma, artha, and kāma in harmony.

A wise and learned wife can also bestow the fourth goal viz. mōkśa on her husband by being a constant support to him in his path of scriptural learning. She motivates him towards this goal and thereby becomes the cause behind his spiritual upliftment and liberation.

31.4.3. Women rescues all the ancestors of her husband from hell

Ancestors who are not liberated and who have ascended to higher regions based on merit are susceptible to fall down. Mahabharata says that the father after death is prevented from falling into a hell called 'put' if he has a son. It is said that by a son one conquers the three worlds, and by a grandson, one enjoys eternity, and by a great grandson one enjoys everlasting happiness. Therefore, a wife who is called as 'jāyā', is the one who helps a man, and his deceased forefathers to gain higher regions of felicity.

"The husband entering the womb of the wife cometh out himself in the form of the son. Therefore is the wife called by those cognisant of the Vedas as Jaya (she of whom one is born). And the son that is so born unto persons cognisant of the Vedic Mantras rescueth the spirits of deceased ancestors. And because the son rescueth ancestors from the hell call Put, therefore, hath he been called by the Self-create himself as Put-tra (the rescuer from Put). By a son one conquereth the three worlds. By a son's son, one enjoyeth eternity. And by a grandson's son great-grand-fathers enjoy everlasting happiness". (MBH 01: LXXIV)

31.4.4. Wife helps a man to manifest himself

Kaushitaki Upanishad mentions “ātmā vai putranāmāsī |”, which means, “Thou art myself in the form of a son”. A son born through one’s wedded wife is verily the father himself manifested as a new being. This kind of manifesting one’s own self in one’s own life is possible only through the help of one’s wedded wife. In fact scriptures give such a high respect to a wife that it is said that – because the father himself is born through the womb of his wife, he should look at her as his mother. This indicates how much of respect one needs to have for one’s wife. This certainly is a slap on the faces of all those scoundrels who beat their wives, who burn them to death, and who torture them in various ways.

“It hath been said by learned persons that one is himself born as one’s son. Therefore, a man whose wife hath borne a son should look upon her as his mother. Beholding the face of the son one hath begotten upon his wife, like his own face in a mirror, one feeleth as happy as a virtuous man, on attaining to heaven. Men scorched by mental grief, or suffering under bodily pain, feel as much refreshed in the companionship of their wives as a perspiring person in a cool bath”. (MBH 01: LXXIV)

31.4.5. Wife is the most valuable possession

For a man – the best friend who stands through thick and thin throughout the course of their common lifespan is his wife alone. If a man is in his good days, all other friends including the closest relatives would sing his glories, however when the time remains unfavourable, none of them would stick and standby a man except his loving and caring wife (parents are exceptions because if they are alive they would stand by a man but after their death one who gives her shoulder as support during the moments of distress is the wife alone).

“They that have wives can lead domestic lives. They that have wives have the means to be cheerful. They that have wives can achieve good fortune. Sweet-speeched wives are friends on occasions of joy. They are as fathers on occasions of religious acts. They are mothers in sickness and woe. Even in the deep woods to a traveller a wife is his refreshment and solace. He that hath a wife is trusted by all. A wife, therefore, is one’s most valuable possession”. (MBH 01: LXXIV)

31.4.6. One shouldn’t do anything that is disagreeable to his wife

Mahabharata says that a man shouldn’t do anything that is displeasing to his wife.

"No man, even in anger, should ever do anything that is disagreeable to his wife, seeing that happiness, joy, and virtue,--everything dependeth on the wife". (MBH 01: LXXIV)

31.4.7. Wife Should Be The Queen Of The House, Not A Slave

The position given to woman as a wife in our culture was indeed very exalted. Below mantra from Rig Veda clearly highlights that she is expected to be treated as the queen of house (gruhiNi) and the main spokesperson of that house. It should be noted that husband do not enjoy such status like gruharAjA (king of house). He is just called as gruhasthA (householder). It should not be thought as if a bride needs to dictate her in-laws because she is called the queen of that house. Instead, we need to understand that she is being the queen's position in their hearts. A position in heart remains for posterity and that's what is the intended message; also it means of giving prominent position in the home.

"The bride is entering the ritualistic location, her hand held by the god puushan (one form of the sun god) the twin gods of medicine the Ashwins are accompanying her in the chariot.. and she is going away from her house to that of her husband and she is blessed that she may become the ruler of the household and the main spoke-person of the assembly in her husbands place". (Rig Veda 10-75-26)

The bride is blessed to join the supreme place in the household. See how the father-in-law, mother-in-law and everyone grants her the central place in their hearts. The below verse exists in Atharva Veda too.

"May your father in law treat you with affection as if you were a queen. May your mother in law treat you with love as if you were a queen. May your sisters in law love and respect you as if you were a queen. May your brothers in law respect and adore you as if you were a queen" (Rig Veda 10-85-46 and atharva veda 14-2-44)

31.5. Regarding Widowed Women

Our religion gave equal rights to man and woman. With the invasions from foreigners due to their laws being enforced and mixed with those of the laws of our land, the widowhood related woman-unfriendly-customs would have appeared. Did Kunti shave her head in Mahabharata? Do we have any reference from scriptures where Tara (wife of deceased Vali),

Mandodari (the wife of deceased Ravana), utara (the wife of deceased Abhimanyu) shaving their heads and wearing white sarees? Certainly we don't have such references!

In fact Rig Veda supports remarriage of ladies who lost their husbands as follows.

*kuha svid doṣā kuha vastoraśvinā kuhābhipitvaṃ karataḥkuhoṣatuḥ |
ko vāṃ śayutrā vidhaveva devaramṃ maryamṃ nayoṣā kṛṇute sadhastha ā || (RV 10:40:2)*

"Where are ye, Aśvins, in the evening, where at morn? Where is your haltingplace, where rest ye for the night? Who brings you homeward, as the widow bedward draws her husband's brother, as the bride attracts the groom?"

31.6. Union with a Woman was done with her consent and not by Rape

In Mahabharata we have a great story of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. King Dushyanta on seeing her gets enamoured by her beauty and gains the strong desire of union with her. Unlike today's some men with destructive animal mindset, who would think only of 'rape' for satisfying their desires of flesh; the ancient Hindus used to maintain discipline even while being stung by the arrows of the passion.

Dushyanta said, "...O thou of the fairest complexion, full of desire I am, thou also in a similar mood mayst become my wife according to the Gandharva form". (MBH 01: LXXIII)

Shakuntala spoke the following words to him and asked for a promise.

Sakuntala said, "This is thy son, O king! Let him be installed as thy heir-apparent. O king, this child, like unto a celestial, hath been begotten by thee upon me. Therefore, O best of men, fulfil now the promise thou gavest me. Call to mind, O thou of great good fortune, the agreement thou hadst made on the occasion of thy union with me in the asylum of Kanwa." (MBH 01: LXXIV)

Later on, Shakuntala reminds Dushyanta of their conversation about the agreement between the couple and they united. Thus was the desire of the King fulfilled by her.

"Sakuntala, having listened to all this, answered, 'If this be the course sanctioned by religion, if, indeed, I am my own disposer, hear, O thou foremost one of Puru's race,

what my terms are. Promise truly to give me what I ask thee. The son that shall be begotten on me shall become thy heir-apparent. This, O king, is my fixed resolve. O Dushmanta, if thou grant this, then let our union take place". (MBH 01: LXXIII)

There are many such stories in scriptures, where even the mightiest Kings never tried to rape any women even despite becoming passionate seeing their beauty. Then how come the weakest humans of today's era dare to molest women? – is the question we need to ponder about. The only answer is – lack of awareness of the morals what our scriptures teach and lack of control over one's senses.

31.7. Female Foeticide

Hinduism believes that God exists in all - both living and non-living. We also believe in past lives and future re-births. We strongly believe that each soul is equally divine. Each soul gets a body and environment that is conducive to his / her spiritual progress and is capable of fulfilling his / her dis-satisfied desires. It is God who directs a soul to take birth in a particular body. If we kill female babies, it would mean that we disrespect God's decision. Hence it is illogical and a heinous crime to kill any child. On one hand, female forms are worshipped. We revere our country as 'mother' (bhArata mAAtA). How can such a culture even think of killing female child. The problem is with the illiterate who think that female child is a burden and will incur financial depth as they will have to give dowry (which is not at all sanctioned by shAstra-s). The irony is that the same society think that advent of female (either wife or as daughter) is a sign of prosperity and good luck.

31.8. sati and widow

sati or sahgamana means 'to accompany'. Wives used to ascend with husband after husband left his mortal coil. sati, by the power of her tapas would be able to detach herself and leave her body in the burning pyre of her husband. Both would leave in subtle bodies. Unlike in kaliyuga where the body dies if it does not get food, in earlier yuga-s, the body does not die if it didnt receive food.

Kanchi SankarAcArya says,

Since the Krta-Yuga there has been a decline in the powers of man. In that age a man lived so long as his skeleton lasted. Even if his blood dried up and his flesh was destroyed he survived until his bones collapsed. People in the Krta age had much power of knowledge. They were called "asti-gata-pranas".

In the Treta age people were "mamsa-gata-pranas", that is they lived so long as their flesh lasted and did not perish even when their blood dried up. They had a special capacity for performing sacrifices.

In the Dvapara age people were "rudhira-gata-pranas" and lived until such time as their blood dried up. They were known especially for the puja they performed.

We of the Kali age are "anna-gata-pranas" and life will remain in our body so long as the food [nourishment] lasts. We have little capacity to meditate, perform rituals and puja. But we are capable of chanting the names of the Lord - Krsna, Rama, and so on. It is true that by muttering the names of the Lord we will be liberated.

Source: <http://www.kamakoti.org/hindudharma/part5/chap38.htm>

From this we can know that the powers of human mind has declined with time. Hence sati might not be practical today. Some kshatriya queens used to jump in fire and self-immolate themselves to save their 'pride' and would not surrender to the enemies. However, at no time sati was compulsory. madri chose to practice sati, but kunti, the other wife of Pandu was not allowed to practice sati instead of her wish. She might not have qualified for it. The other reason was she was needed to raise 5 sons.

A symbolic interpretation of sati can be given which can be applied today. A wife would renounce all the memories of the world with the death of husband. Hence her old self dies (similar to sanyAsa), and a new woman is born with no worldly obligation except that she has children to raise. Life of widow is similar to sanyAsin, free from worldly and social obligation so that she can dedicate her entire life for Atmic upliftment. Widow has benefits that sanyAsins do not enjoy. She has the protection of her family members. She need not be an ascetic. She do not need to worry about the basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. However if one does not wish to live a spiritual life, then parASara smriti (P.S. 4.30) says a widow can remarry, as curbing sensual desire is not advisable as it may bounce back at any time with full force and she might not be able to control it. This might result into disturbing her mental balance or she might start looking at other men with an eye of lust.

31.9. Conclusion (women in sanAtana dharma)

With little to add, we would like to present another scenario of women being practically oppressed and deprived of their rite. Yes, in a certain period of time, they did suffer subjugation and couldn't live as freely as men, but it is not the fault of veda-s themselves, nor the fault of great AcArya-s but our selfish and limited or rather wrong understanding of SAstra-s and declining interest in learning of veda-s and spirituality in general that is the culprit. As a backfire, the natural outcome has been revivalists who have worked hard for womens' rights, as it is the nature (svabhAva) of the mother nature to keep the balance. Whenever any extreme way of life rises and tries to establish itself in the hearts of men, the imbalance caused to the society would create another extreme that would counter the former extreme with later extreme until the equilibrium is attained. The pendulum keeps

swinging until it rests in center. Considering the then situation, we would also not hate those who opposed veda-s for whatever reason they did so, afterall truth cannot remain hidden for ever. It will always shine forth through some high souled one and will show us the path to eternity.

With the above discussion we wish to make the world understand that the sanātana-vaidika-dharma has always been friendly to men and women equally. Assuming different role does not mean inequality. In ancient India people enjoyed equal rights whether they were men or women. There were no support for rapes; there were no support for molestations in our scriptures. Our scriptures talk against such heinous crimes.

We do not wish to cover the crimes against women or in general crime against any individual, still it is our duty to present facts so that the transformation in the hearts and minds of laymen can be achieving without abusing our veda-s and discarding them as impractical orthodox, primitive practice of medieval age. There is no need to discard them, worst hate our SAstra-s. This is our intention.

Women – whatever relation they may come up into our lives – they are adorable in all those forms and relations. As a mother she is venerable, as a sister she is full of affection, and as a wife she is the support of a man’s life just like a backbone and as a daughter, she is our greatest wealth, our very heart.

People do not have enough learnings of scriptures and yet they dare to question our exalted religion. Those who speak against Hinduism calling it as a backward religion or good for nothing – they haven’t even read one scripture fully. Those who question the religion calling the practices like dowry system, and sati-method as a part of the compulsory religion – they in reality are not even aware of the names of the scriptures of our religion, let alone reading one of them.

Hinduism is the greatest revolution that exists on this Earth for ages. It is the one religion where women as well as men have their independence secured while they engage themselves in mutual inter-dependence.

32. Types of Marriages in Hindu Dharma

Note: *This article is a reproduction of original article said by Kanchi Paramacharya Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati Mahaswamigal. This article can be found [here](#). Author’s Comments are in Italics marked as a ‘Note’*

The article is not written in transliteration.

The dharmasastras, including the Manusmrti, mention eight forms of marriage.

*Brahmo-daivastathaivarsah
prajapatya-statha 'surah
Gandharvo raksasascaiva
Paisavastamah smrtah
---Manusmrti, 3. 21*

The eight types are: brahma, daiva, arsa, prajapatya, asura, gandharva, raksasa and paisaca.

1. brahma

After the student bachelor has completed his gurukulavasa, his parents approach the parents of a girl belonging to a good family and ask them to give away their daughter in marriage to their son--to make a gift of their daughter (kanyadana) to him. A marriage arranged like this is brahma. In it this girl's family does not give any dowry or jewellery to the boy's family. There is no "commercial transaction" and the goal of a brahma marriage is the dharmic advancement of two families. Of the eight forms of marriage the dharmasastras regard this as the highest.

Note: *After marriage, both groom and bride do not sleep together, nor does the bride stay in her husband's house. Both sleep in separate rooms or with their parents and return home to continue their studies. Grooms is still a brahmachari and will remain so until he has completed learning veda-s. Until then, the age of groom (and bride) might be around 22-25 years. There is no communication between them. After completing the studies and visiting holy places like Gaya Groom now rightfully asks for his bride and his In-Laws happily hand her over them him as now he is considered capable to handle family responsibilities*

In later period when gurukul culture collapsed, still bride-groom did not stay together and had few communications that too on religious occasions.

Child Bride is not handed over to in-laws immediately after the beginning of menstrual period. Beginning of Menstrual Cycle (MC) is surely a sign of maturity, but beginning of MC does not mean that a girl is fully matured and capable of conception. It is just beginning of transformation in girl's body. It takes years to complete this transformation like opening or widening of vaginal track, proper development of Mammary glands and breasts, etc. According to Modern Medical Science, once ovulation and menstruation begin, the maturing of the breasts begins with the formation of

secretory glands at the end of the milk ducts. The breasts and duct system continue to grow and mature, with the development of many glands and lobules. The rate at which breasts grow varies greatly and is different for each young woman ([source](#)). Hence it is erroneous to immediately hand over bride to In-Laws. Nor does a 12 year old bride has emotional and mental maturity to be able to handle family responsibility. Even after collapse of Gurukul system, generally bride is handed over to in-laws after 17-18 years.

Pre-mature sex and conception (fertilisation) is one of the main reasons of death of young girls of 13-14 years during sex or while giving birth to her child.

2. daiva

Marrying a girl to a rtvik (priest) during a sacrifice is called "daiva". The parents, in this type, after waiting in vain for a young man to turn up and ask for their daughter's hand, go looking for a groom for her in a place where a sacrifice is being conducted. This type of marriage is considered inferior to brahma. In the sastras womanhood is elevated in that it is the groom's family that has to seeking bride for their son.

3. arsa

The third form, "arsa" suggests that it is concerned with the rsis, sages. It seems the marriage of Sukanya to Cyavana Maharsi was of this type. But from the dharmasastras we learn that in arsa the bride is given in exchange for two cows received from the groom. If the term is taken to mean "giving away a girl in marriage to a rsi", we must take it that the girl is married off to an old sage because the parents could not celebrate her marriage according to the brahma rite at the right time. The fact that cows are taken in exchange for the bride shows that the groom does not possess any remarkable qualities. According to the sastras, in marriages of noble kind there is no place for money or anything smacking of a business transaction.

4. prajapatya

In prajapatya there is no trading and kanyadana is a part of it as in the brahma ceremony. But from the name prajapatya it must be inferred that the bride's menarche is imminent and that a child must be begotten soon after the marriage. For this reason the bride's father goes in search of a groom, unlike in the brahma type. The brahma type is a better type of marriage than prajapatya since, in it, the groom's people go seeking a bride who is to be the Grahalaksmi of their household.

5. asura

In the asura type the groom is in no way a match for the girl, but her father or her relatives receive a good deal of money from the man who forces them to marry her to him. In arsa in which cows are given in exchange for the bride there is no compulsion. Nor is the groom wealthy or powerful like his counterpart in the asura type. Many rich men must have taken a second wife according to the asura type of marriage.

6. gandharva

The next is gandharva. The very mention of it calls to mind Sakuntala and Dusyanta. The gandharva type is the "love marriage" that has such enthusiastic support these days.

7. rakshasa

In the raksasa form the groom battles with the girl's family, overcomes them and carries her away. It was in this manner that krsna Paramatman married Rukmini.

8. paisaca

The eighth and last is paisaca. In asura even though the girl's willingness to marry the man is of no consequence, at least her people are given money. In raksasa, though violence is done to the girl's family, the marriage itself is not against her wish. Rukmini loved Krsna, did she not? In paisaca the girl's wish does not count, nor is any money or material given to her parents. She is seized against her wish and her family antagonised.

32.1. Why 8 types of marriages

We have the brahma type at one end and the paisaca at the other. There cannot be the same system or the same arrangement for everybody. Our sastras have taken into account the differences in temperament and attitude among various sections of people and it is in keeping with the same that they have assigned them different rites, vocations, etc. All our present trouble arises from the failure on the part of men, who advocate the same system for all, to recognise this fact.

There are tribals living in the forests who look fierce and have a harsh way of life. But at heart they may be more cultured than townspeople, not to speak of the fact that they are useful to society in many ways. They have frequent family feuds. In consideration of this raksasa and paisava marriages may have to be permitted in their case. After the marriage, they are likely to forget their quarrels and live in peace with each other. Ksatriyas who are physically strong and are used to material pleasure are allowed the gandharva form of marriage and their girls have even the right to choose their husbands as in the svayamvara ceremony.

It is for these reasons that the dharmasastras, which are based on the Vedas and which constitute Hindu law, permit eight forms of marriage. In all these eight, the bride and groom have the right to be united in wedlock with the chanting of mantras. But brahma is the highest of the eight forms. In it the bride must not have attained puberty. "Pradanam prak roth": -- this statement is in the dharmasastras themselves. A girl's marriage, which has same significance for her that the upanayana has for a boy, must be performed when she is seven years old (or eight years from conception)

Unfortunately, in the case of some girls, a groom does not turn up in time for a brahma marriage to be performed. Meanwhile, they grow old and their marriage is conducted in the arsa, daiva, or prajapatya way. Only these types are permitted for Brahmins. But for the rest other types are also allowed. They may marry a girl who has come of age either in the gandharva way or in a svayamvara.

32.2. On Marriage Mantras and right age of marriage

The marriage mantras are intended for all the eight forms. It means that they are employed even in the marriage rite of girls who have attained puberty. The two mantras quoted above are recited in all the eight types of marriage. **They are addressed by the groom to the bride who comes to him after she has attained puberty and after she has been under the guardianship successively of Soma, gandharva and Agni.** The mantras are chanted not only in brahma marriages but also in all other forms. The same are addressed by the groom to his child bride also. **Though his marriage is being solemnised to the child bride now, he will start living with her only after she comes of age, after she becomes a young woman. He will bring her home to live with him only after she has come successively under Soma, gandharva and Agni. So he chants the mantras in advance.**

Nowadays we sometimes perform a number of samskaras together long after they are due according to the sastras. For example, we perform the jatakarma if a son as well as his namakarana and caula during his upanayana when he is 20 or 22 years old and not long before his marriage. Similarly, instead of such postponement of the rites, in the brahma marriage the mantras mentioned above are chanted in advance.

I will give you an example in this context. When the brahmacarin performs the samidadhana he prays before Agni to grant him good children. How absurd would it be for our reformers to argue, on the basis of this prayer, that a young boy must have children when he is yet a celibate-student and that he may become a householder only later. The point to note is that the boy prays on advance for good children. The Vedic mantras cited by reformers must be seen in the same light.

The mantras [quoted by reformers] are appropriate for the marriage of a girl who has come of age also.

This is our reply to the school of opinion represented by the Rt Hon'ble Srinivasa Sastri. If the mantras in question are chanted at the time of the marriage of girls who have come of age, it does not mean that all marriages are to be celebrated after the girls have attained puberty. According to the brahma form of marriage, the girl must not have had her menarche. There is incontrovertible proof for this in the Vedic mantra chanted at the end of the marriage rite.

I told that a girl is under the sway of a gandharva between the time she is able to wear her clothes without anybody's help and her menarche. His name is Visvvasu. The mantra I referred to is chanted by the groom addressing this demigod. "o Visvasu, " it says, " I bow to you. Leave this girl and go. Go to another girl child. Have I not become the husband of this girl? So give her over to me and go to another girl who is not married and lives with her father. " During the wedding the groom performs a puja to this gandharva and prays to him to free the girl from his control. Here is proof that the bride is not under Agni and has not had her menarche.

The question now is about the verse (from the Manusmrti) cited by the reformists. According to it, a girl may wait three years after her menarche and then seek her husband on her own.

There is an answer to this. The general rule according to the dharmasastras is that a girl must be married before she attains puberty: "Pradanam prak roth. " What happens if this injunction is not followed? If groom does not come on his own, seeking the girl's hand, her father or brother must look for a groom and marry her off. But if they turn out to be irresponsible or otherwise fail to find a groom? Or if the girl has no guardian, no one to care for her? The lines quoted by the reformers from the Manusmrti apply to such a girl. She may look for a husband on her if none of her relatives, neighbours or well-wishers take the trouble of finding her a groom even after she has attained puberty.

Though the reformists quote from the Vedas and sastras in support of their view, they fail to take into account the context in which the relevant passages occur. They see them in isolation. That is why they keep arguing that the customs followed by people steeped in our traditions are contrary to the sastras.

In the Chandogya Upanisad there is mention of a sage called Cakrayana Usasti whose wife had not come of age. The reformists do not examine such references in our ancient texts with a cool head but are carried away by their emotions.

In the past the common people did not know how to counter the arguments of the reformists. Even so they did not accept their views thinking it best to follow the practices of their elders, of great men. That is why the bill brought twice by the Rt Hon'ble Srinivasa sastri before the legislative council to amend the marriage act (with reference to the age of marriage) did not receive enough support. Later (Harbilas) Sarada introduced the bill which [on its passage] came to be called the Sarada Act. Many people (in the South) think Sarada was a woman and call the law named after him the "Sarada Act". The Central legislative assembly was equally divided on the bill -- 50 percent for and 50 per cent against. Then the British asked one of the nominated members to vote in favour of the bill; and thus the minimum age of marriage for girls was raised by a legal enactment. The bill was passed not on the strength of public opinion but because of the government's intervention. The mind of our British rulers worked thus: "The Congress has been demanding svaraj but we have refused to grant it. Let us give it some satisfaction by being of help in inflicting an injury on the (Hindu) religion. "

Now things have changed. There is no respect any longer for old customs and traditions. When the Sarada Act came into force in British India, some Sanskrit scholars returned the "Mahamahopadhyaya" title conferred on them by the government. Among them were Pancanana Tarkaratna Bhattacharya of Bengal and Lakshmana Sastri Dravid. The latter was settled in Kasi and had the "Dravid" tagged on to his name to make it known that he belonged to the land of the Tamils. How many people today are inspired to rise in protest against the changes introduced by our government in our sastric observances.

Our children must be taught the substance and meaning of the sastras in a comprehensive manner. To speak to them about one aspect here and another there will lead to a haphazard and confused view. The half-baked research carried on in the Vedas has given rise to the opinion that the scriptures favour love marriage. The canonical texts must be seen in their entirety. When a subject is examined, its underlying meaning and purpose must be grasped. Also they must be seen in the light of other relevant passages occurring elsewhere. A conclusion must be arrived at only after a thorough inquiry into all points.

The brahma marriage is for all castes. Other forms of marriage are also permitted for non-Brahmins, also post-puberty marriage. If the idea is to give importance to carnal pleasure these other forms may be permitted. But **brahma is the best if the purpose of the marriage samskara is the advancement of the Self.**

33. Nonviolence and Vegetarianism

Nonviolence is prescribed to be practised physically and mentally. Vegetarian food is prescribed for those who wish to progress spiritually.

33.1. Non-Violence (अहिंसा)

Non-violence was always practiced and encouraged in Hinduism. Non-violence is not to be taken in literal way. It is an attempt to be as much non-violent in actions, thoughts and emotions. Only Atman is truly non-violent as it attaches with no one. One can be non-violent when one detaches oneself from body mind, intellect and ego. It is identification with the body and all that is non-Self that is responsible for all types of violence, physical or mental. Hence, Non-violence is a journey beginning from dis-identification of Self with the body and mind and ends up in total detached state which is Brahman, a state beyond all three guNa-s - sattva, rajas and tamasa.

33.1.1. Why does violence cease to exist in state of enlightenment?

Brahman or Atman is beyond three guNas- and so it is beyond mAyA. All that we experience is because of mAyA. Our attachment with non-Self is because of mAyA.

One can only be enlightened when one has renounced attachment towards worldly objects, both external (physical) and internal (mental, desire to acquire them). Hence mind does not long for objects. An introvert mind is satisfied. yogi-s and advanced meditators live a simple life with very few necessities.

An enlightened yogi feels intense bliss, deep peace, has a sense of contentment, and feels completeness. Such a yogi does not need anything from the outside world or from heaven, but remains merged into the Blissful immortal brahman.

For advanced meditators, every thought or desire itself is violence, as it produces ripples in steady consciousness and tries to trap the infinite consciousness into thought process and desire to achieve them. If such is the case of a sAdhaka, who has not yet realised, then what can be said about GYAni, an enlightened soul, who is permanently merged into Brahman? Definitely violence cease to exist in the supreme state of Enlightenment.

33.1.2. Why does mind give violent reactions?

Because it does not get what it wants or longs for. Hence either it is a quest to conquer, achieve or it is the frustration of failure to achieve the desired object that brings violent reactions.

33.1.3. Why does mind long?

Atman empowers mind and it itself shines (reflects) from within mind. Searching for happiness is our basic longing. It is not wrong to desire for happiness. What is wrong is to search it outside when it is inside says Sri Ramana Maharshi. After achieving that is desired, we feel happy. Everyone, whether one believes in spirituality or not is longing for this happiness. Our entire life is nothing but search for this truth. We try to find it in a person or an object and try to achieve it. Since it is our own wish, we use our will and put in our efforts ... and the vicious cycle of action and reaction, karma and it's fruits keeps rolling ... and one is trapped in the cycle of birth and death. So instead of returning back to the source of mind, which is Atman, 'I', we search 'I' outside mind and body.

So the cause of violence is -

To search for happiness out us in worldly objects or person and Making efforts to achieve it and get frustrated if it is not achieved.

One may take violence as an act of physical abuse. But in reality, in subtler plane, violence is found even in trivial actions like making efforts. It is violence when it is compared with the eternally peaceful and blissful state of non-activity.

**So why does a person resort to violence -
The answer is: Ignorance of our True nature.**

So to return to our true nature, what should be done?

Now we enter into the spiritual world, the path of renunciation and dis-identification. We may have the will, but not the temperament and mental purity to apply the teachings of vedAnta in our life. One cannot simply stop expectations and reactions. Hence we begin with purifying our mind so that one day we can practice detachment with correct understanding.

The path of purification begins with doing social service and surrendering fruits of work to God. We can go one step further to surrender our actions too to God and keep praying to show him a direction and the path that best suits you. We can add bhakti to get emotionally attached to God. Upon right time, God will himself guide you either directly or through a Guru. After this phase, just like a prey cannot escape from clutches of a lion, so does a student does not escape from the clutches of Guru. He (his spiritual progress) is under the control of Guru and constantly benefits from his Guru's grace.

Till now, we were talking about violence from spiritual POV, now lets turn towards practical side of 'violence'

33.1.4. Practical side of non-violence

Non-violence is a necessity for sages who have renounced the world. For a person living in society, one has to follow smriti-s too, which are moral and ethical codes. Like the parASara smriti, often called as the smriti that is suitable to kaliyuga (refer to sloka-s 1-25 of parASara smriti) says that you should be careful while donating something. Take care that the person is of good natured, else our money or stuff can be used for wrong purposes. Even the celebrated Manu smriti 8.350 says that a king can kill anti-social elements like murderer and rapist either in secret or in public. For this king incurs no sin. Sin is uncured when King does not kill him.

Our SAstra-s teach us to rise against injustice, to keep fighting till last drop of blood. All devatA-s except bhagavAn brahmA ji are equipped with weapons. SAstra-s do not teach us to be cowards. Teachings of vedAnta are not to be confused that it should be applied by all. vedAnta is not for all. It is only for those high souls you have purified their mind by lots of good karma and intense meditations in this life or in previous lives. We have a dedicated SAstra 'dhanurveda' for training men in martial arts.

You may have heard about animal sacrifices in SAstra-s. Please Kanchi Paramacharya's response on these issues

<http://www.kamakoti.org/hindudharma/part5/chap23.htm>

<http://www.kamakoti.org/hindudharma/part5/chap24.htm>

<http://www.kamakoti.org/hindudharma/part19/chap6.htm>

33.2. A False Practical Perspective - Violence can only be won by Non-violence

There is a popular notion that '*Violence can only be won by Non-violence*'. The answer is both true and false. The answer is true from mental or spiritual POV and false from Practical POV We will have to understand both approaches.

Mental / spiritual approach

The approach of countering violence with nonviolence is very effective way on personal level. When violent thoughts enter into mind, a sAdhaka (disciple) is taught to counter it by non-violent way. The approach is to stay as a witness, by not letting thoughts and emotions influence your mind and force you to act in a violent way. Any person's opinion is his/her opinion and cannot influence you. Only if and when you start thinking on it, **other's thoughts now becomes your thought.** If you get involved in violent thoughts you are adding fuel to the fire and keep it burning. Hence first, the thought should be identified and our conscience will help identify it. Next, firm decision must be taken as not to get influenced by it. To reduce influence of thoughts and uproot them, one must detach himself from such thoughts and let it pass by. Silently and peacefully surrender yourself to God and thoughts in some time will lose strength. This is meditative approach which only few practice.

Remember, you and only you can practice meditation. Only you can detach yourself from thoughts and not let them influence you.

Practical Approach

On practical grounds, the case is completely different. Here, a violent person's conscience does not stop him or he does not listen to his own conscience. Hence his mind allows 'the act of violence'. How can other person help such a person unless that person himself decides to change his approach and decides to act against his violent tendencies.

The issue today is topsy turvy when religion is taken into account. While eastern dharmic religions prefer and advocate meditative approach, some religious preachers of Islam teach violence as they core duty. Again the intention behind violence is not noble, it is destructive in nature.

A wrong deed does not become right deed when you do it by pledging belief in a particular saviour.

Our dharma shAstra-s teach us to fight injustice. Be it manusmriti or mahAbhArata or rAmAyaNa. Which for of God did not lift weapons to fight for justice? Even Lord brahmA ji when angry will project a rudra form his forehead and a rudra will destroy the wrong doers. Even female forms like mA kAlI and mA dUrgA held weapons.

Our ancestors kept fighting with mughals and muslim rulers. Two advaita AchArya-s sAyanAchArya and vidyAraNaya svAmI encouraged both of them, reconverted Hukka and Bukka to Hinduism. Both brother fought muslims and won back large part of kingdom known as Vijaynagar, which lasted for 350 years. This kingdom was larger than any muslim kingdom.

Some say that Britishers could no longer withstand the onslaught and the increasing influence of Shri Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on youngsters and Indian soldiers in Royal British Army. Indian Soldiers refused to attack their fellow Indians and the war of freedom was won.

Like you said, Shri Guru Govind Singh ji and Shri Tek Bahadur Singh ji along with other brave sikhs dedicated their to fight Muslim invaders.

If you do not fight back, enemy gets impression that we are weak.

Chanakya was also of the opinion of 'eye for an eye' approach.

Peace Talks - things to consider to make it succesful

Likewise, when we talk of 'peace talks', they are only possible when both parties wish to genuinely solve the issue by debating on it. Both parties have to be optimists, be receptive and open to all suggestions. For this they must have a calm mind. If one party is not ready to compromise and not ready to listen i.e. is not receptive, there can be no peace talk.

29.2. Vegetarianism (शाकाहारी भोजन)

Our journey is from individuality to totality. In order to progress spiritually, we have to turn our extrovert mind introvert. For doing this, one has to have dispassion in worldly matters and objects. Only a sAttvika mind can turn introvert, as rajas is for activity, power and glory and an active person, who is attached with his actions is always extrovert. tamasa guNa is connected with laziness, inertia, ignorance, revengeful attitude.

It is due to these qualities that Veg food is recommended, as it contains more of sattva and rajas guNa tamasa. Fruits contain more sattva than rajas.. They are light to digest. Underground food is not prescribed in Jains and even by vaiShnava-s as it has tamas guNa. It is said that 'food makes up mind' and hence, it is prescribed to saints to have a light sAttvika food.

33.2.1. No Central nervous system

Plants do not have central nervous system, though they have feelings and have life. They have a guNa of paropkAra (benevolence). In ancient days, saints used to pray to plants to have fruits and plants used to respond to their prayers. Saints used to pray to herbal plants to show their guNa-s (healing qualities). Some say, this is how Ayurveda was developed. Besides, we do not destroy the whole plant, but just pluck flowers, fruits and other vegetables. If we do not pluck fruits or grains, then open ripening they drop automatically. Do we feel pain when we trim our hair and nails? Aren't they part of our body?

33.2.2. Leaves and Branches

Leaves, and branches grow back. Leaves have their own lifespan. They turn yellow and dry. They detach and fall off from trees. Similarly branches or small stems turn dry and fall off. Even if one does not harm tree, some branches fall off on their own. In coconut trees, heavy branches good enough to break our skulls or cause fracture, fall by themselves. This indicates that trees do not die when a leaves or stems are torn out. However, if you axe branches that are green, then wise say that trees do not like it. They emit vibrations which other trees catch. Birds sittings on trees also catch these vibrations and get nervous, especially those birds who have build nests on nearby trees.

33.2.3. Underground Food

The damage is done when we uproot plants and take their roots like onion, etc. Here too the plants are not deliberately destroyed. When they've finished developing, you'll notice the lowest leaves start to yellow and wither. Shortly after, the stems will flop over at the neck, as if all your plants had just died. Hence even if we do not uproot them, plants are still going to die.

Still since they grow underground, they are said to have more of tamasa guNa.

The peculiarity of tamasa guNa is strong smell which we see in onions and garlic. Even garlic can be taken in small quantities for medicinal purpose. Many Herbs are grown underground.

You may be attracted by the smell of Pav Bhaji, but you will never be attracted by the smell of any fruits. You will eat fruits only that is necessary, which is not the case with other foods. If it is your favourite delicacy, you will eat more. This attraction and bias is keeps mond extrovert, while fruits do not increase our extrovert tendencies as they do not attract us in a way other delicacies do.

Hence, for spiritual aspirants, sAttvika food is recommended which is light, easy to digest, causes less harm to others and purifies our mind. The energy saved in digesting food can be used for spiritual purposes.

33.2.4. Trees wants us to eat fruits

Another argument is that plants also feel pain. This is true and SD has recognised this long before modern medical science did. However, there is a reason for plants and trees growing flowers and fruits. The reason is to multiply, to increase the number of trees. It is the same desire that is in every living being. Flowers have pollens. The pollens from male part needs to be transported to female stigma. The process of transfer is called as pollination. Since plants cannot move on their own to satisfy their mating desire, they need to get it done through someone else. Hence flowers look beautiful, their colour, shape and aroma are very attractive. Insects gets attracted to it and sit on it and in process pollens are stuck to insects. When insect reaches another flower, pollens get deposited to another flower and the process of pollination is completed. In the same way, fruits have seeds. When any animal eats fruits or vegetables and drops seed on ground, if they fall on suitable land, seed will one day grow to a big tree. Hence plants wants us to eat fruits. It is their way of multiplying. Hence the argument that plants have feelings too and so we should not eat fruits and vegetables seems unwise.

33.2.5. Deforestation

Deforestation is the main issue. Increasing, uncontrolled human population, no care of environment by us and our 'lavish' lifestyles are responsible for deforestation disturbing the whole ecosystem. shAstra-s and Hindu culture teach us to live in modesty. SD does not encourage negative qualities like greed, selfishness, uncaring attitude, etc which are responsible for all the mess stealing the natural habitat of animals, birds and insects. Hence

living dhArmic life is always better. We must keep our ever-demanding mind in check. SD teaches us how should we keep a check on our mind and live in harmony with nature.

33.2.6. Why should not we eat meat

Mineral kingdom i.e. rocks have consciousness (read somewhere in Sankara bhASya, mostly in viShNu sahasranAma bhASya), but this consciousness is in raw form and often they have to wait for many years or even kalpa to ascend to higher state of consciousness. Animals are more evolved than plants. No animal is willing to give away his life for taste of tongue. When any animal e.g. chicken knows that it's going to die, it is in state of depression and hopelessness. The emotions like pain of separation from body on account of death is too much and wish to live i.e. unwillingness to die, are all embedded in the energy or emotional body of animal. We cook and eat these emotionally diseased bodies. Emotions are tAmasika in nature and hence they will increase tamasa guNa of mind. So mind does not get purified. One yoga student who used to eat non-veg was initiated into higher practice after warning to quit non-veg. He didn't quit eating non-veg. After sometime, burns appeared in his skin.

yogi-s say, that meat eating clogs mind.

33.2.6.1. Is eating meat permitted?

Eating Meat is permitted in certain conditions. Human survival is more important than following shAstra-s. There are factors which are beyond our control like natural calamities like earthquake, floods, barren, non-fertile land.

In such cases, which are called as ApAta sthiti (emergency situation), normal rules are not applicable. dharma cannot be rigid and non-practical.

Meat eating is permissible where the land is not fertile and there is no vegetation. West bengal is flooded for 6 months. There is no chance for any vegetation for 6 months. Hence Bengalis eat Fish with rice. It is their staple diet. Bengalis do not consider fish as non-veg.

33.2.6.2. The common argument

If one argues that there is no difference in 'killing' either plants or animals, then we would like to ask them why they condemn cannibalism. Carnivorous animals avoid eating other carnivorous animals.

33.3. Vegetarianism - Scientific Perspective

Vegetarianism has many advantages. Scientists, doctors and economists are favouring vegetarianism. Many papers are published in support of this claim.

In technical terms being 'vegetarian' excludes consuming, milk and milk products and eggs. Better word would be 'Lacto-vegetarian'.

Scientific studies have concluded that human body is not created to eat meat. Humans have adopted

Some of the advantages of being vegetarian are

1. Longer lifespan
2. Human body is not designed to eat (and digest) raw meat.
3. Lower chance of heart diseases
4. Reduce risk of colon cancer. Undigested meat remains stuck on intestine walls for 3-4 days and sometimes for months.
5. Live healthy life. Veg food is rich in minerals and vitamins.
6. More stamina and energy
7. Economical.
8. Meat industry one of the factors in global warming.
9. *and more*

There are several theories put forward to support claim that Human Body is not designed to eat meat. Lots of information is available on internet showing advantages of vegetarianism. We will write them in brief

1. No sharp and strong claws
2. Meat-eaters have no skin pores and perspire through the tongue
3. Canines in Humans are for name sake only. Even Omnivorous animals like Monkeys have longer and stronger canines than humans. Molar teeth for grinding are absent.
4. Humans have intestinal tract 10-12 times their body length while carnivorous animals have only 3 times their body length.
5. Carnivorous animals eat meat raw and have a desire to hunt animals and get attracted to the dead body, while humans do not have hunting desire.
6. Hydrochloric acid in stomach to digest food is 20 times stronger in case of meat eating animals.
7. Salivary Glands are not needed to digest food in case of carnivorous, while humans and herbivorous animals have well developed salivary glands.

8. Meat-eaters have acid saliva with no enzyme ptyalin to pre-digest grains while Humans like Herbivores have alkaline saliva with ptyalin to pre-digest grains.

Source: <http://www.celestialhealing.net/physicalveg3.htm>

Original Source: Based on a chart by A.D. Andrews, Fit Food for Men, (Chicago: American Hygiene Society, 1970)

Here is one more article explaining dangers of eating meat

“You are what you eat”, is a slogan that I love to use to show the mental aspect of vegetarianism. When animals are slaughtered, fear and aggression enzymes are shot into their cells from their glands and other organs, just as in humans, and are part of the dead carcass that goes on to the food store. They remain in the meat until the consumer ingests those same enzymes, which are molecularly very similar to those found in humans. Fruits and vegetables do not have emotions; therefore, when they are picked they do not release any emotions cells prior to digestion. The enzymes within fruits and vegetables supply the body with sufficient nutrients that will always uphold a healthy state of mind.

Fruits and vegetables are high in nutrients; the very thing the body needs to live a long disease and pain free life. The same cannot be said for meat. Nutritionally, the alkaline-based digestive system of humans will not properly break down substantial acid substances, the greatest of which is meat.

Source: <http://www.oco.org/the-many-advantages-of-vegetarianism/>

34. Acharya, guru, bhakta, svAml (Master)

In SD, there are four different types of teachers.

1. AchArya-s
2. svAml (master)
3. bhakta-s
4. guru-s

34.1. AchArya

The word 'AchArya' is derived from the word 'AcharaNa' meaning 'behaviour' or 'conduct'. Hence an AchArya is the one who teaches not only the shAstra-s but by setting an example of his own 'way of life'. Another meaning of the word 'AchArya' is 'the one who purifies (the surrounding, hearts of people) by his own conduct.'

Acharya-s are those who follow traditional teaching, traditional way of life and are proficient in their philosophical school of thought. An Acharya is expected to be capable to defend his own sampradAya.

An Acharya need not be Self Realized.

34.2. svAml (Master)

svAml is a term used to address a monk. He may or may not be realised. A svAml may be a master, a teacher or an advanced student. Fresh renunciates are called as brahmachAri-s.

34.3. bhakta saints or rasika sant

bhakta-s saints are great God-intoxicated devotee saints of the Lord who are immersed in ISvara bhakti. Some like Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa have an extremely rare capacity to awaken the sleeping 'spirituality' of a laymen (be him an atheist) by just touching him / her. They care for none but God and keep singing the beloved Lord's name and glories wherever they go thereby spreading spiritual love of God and igniting the hearts of whomsoever who is in vicinity. Their soul-stirring bhajan-s (song dedicated to the beloved Lord) often cross boundaries of sampradAya (philosophical schools) and fills one with devotion. Their heart overflows with divine love for God. when in ecstasy, tears of joy rolls down cheeks and in getting astonished by Lord Glory and his lila (his divine sport), their hairs stand on ends. Love, the strongest and subtlest of energies has become their very nature. They constantly long for God and pray, beg him to be ever present and give a place to 'this insignificant creature' at his lotus feet. Words fell short of their glories.

34.4. guru

Since 'guru' is very important in SD, it is taken as separate topic. However, we will describe guru in brief and how a guru differs from Acharya and bhakt saints.

'guru' is the one who has realized his true nature, which is brahman and permanently abides in it. The supreme state of Self Realization is his natural state.

guru adheres to no single siddhanta. A guru can initiate any one in dvaita, advaita, yoga or give mantra dikshA of rAma, kruShNa, Siva or any other form of God to anyone. A saint and AchArya can only give initiation in their own siddhAnta and mantra dikshA (initiation by giving mantra) of his own ISTa devatA, but a guru has no such restriction.

bhagavAn in gltA (BG 7.16-18) says that a GYAnI is his very AtmA meaning a GYAnI bhakt (devotee) is the most dear to him.

guru is extremely powerful. S/he can initiate or give updesha anyone by mere look, by touch or even by wish. There is no limit to the power of a guru as God himself acts through him. His silence is the most powerful of all, capable of lifting the deserving soul to the ultimate state of enlightenment. The glory of param guru (simply called as guru) is unexplainable. They are the living power of God and the living vedAnta. guru is the knowledge himself. There is no doubt about him. A guru can grant moksha to even an ant or an animal, as in case of Sri Ramana Maharshi giving moksha to Laxmi, the cow, a crow and his mother even if the disciple has not practised intense meditation. It is said that a man can escape from the clutches of a crocodile or a tiger, but not from the clutches of a guru. Such a blessed soul is bound to get enlightened as God has himself chosen the soul to reach to him through his instrument, a guru. A guru is a medium, an agent between a devotee and God.

35. guru

Note: *The article is not completely written in transliteration, specially verses quoted from guru gltA. Hence you will find guru written as Guru and pArvatI written as Parvati. As and when time permits, we will replace sanskrit words with correct spelling.*

'guru' has many meanings as given in guru gltA. A guru is not different than conscious Self, Brahman. Guru is the remover of sorrows and ignorance. 'guru' in guru gltA is not the person (except in some verses), but formless Brahman itself. Hence meditating on guru means meditating on brahman. guru and Siva are one. Real nature of Siva is formless. Brahman is also formless. 'guru' has to be understood as 'guru tatva', who is formless and this supreme tatva (or state of consciousness) manifests through a body to guide us to our own Self, Brahman.

'guru' is the one who has realized his true nature, which is brahman and permanently abides in it. The supreme state of Self Realization is his natural state. While staying in advaita sthiti

Or, who can know the true greatness of the Raja Yoga. Knowledge, mukti, condition, and Siddhîs can be learnt by instructions from a *gurû* alone. 8.

दुर्लभो विष्णय-तयागो दुर्लभं तत्त्व-दर्शनम् |
दुर्लभा सहजावस्था सद-गुरोः करुणां विना || ९ ||
durlabho viṣhaya-tyāgho durlabham tattva-darśanam |
durlabhā sahajāvasthā sad-ghuroḥ karuṇām vinā || 9 ||

Indifference to worldly enjoyments is very difficult to obtain, and equally difficult is the knowledge of the Realities to obtain. It is very difficult to get the condition of Samâdhi, without the favour of a true *guru*.

[Source and Credits](#)

guru gltA is a scripture exclusively dedicated to 'guru'. This shows the importance of the role of guru in spirituality. Please find some verses from guru gltA describing 'guru'

35.1. Meaning of the word 'guru'

The Guru is not different from the conscious Self. Without doubt, this is the truth; therefore wise men should make an effort to seek knowledge of Atman from Him. (22)

The hidden ignorance, absence of the Knowledge of Self, the world, Maya, the body are all caused by ignorance (Ajnana). By whose grace one attains direct Knowledge of the Self he is known by the name Guru. (23)

The syllable "Gu" is the darkness and the syllable "Ru" is said to be light. There is no doubt that the Guru is indeed the Supreme Knowledge that dispels (the darkness of) ignorance. (33)

"Gu" Kara means the darkness and "Ru" Kara means the remover of the darkness. On account of the power of removing darkness, the teacher is known by the significant name "Guru". (34)

The letter "Gu" denotes that He is beyond the three Gunas and "Ru" denotes that He is beyond forms. Because He is free from Gunas and forms, He is called the Guru. (35)

The first syllable "Gu" represents the principles such as maya and the second syllable "Ru" the supreme knowledge that destroys the illusions of maya. (36)

The syllable "Gu" is that which transcends all attributes, and the syllable "Ru" is that which is without form. The Guru is said to be the one who bestows the state that is beyond attributes (and form). (45)

O dear, Guru is the Shiva without three eyes; He is the Lord Vishnu with two hands. He is again Brahma with one face. (46)

I prostrate myself before that Guru, the Bliss of Brahman, the bestower of Supreme Happiness, who is Knowledge absolute, transcending the pairs of opposites, expansive like the sky, the goal indicated by the great sayings like “Thou art That”, the one eternal, pure, unchanging, the witness of functions of the intellect, who is above all Bhavas (mental conditions) and the three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas). (51,52)

The Guru is one who instructs the disciple about attributeless, eternal Brahman, and there by reveals the Brahmanbhava (feeling of being Brahman) in his heart just like one lamp kindles another lamp is the Guru. (73)

Please find some selected quotes from Guru Gita.

35.2. Who is Guru?

The Guru is not different from the conscious Self. Without doubt, this is the truth; therefore wise men should make an effort to seek knowledge of Atman from Him. (22)

The Guru is one who instructs the disciple about attributeless, eternal Brahman, and thereby reveals the *brahmabhAva* (feeling of being Brahman) in his heart just like one lamp kindles another lamp is the Guru. (75)

35.3. guru is brahman, not person

Lord Shiva says to Parvati, “I shall tell you, the state of consciousness that arises in the heart when the consciousness personified Purusha of the size of the thumb is meditated upon in the heart.” (76)

“I am unborn. I am deathless. I am beginningless. I am endless. I am changeless. I am consciousness and Bliss. I am the smallest of the small. I am the greatest of the great.” (77)

There is none prior to me and none later. I am eternal. I am self illumined. I am diseaseless. I am ever pure. I am the eternal Akasha. I am without the least movement, am Bliss imperishable. (78)

O Parvati, **Brahman is the unseen incomprehensible, without name and form and inexpressible by word or speech directly. This is the very nature of the Brahman.** Know it thus. (79)

35.4. Real sanyAsin-s

They who understand the meaning of the great sayings (mahAvAkya) by doing service of the guru are real sanyAsi-s. The others are mere wearers of the ochre coloured dress. (72)

According to guru gltA, there are **seven types of guru-s.**

35.5. Types of guru-s

guru-s are of many types with different capacities. They are known by names, Suchaka etc. The intelligent one should know and test for himself and seek refuge in the one who is established in Self-Knowledge. (165)

sUchaka guru

The “sUchaka” guru is one who is well-versed (well-educated) and has mastery over atleast one external worldly science. (166) i.e. he has a Mastery over anyone science or art. e.g management Guru.

vAchaka guru

O Parvati, know the instructor of the duties of the different castes and orders (varNa and Ashram), dharma, adharma, etc. to be of the “vAchaka” type. (167)

bodhaka guru

The guru who initiates the disciple into the five lettered mantra etc., O Parvati, he is of the “bodhaka” type and he is superior to the vAchaka and sUchaka types named above. (168)

niShiddha guru

The guru who initiates one into the lower types of vidyA-s, like mohana, mAraNa, vashya etc. is called by the name of “niShiddha” guru (prohibited Guru). (169)

vihita guru

“The samsAra is transitory and an abode of calamities”- Viewing thus the world which is an abode of miseries, this guru shows the path leading to vairAGYa (dispassion), is known as the “vihita” guru. (170)

kAraNAkhya guru

The guru who initiates the disciple into mahAvAkya, tattvamasi - तत्त्वमसि (तु त्वमसि) (Thou are that) etc. O pArvati, he is called the “kAraNAkhya” guru. He is the remover of the disease of this mundane world. (171)

parama guru, the Supreme guru

He, who is expert in total removal of all types of doubts, and who removes the fear of birth and death, is considered to be the “parama” guru. (The Supreme Guru) (172)

One gets such a Supreme guru as a result of merits acquired in many births. Having attained such a guru, the disciple never falls prey to bonds to samsAra, he is liberated forever. (173)

parama guru is the best

O pArvati, there are in the world thus many kinds of guru-s, of all these, one should by all means and efforts, serve the param guru. (174)

Let us summarize these Seven Types of Gurus

sUchaka guru	Mastery over any one science or art. e.g. management Guru, Mastery in Healing, Mastey in martial arts & war tactics (dhanurveda), etc.
vAchaka guru	Initiates one into spirituality by giving a Diksha Mantra, which transforms the life of the Diksha Receiving Person.
bodhaka guru	Gives instructions related to caste, creed, religion.
nishiddha guru	Prohibited Guru. Invokes God’s Secret powers for personal benefit or with evil intention.
vihita guru	Shows Vairagya (Dispassion) in Society
kAraNAkhya guru	Guru who gives Sanyasa Diksha (initiates disciple into Monkhood). He is the remover of the disease of this mundane world.
param guru	Dispeller of doubts, removes the fear of birth and death is

	considered to be the “Param Guru”. (The Supreme Guru) i.e. one who teaches and shows the path of Liberation (moksha). (172)
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35.6. Glories / Praises of Param Guru (often called as Sadguru)

Just as the ocean is the king of waters, the Param Guru is the King among Gurus. (179)

A Param Guru is free from attachment, etc; peaceful, always contented in Himself, independent, and one who considers the status of Brahma and Vishnu like a blade of grass. (180)

One who is independent at all times and places, who possess an unshakable mind and always blissful, who experiences the homogenous essence of the Self, such a one is the Param Guru. (181)

One who is free from the feeling of duality and non-duality, who shines by the light of His self-realization, who is able to destroy the deep darkness of ignorance, and is omniscient, He is a Param Guru. (182)

By whose mere Darshan (look with devotion), one attains calmness, cheerfulness, and peace and steadfastness, and peace of mind, such a one is Param Guru. (183)

One who looks upon his own body as a corpse, and his Self as the non-dual Brahman, and who has killed the infatuation for wealth and women, such a person is a Param Guru. (184)

35.6.1. Sadguru, the only Saviour

Family traditions, wealth, strength, shastras, relatives, brothers, - none of these are useful to you at the time of death. Satguru is the only saviour. (188)
Always be the servant of Sadguru

At all times and under all conditions one should feel the non duality of the Self but one should never have this feeling with his Guru. (62)

35.6.2. Prayer and Salutation to Param Guru

Prostrations to Brahman, the unthinkable, the unmanifest, beyond the three Gunas(Sattva,Rajas & Tamas qualities of Nature) yet the Self of Gunas, the Substratum behind the whole universe.(1)

By whose grace that one realizes "I am everything, everything is superimposed in me, I offer my salutations and worship to my self-realised Satguru's lotus feet. (215)

O Lord, by the gift of the light of knowledge, may Thy blessings be bestowed on me, whose eyes are covered by the cataracts of ignorance, and whose mind is captured by sense pleasure. (216)

35.7. How to behave in front of a guru

Wise disciples should never speak egoistically and should never tell a lie before the Guru. (60)

At all times and under all conditions one should feel the non duality of the Self but one should never have this feeling with his Guru. (62)

When the Guru is present one should never give teaching to others. If one does so, one becomes a demon. (65)

When the Guru is present one should not intoxicate himself or waste time in the Guru's ashram. It is prohibited to initiate disciples, give lectures, show off and order the Guru in the Guru's ashram. (66)

One should not stretch legs in the front of the Guru, nor indulge in personal luxuries, nor gratify the senses. (67)

One should never ignore the words of the Guru, be it just or unjust. Carrying out his behests, one should live, day and night like a servant, with the Guru. (68)

One should never enjoy the wealth not given by the Guru. Those which are given by Him, one should enjoy like a servant. One may thereby attain vital force. (69)

Sandals, seats, beds etc; and the other articles used by the Guru should never be touched by one's feet. One should prostrate to the articles used by the Guru. (70)

While the Guru walks, the disciples should follow him. He should never cross the Guru's shadow. He should not wear precious dress, ornaments etc. (71)

On the advice of the Guru, if one meditates with firm determination on the principle of "I am one without duality" need not resort to forest for penances, and the constant practice of the above principle brings about samadhi and his sins are burnt instantaneously. (94 & 95)

Therefore discarding all kinds of contacts with people, by all possible means, giving up all conflicts of the scriptures; one should take refuge in the Guru. (103)

The Guru devoid of Knowledge, who indulges in falsehood and who is full of vanity should be abandoned. Because when he is not able to find peace for himself, how is he to bestow peace on others? (104)

35.8. No way of Escape for a Disciple how has abandoned is/her Guru

Even though one is the knower of the entire truth (knower of all shastras); if he is a Guru Tyagi (abandoner of the Guru) he will face, at the time of death, great distraction. (64)

He who does not respect and honor the Guru, such a man takes innumerable births in wombs like that of a dog, and ultimately takes birth in the womb of a Chandala. (202)

By abandoning one's Guru, one goes to death, by renouncing the Guru mantra, one endures poverty. The abandoner of the Guru and Mantra go to the hell known as Raurava. (203)

The unfortunate, the weak, those who have turned their faces against the service of the Guru, who do not believe in this teaching, suffer in terrible hells. (150)

One who speaks to the Guru in rude or insulting manner or who wins arguments with Him is born as a demon in a jungle or in a waterless region. (61)

35.9. Guru Gita - Gurus to be avoided

(Note: Online version of Guru Gita published by HariOM Group is not full version. Some verses are missing. Translation adapted from Shri Nandalal Dashora's Hindi translation, published by Randhir Prakashan)

Guru Gita extols Guru as parabrahman with whose power the trinity works. Guru is very holy to us and is often equated with ISvara (God). Some thugs or immature disciples take undue advantage of the reverence that our society shows to the true guru. In this process, both Guru and disciple are bound to perish. Guru Gita gives us the characteristics which should be absent in the Guru you believe. Translations are given in Hindi, Gujarati and English along with moola sloka-s. Please find the verses below:

The Guru devoid of Knowledge, who indulges in falsehood and who is full of vanity should be abandoned. Because when he is not able to find peace for himself, how is he to bestow peace on others? (104)

What special knowledge has a stone in saving other stones from drowning? If it cannot swim across the river by itself; how can it help other stones to swim across? (105)

They (such Gurus) are not at all fit to be worshiped whose reasoning creates painful delusion. Such Gurus should be abandoned from a distance. One should take refuge only in the Self-realized* ones. (106)

**The word used is धीरानेव meaning धैर्यवान् गुरु i.e. the guru who has patience*

O Parvati, imposters, habitual sinners, atheists, those who are of the different temperament, slaves of woman, evil-doers, ungrateful, roguish, those fallen from Karma Marga, cruel, who indulge in vain discussions, sensualists, those who are angry, violent, unyielding to reasoning, devoid of knowledge, great sinners, crooks, fools, such Gurus should be avoided; and one should only take refuge in the Self-realized Guru with single-minded devotion and discrimination. (107, 108, 109)

36. bhakti movements - Crossing varNa boundaries: bhakti is for all, recommended for kalyug

Earlier we had seen that varNa dharma was resisted by some saints. Deterioration of varNa dharma was predicted long ago in purANa-s. Solution given was to practice simple bhakti. bhakti is the most suitable way to progress in spirituality. Great poet saints, and devotees of God were born in all sampradAya-s spreading the glory of their ISTa devatA (deity of worship) far and wide touching hearts of thousands and lakhs of innocent people and raising them on spiritual plane.

The most prominent names are 12 Alvars, 63 Nayanar Saints, Meerabai, Tukaram, Narsinh Mehta, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Laal Ded (Lalleshwari) to name a few. These saints do not adhere to any sampradāya-s except Srī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Masses got attracted by God-intoxicated personalities and have benefited much from their presence. While Āchārya-s helped establish a vaidika dharma, these saints contributed to spreading the glories of the Lord far and wide in hearts of thousands of men.

When someone hears the word bhakti or Vaṣṇava bhakti movements, they think that Vaṣṇava-s are devotional sects. Though this tradition has produced many great devotees of Bhagavān Viṣṇu / Kṛṣṇa / Rāma, they too have established many sampradāya-s in line with vedic philosophy.

37. nAgA sAdhu-s

One of the meaning of the word nAgA is 'to be absent'. This is true since nAgA-s before taking sanyAsa have to perform their own last rites (death rites). After the initiation ceremony, they get a new life which is not connected with the earlier one. Hence they are absent from their past life (pre-monastic life). The meaning of the word may not seem to be convincing, but a little deeper will help us get clarity. Worldly minded people have worldly thoughts and desires. nAgA-s have renounced worldly thoughts and desires and so worldly thoughts and desires are absent in them. Hence they are called as nAgA sAdhu-s - those in whom there is no worldly desires. Their monastic life is completely different than their pre-monastic life.

37.1. Life of nAgA sAdhu-s

There are 13 divisions of nAgA sAdhu-s who live in 13 different akhADA-s. Traditionally the word akhADA means a wrestling ground or a training ground for martial arts. akhADA is a place or a resident ashram of nAgA-s which not only includes their martial training but also spiritual training. nAgA-s undergo intense meditations and practice haTha yoga. Some take it to extreme and practice it for 12 years or throughout their life. They prefer to meditate in night when there is no one to disturb them nor are there any visitors or devotees. In addition to meditative disciplines, they also practice martial arts and were a part of rajput regiments for many years. Sri madhusudhan sarasvatI, a celebrated name in advaita vedAnta is said to have set up the order of nAgA sAdhu-s. They have their own guru

(mahanta), who in turn believes in SankarAcArya-s. Some believe that nAgA-s are Saiva-s, but they believe in all forms of God. Some have guru dattAtraya as their ISTa devatA. bhagavAn Siva as rudra or bhairava is known to smear ash and bhagAVan dattAtraya used to roam naked. However their lifestyle does not match with that of vaiShNava sanyAsin-s. They do not adhere to siddhAnta-s as propounded by vaiShNava AcArya-s of various sects like Srl vaiShNava, etc. By nature nAgA-s are hot headed. Aggression is necessary for warriors. It should also be noted that their way of life is also different from traditional sanyAsin-s of the catur-amnaya matha-s (four traditional ashrams established by Adi SankarAcArya jI) and the fifth kAnchi matha. sanyAsin-s of Sankara matha-s or those directly or indirectly associated to it, do not roam naked. They were ochre coloured cloths. Ochre or orange colour is the colour of fire, which symbolises knowledge i.e. GYAnAgnI, the fire of knowledge. It is also a symbol of renunciation.

For nAgA sAdhu-s, the body itself is a cloth (a covering) of AtmA / jIvAtmA. So why to cover clothes with another set of clothes. It requires years of strict discipline to be a nAgA. They have to follow their rules strictly and practice intense meditations. After 3 years of serving his guru, guru decides him to make him a nAgA sAdhu-s. If they break the rules, then koTavAla (head) may give them punishment. Their punishment is different than punishments prescribed by civil law codes. They may be asked to dip 100 times in icy waters of mA gangA. In general, there is no provision of nAgA-s to return home, i.e. back to society, but may be some may run away if they cannot sustain the hard life of nAgA, they are not officially allowed to live.

According to general rules, when they are inside the akhADA, they remain fully naked. But when they roam in society, it is forbidden to roam naked in order to attune with the attiquity of society. They have to wear clothes, may be in 3 piece, as in loka-vyavahAra (i.e. in society). When they visit a temple, they have to wear 3.5 Mtr cloth. They can use the cloths to other purpose. Each akhADA has it's own ISTa devatA and their own weapons which they have to master. junA akhADa have bhagavAn dattAtraya as their ISTa devatA. He is their idol. bhagavAn dattAtraya in srimad bhAgavat mahApurANa has said that 'we do not have longing for worldly objects, we live in brahma-bhAva (in state of supreme state of consciousness) and our body itself is our covering (cloth) of our AtmA'. nAgA-s are given different responsibilities depending upon their skills and mental-makeup. Some are trained in combat skills and master a few weapons while others may be inclined towards intense meditative practice, some in haTha yoga, some in administrative task, some are temple priests and so on. According to their ability and mental makeup they are entrusted different types of responsibilities. There are mahant, koTavAla, bhanDARI, pUjARI, kArbhARI, etc. There are gradations of seniority among them like Srl mahant is the head of all (There are 4 types

of mahant). Women are also given sanyAsa, but they are forbidden to roam completely naked. They live in a separate place within junA akhADA in a women-exclusive area.

37.2. nAgA sAdhu-s - The defenders of sanAtana dharma

baraphAni nAgA-s were trained in such a way that they are capable to fight in extreme cold like in himAlaya-s, kArgila. rAja-rAjeshvara nAgA can fight in all conditions. mahA kAla nAgA-s of ujjain were considered as very deadly. They have mastery in killing opponents. When both baraphAni and rAja-rAjeshvara cannot handle the situation, then the services of mahA kAla nAgA-s were called.

The famous religious gathering at various kumbha melA-s is very popular. nAgA sAdhu-s are given the first right to bath. Since junA akhADA, as the name suggests (junA means old), is the oldest, the Sri mahant (head of junA akhADA) is the first one to take a bath.

37.3. Smearing ash

Both aghori-s and nAgA sAdhu-s smear themselves with ash as ash reminds that finally everything that they possess will ultimately turn to ashes. Ash is the final form of transformation and is considered to remain permanent i.e. ash has long life. It symbolises vairAGYa (dispassion), futility of worldly affairs, transient nature of body and world. Ash reminds one of death of body (temporary nature of human body) and also represents immortality. Ash is also favourite of Lord Siva and is considered as prasAda. Practically, ash is also a mosquito repellent. It helps both nAgA sAdhu-s and aghori-s. nAgA sAdhu-s live in jungles or remote places and aghori-s most of the time live in cremation ground. White ash is also said to have medicinal properties.

There are many types of ashes. One of the holy ash is made from body of a vedic brAhmin. There is a belief of one akhADA of nAgA that the ash (bhabhUta) offered to the temple of mahAkAleshvara is that of pyre of vedic brAhmin. This bhasma or bhabhUta (ash) is called as chitA bhasma meaning pyre-ash. During his lifetime, if a practising vedic brAhmin wishes that his body after death be useful to nAgA sAdhu-s, then honouring his last wish, his mortal body is brought to the cremation ground of ujjain's mahAkAleshvara mandir (temple). then after burning his body on fire (after his death), the ash is offered to mahAkAleshvara and

then it is distributed as prasAda in small quantities among nAgA-s of different akhADA-s. It is said that prasAda should be distributed to as many people as possible so that maximum people can benefit of God's grace. Hence the quantity given to one person is very less, in this case it's a small pinch.

Other ashes include mixing of other materials which help protect body from heat and cold and insects. Mixing of other materials also help increase the quantity of ash. Ingredients other than ash include peepal, pAkaDa, rasAlA, bel patra, banana and dry pieces of cow dung. The mixture in powder form is mixed and is screened by cloth. After screening, the mixture is mixed with milk (not warmed) and small laddu-s (laddoos), small balls are made. These small balls are baked in fire and the burning mixture is extinguished and cooled by fresh milk which is not warmed. Before smearing ash over whole body, nAgA-s chant some mantra-s, which they say are necessary to this mixture may harm their body.

bhabhUta is one of the 17 shringAra (decorative ornaments) of nAgA-s and an integral part of their life. They can't imagine themselves without bhabhUta. Other articles used for decoration are rudrAksha mAIA tied at various places, flower mAIA, metal rings, tilaka, and even bells. It is interesting to know that female nAgA sadhu-s who are called as mAIA jI or mAIA (and not nAgA sAdhvi-s) have 16 shringAra-s. nAgA-s have their own way of living and their unique world not found anywhere else.

Nice documentary of nAgA sadhu can be found on youtube:

Life of Naga [Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#) | [Part 3](#) | [Part 4](#)

38. Finding Consistency among Contradictions

Though SD is very flexible still no dharma can be so flexible that it can allow anything that one think. Spiritual path cannot be inconsistent nor can one interpret scriptures in whimsical way. There has to be a consistent approach that does not contradict the basic scriptures. Philosophies of SD is also established in the same way. There are certain rules and regulations which are followed by all āchārya-s.

The First rule is the order of authority of scriptures. Shruti (vedas and upanishads) is considered as the most authentic. Then follows Itihāsa i.e. Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. Mahābhārata is often quoted by Āchārya-s. Then comes puraṇā-s, then Dharma Smriti-s and

Āgama Shāstra-s or Tantra-s. It is customary to put Bhagavad Gītā under smṛiti though it is a part of Itihāsa. Though Gītā is a smṛiti it is still considered as authentic after itihāsa or sometimes rated superior to itihāsa as it is the essence of upanishads. Brahma Sūtra, a composition of Veda Vyāsa is considered as the topmost text. It is final text to be studied by the elite. Any contradiction is to be cleared and a philosophy is established only after writing commentary on Brahma Sūtras with quotes from scriptures to prove consistency.

So the order is Shruti → Itihāsa → Bhagavad Gītā → Purāṇa-s → Dharma Smṛiti-s → Āgama Shāstra-s.

In traditional debates, independent compositions and hymns composed by āchārya-s are not considered authentic.

Hence an Āchārya must prove his philosophy is consistent and cite references from scriptures in support of his claim. Anyone can challenge his views and raise objections. Āchārya must be in a position to defend his philosophy. If he fails his philosophy is rejected.

Use of logic and the six pramāṇa-s are also accepted. Some schools like Vaiṣṇavas only accept 3 pramāṇa-s while advaita and kumārila bhaṭṭa's pūrva mimāṃsā accept all six. prabhākara's pūrva mimāṃsā accept five pramāṇa-s while nyāya schōl accept 4 pramāṇa-s. Philosophy of Nyāya school (one of the six darśan shāstra-s) is widely used in order to establish philosophy on logical basis.

Lets understand this with the help of an example.

Suppose if person 'A' claims Krishna is supreme God and person 'B' claims that Śiva is the supreme God. In order to decide, we must quote reference. 'A' quotes Bhagavad Gītā which says, 'I (Krishna) is Brahman' while 'B' quotes Śiva Gītā to quote 'I (Śiva) am Supreme God'.

In this case, claim of A is given more weight as Bhagavad Gītā is a part of itihāsa while Śiva Gītā is a part of purāṇa. Hence Bhagavad Gītā is more authentic than Śiva Gītā. B needs to give more proofs either from Bhagavad Gītā or from upanishads or vedas to strengthen his claim. If B quotes from Mahābhārata citing an incidence of Kriṣhna worshipping Śiva and

undertaking Pāśupata dikshā. The B's claim is given more weight. Further if B quotes from upanishads like Atharvaśiras or Atharvaśikhā or Kaivalya or Svetaśvatara or say Pancha brahma and even quotes from vedas like Srī Rudram's verse 'OM namo bhagavate rudrāya' and also quotes from skambha sūktam of Atharva veda then B's claim is stronger than A's.

Further if A fails to quote shruti-s then A will loose his claim and his philosophy will be rejected.

If both cite verses from all scriptures, then both views are accepted. However the issue of superiority of Śiva or Kriṣhna remains unsolved. If person C manages find a way to reconcile both claims citing support from scriptures, his views are considered as authentic than A or B. Another problem is that in order to prove one God as superior another has to be shown as inferior. Again verses praising the other God are rejected.

In this example, if C says that though both Śiva and Kṛṣṇa are outwardly different, they are same as Brahman. Śiva tatvam and Kṛṣṇa (Krishna / kruṣhṇa) tatvam are same in their formless aspect, his argument based on logic and citations from scriptures is considered superior to A and B, as no verse needs to be rejected and vedas, upanishads, purāṇa-s, Gītā, itihāsa and āgama shāstra-s all are fully accepted.

All vaidika āchārya-s like Ādi Sankarāchārya jī, Rāmānujāchārya jī, Madhvāchārya jī, Srīkāntāchārya jī (Nilkanṭhāchārya jī) established the superiority of their philosophy and chosen form of God in the same way. They all contributed to our rich vedic culture and covered people of different temperament.

38.1. Refuting Left hand Path and sexual interpretation

Following the above method, any claim or verse that is of non-vedic nature like encouraging sexual relationship in order to excel in spirituality can be rejected as it is not found in vedas nor in Bhagavad Gītā, which is an essence of upanishads and accepted by all. Hence if anyone quotes a verse from any tantra or you find any tāntrika procedure that requires sexual relationship with a partner, it can be easily rejected as tantra-s do not represent mainstream Hinduism.

Alternatively if any verse from purāṇa-s or any other scripture is quoted, attempts should be made to interpret it as a yogic process involving kuṇḍalini, nāḍī-s, chakra-s and subtle bodies. An example of this type is interpretation of Linga and Yonī.

One of the meaning of Linga is male genital organ and that of Yonī is female genital organ. Hence some may claim that Śiva linga is a symbol of sexual union. We must understand that sanskrit words have more than one meaning. 'Linga' as per Linga purāṇa means 'manifestation (of formless brahman)'. Yonī means prakṛiti or nature the power of Brahman. Verses describing union of Śiva and Śakti indicating the process of creation does not mean that they copulated and had sex. Creation results from sound OM as described in Linga Purāṇa. Śiva is static brahman and Śakti is dynamic power of Brahman through which creation takes place. Siva linga represents the trinity and all the demigods and demigoddesses. It is symbol of formless brahman in which lies the entire cosmos. Hence though outwardly on first site the verse though look of sexual nature, they are not.

Finally, one must use their head before accepting blindly. A laymen may not have read scriptures, the vedas and upanishads and puranas, but as described earlier one of the definition of practicing dharma is 'dhi' i.e. buddhi i.e. intellect. A religion which has a tradition to revere asceticism, chastity, renunciation and tapas cannot encourage sex as an ideal means to salvation. God is always perfect. Stories intent to teach us in a friendly way. They are not created to show that our Gods have no control over themselves or that one God gets humiliated by another and so is inferior to the one who is victorious. Instead of finding faults with our Gods, we must find faults within ourselves. By using our commonsense, one can easily reject such verses as laymen notices that such a convoluted interpretation of Śiva linga is absent when one goes to Śiva's temple. Alternatively, Śiva must represent formless Brahman, as the linga is called as Śiva linga and not Śankara linga or rudra linga. Śiva is the formless aspect of Śankara, the deity of destruction, the one of trinity. Śiva is above the trinity.

Similarly the word kāma, often (mis)translated as passion or sexual desire, simply means 'desire' or 'wish'. Even the desire to get moksha is called as kāmanā (desire).

Shrī Santosh jī of [Mahāpāshupatāstra Blog](#) has explained the inner meaning of such verses and has refuted the interpretation of left hand paths and convoluted interpretation purposefully done to denigrate Hindu Gods. Please refer to following articles.

- [The unassailable glory of lord Bhuvaneshwara – the primordial Skambha supporting the worlds](#)
- [The Imperishable Glory of Lord Kameshwara – The Primordial God of Desire](#)
- [The Unfading Glory of Mahakala – The Primordial and Eternal Supreme Time!](#)

38.2. Nāhī-Nindā Nyāya

While going through purāṇa-s one may find that at various instances, one God is defeated by another in one occasion, while it is vice versa on another occasion. For example, Siva might be defeated by Vishnu or Krishna in one story while Rama or Vishnu got defeated by Siva in other story. We must find a way to neutralise these contradictions.

Kanchi Paramacharya asks us to adopt Nāhī-Nindā-Nyaya. The purpose of exalting a particular deity over the other is not to depreciate the latter. The underlying idea is that a person who worships his chosen god has unflinching faith in him and becomes totally devoted to him. Such exclusive devotion is called "ananya bhakti". **The idea here, however, is not to regard other devatas as inferior to one's own chosen deity- an example of "Nāhī-Nindā-Nyaya".**

Tarka Sastra (science of dialectics, logic and reasoning) proposes “nahi ninda nyaya” to support one’s theory. Glorify your view, but that doesn’t mean that the other view is flawed.

With nyaya, almost all contradictions can be neutralized

Please refer following article to understand Nāhī-Nindā-Nyāya

[Contradictory stories in Puranas have 'same moral of the story'](#)

39. Having many canonical texts has it’s advantages

Hinduism is not like Abrahamic religions which have just one book to follow. In Hinduism there are many sects and subsects. Each one focussing on their own chosen canonical texts. This means that you need not stick to one book if it does not appeal to you. Since everything is selective in Hinduism, it difficult to criticize ALL Hindus attacking one viewpoint.

For example, someone will show you a verse from vatsayana's kAmasUtra and will declare that Hinduism is a sexiest religion. You can simply reject that verse or the whole book. It is not compulsory to read all of literature. Perhaps this book is not found in every home unlike bhagavad gItA. gItA is an essence of upanishads i.e. vedAnta and so an essence of veda-s themselves. brahmasUtra is the topmost canonical text. Many AchArya-s have written commentary, sub-commentary and gloss on both gItA and brahmasUtra. Sex is not promoted in any one of the commentaries.

Another common criticism is that of Siva linga as phallic symbol. While we have already touched this subject, we can simply reject this claim by stating another verse which gives another meaning of the origin and meaning of 'linga'. Hence the interpretation depends upon the mindset of the interpreter. None of the popular Saiva AchArya-s nor the great nAyannar saints have ever interpreted Siva linga as the phallic symbol of bhagavAn Siva. You can completely ignore or reject the whole of Agama shAstra-s, you can ignore certain purANa-s if they do not match with your thinking. You can ignore parts of purANa-s which talk on topics that do not interest you are are not filled with Siva bhakti. There is enough material for Siva and viShNu and other Gods to worship them and sing their glories.

Yet another criticism that first comes to picture with the name 'Hinduism' is 'caste system'. For those to do not adhere to caste system, no one outcastes them, no one changes their behaviour with them. If you stick to the vocation by birth, no one bothers to change your opinion except that it is harming others or someone has political reasons to take this step. In other words, people do not bother to change customs that do not harm anyone's life.

In short, no one can say that since 'x' verse says somethings that is why ALL Hindus are of 'x' type.

40. Three ways to interpret any verse

Vedas are coded with multiple layers. They can be interpreted in many way. Some words' represent a particular number. For example Fire represents number '3' (three). In other words, number three is substituted by Fire, zero by vacuum (ether), one by moon, two by horseman, eight by Vasu and so on. Please refer to [this](#) (video skips to 10.00 minutes). This video explains the verse showing waning and waxing phases of moon which is an encrypted formula. You will understand that our shāstras have encrypted mathematical formula like pi (3.142...). Śankarāchārya of Purī, Jagadguru Srī Bhārati Kṛṣṇa Tirtha did a lot of research on mathematical formulas hidden in vedas and found 16 formulas (skip to 14 minutes).

From above explanation, we can understand that scriptures have encrypted mathematical formulas. Similarly astronomical calculations are also encrypted. Locating and decrypting such verses is not everybody's cup of tea. Other than the above, there are three ways to interpret scriptures.

1. Devotional
2. Logical / Symbolical
3. Yogic

Devotional Approach:

This approach is used to instil and increase our devotion. This approach is best suited to those who worship a form of Īshvara or moksha, specifically those having emotional temperament. When one comes across any incident in Purāṇa-s or or Mahābhārta or Upanishads glorifying any form of Īshvara or Īṣṭa devatā emerging as victorious on a battle, devotion naturally cultivates in hearts of devotēs. This approach is a valid approach to instil bhakti.

Logical Approach / Symbolical Approach:

People who are intellectually inclined will always try to find rational / logical reason while studying shāstra-s. The same story which is used for instilling devotion has same, a person with rational intellect will try to find moral of the story. For example in which Īṣṭa devatā emerges victorious, the moral of story is that 'In the end, Good always wins over evil'.

In symbolic approach, characters are interpreted as symbolising a quality or any of the five tatva-s. For example, five Pāṇḍava-s represent positive qualities while 100 kaurava-s symbolize many negative qualities. Though positive qualities are comparatively much less in number, still in the end they win, Īshvara was with them. This idea was explained by a unique āchārya Srī Abhinavgupta jī of Kashmir Saivism in his Gītā commentary Gītārtha Samgrah chapter 1, verse 1 (BG 1.1) gives these meanings. Srī Abhinavgupta explains means of the word 'kurukshetra'. 'kshetra' means 'region', here it means 'Man's Body' which is the facilitator of 'Kuru' i.e. 'sense-organs'.

Each of the five Pāṇḍava name has their own meaning. They are also connected with five tatva-s.

Yudhiṣṭhira = Ākāśa (ākāsha) i.e ether or space

Bhima = Vāyu i.e. air

Arjuna = Agni ie. Fire. Arjuna also represents Jīva tatva.

Nakula = Jala ie. water

Sahadeva = Pṛithvi or Pruthvi or Prithvi. Saha+deva = Sahadeva means 'one who is one with God'

Kṛṣṇa (Krishna) = Beyond Tatva-s i.e. Paramātmā . Ādi Śankara BhagavapAda in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Bhāśya while explaining name #57 says, " 'Kṛṣṇ' (kRRuSh, कृष्ण) means sattā (power) and 'ṇa' (Na, ण) means ānanda. Since Bhagavān Viṣṇu has both qualities (bhāva-s) hence [Bhagavān Viṣṇu] is always known as Kṛṣṇa - (Mahā. Bhā. udyoga 70.5)' - by this statement by Bhagavān Vyāsa jī saccidānanda (sat-chit-ānanda) Bhagavāna is Kṛṣṇa only. In #550 Kṛṣṇa Āchārya explains that Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayana [Veda] Vyāsa is Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa only. (In Sahasranāma some names repeat more than once).

Yudhiṣṭhira: Yuddha+sthira = Yudhiṣṭhira. Yuddha means war, sthira means to 'remain steady', steady like whom, like ākāśa (ākāśa). Yudhisthira means the one whose mind remains steady [like ākāśa] in battlefield.

Bhima: The one who is powerful like Wind. Bhima killed all 100 kaurava-s including Duryodhana. He was a mighty warrior with strength of 10,000 elephants. Elephant symbolizes strength.

Duryodhana: Duryodhana means dur-yoddha meaning 'warrior with bad ethics or wicked warrior. This name became famous because of the way he lived and the policies he adopted

to get rid of Pāṇḍava-s. His birth name was 'Suyoddhā'. su means good and yoddhā means warrior. Suyoddhā means 'Good warrior or warrior with good ethics.

Dusāsana: 'Duśāsna' means 'Bad Ruler' or 'Ruler with Bad or wicked ethics'

This approach too is valid way to study shāstra-s.

Yogic Approach:

This approach is more concerned with interpreting any event. For example, (Tripurāntak) Bhagavān Śiva destroying of three cities of Gold, silver and Iron, made by sons of Demon king, is not taken literally. Three cities represent three bodies

- Iron represents Sthūḷa Śarira or Gross body
- Silver represents Sukshma Śarira or Subtle Body and
- Gold represents Kāraṇa Śarira or Causal Body

Destroying three cities represents destroying of mind and Jīva-bhāva i.e. destroying of Ego or 'I'-ness. This is mentioned in Thirumandiram by a great Tamil Siddha Yogī Tirumular (or Thirumulaar).

Yogī-s interpret Yajna as inner Yajna, oblation to nāḍī-s, chakra-s and Kuṇḍalīnī devi. The word 'gau' or 'go' has many meanings. One of them is 'Cow'. However, as per Ādi Śankara Bhagavadpāda, while commenting on the name 'Govind' in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma, explains that 'gau' means 'vāk' i.e. 'vānī' meaning speech. 'go' also means 'Sun's rays called suṣumṇā'. If we take alternate meaning, which are as much valid as the literal or obvious one, the entire meaning of verse changes. That verse which can be accused of Cow slaughter is actually a verse offering oblation to the goddess of speech via sound. One can give oblation to chakra-s by pronouncing particular sound that is assigned to it. Sun's rays represent trinity or Laxmī which is ātmasvarūpa i.e. Laxmī devī showers prosperity named ātma-vidyā and so she is not different from ātman also known as Brahman. There is no difference between Sun and its Rays. Both cannot be separated.

This type of approach is only for advanced Yogī-s as not all are aware of their subtle bodies and chakra-s. There is a reason for restricting teaching of veda-s as wrong interpretation can cause damage, in this case, incurs sin of killing of holy animal cow which needs to be protected and never to be disrespected. This approach is also a valid approach.

40.1. Sticking to Single approach does not help

If one goes on to interpret the whole of śāstra-s (shāstra-s) with only literal meaning or taking everything as mythology and interpret it symbolically or try to interpret it an inner yogic process may not find consistency. Hence Āchārya Ādi Śankara Bhagavadpāda has given a solution. In one of the commentaries on Upanishads he has said that in general case, one can take literal meaning, however if one cannot deduce any meaning out of verse one is free to make symbolic meaning.

Hence one has to take meanings literal, implied (indirect reference), symbolic and yogic wherever applicable to interpret the whole of śāstra-s consistently. Implied meaning means that on the face value (i.e. vāchyārtha) a verse may look like it is of dual nature, but the meaning it conveys i.e. the essence (lakshyārtha, laxyārtha) points to non-duality. Examples are four great statements or Mahāvākya-s - tat-tvam-asi, atamātmā-brahman, prajñānam brahma, aham brahmāsmi. (There are other Mahāvākya-s found in upanishads. It is said that each upanishad has at least one Mahāvākya.)

Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa was a historical person. Kṛṣṇa, Rāma and Śiva are one as Brahman. We need devotion to progress. Bhakti instils strong faith in us. If we doubt existence of Īśvara (Ishvara), we cannot progress spiritually. Bhakti helps one cultivate strong faith and spiritual attraction for Īśvara. Bhakti is the foundation upon which our spiritual path rests. Yet, we need not take all statements literally, but in a way that helps us apply shāstras in today's life. Symbolic interpretation and implied interpretation is also helpful. One should know the path and how to walk on path. Knowledge (Jnāna) is necessary for getting clarity. No matter whatever path we follow, Kuṇḍalinī gradually rises upto sahasrāra chakra. If chanting of mantra is done in a proper way, it is always helpful.

Notes:

Āchārya Ādi Śankara considered Jnāna as supreme. Āchārya has also written a gloss on Patanjali Yoga Sūtra by the name 'Yoga Tārāvalī'. He accepted Yogic path as valid path. His only point was that liberation cannot be a result of fruits of actions. In Yoga there are various energy based processes called as kriyā-s. The reason was the limited effort cannot produce unlimited result. Moksha is permanent Freedom from life and death and attaining immortality by merging in

Brahman and staying as pure consciousness. According to him, all paths are valid but the final emancipation can happen through knowledge as a result of direct experience of your true Self. This happens when meditation changes from effort to effortless. Everything happens by itself, desires are destroyed and finally mind and ego are destroyed. This happens by itself and you as an individual has no role to play. Of Course this happens at a very later stage. Other āchārya-s like Srī Madhusudan Sarasvatī and Srī Jnaneshvara (Jnaneshwar / GYAndev) have given Yogic interpretation while commenting on Gītā specially chapter six. Srī Rāmānujāchārya jī and Srī Mādhvāchārya jī has connected teachings Gītā and upanishads with Pancharātra āgama śāstra which is a tantra, a manual of temple worship. Just like veda-s, each tantra has ritualistic (karmakāṇḍa) and knowledge part (Jnānakāṇḍa). Both āchārya-s made Pancharātra very popular. While Ādi Śankarāchārya jī established pure vedic path, Rāmānujāchārya jī and Madhvāchārya jī worked for downtrodden and established a path of bhakti which has a good logical base.

All āchārya-s are true from their POV. They gigantic efforts helped revive and revitalize our sanātana dharma. Beauty of sanātana dharma is to live in harmony with people following different, sometimes contrasting philosophies.

As another great Āchārya Srī Appaya Dikshita has said, "what more can be said if Brahma sūtra (vedānta sūtra) is capable of being interpreted in many ways". Gītā, Upanishads, Purāṇās, Itihāsa, Āgama śāstras all can be interpreted in multiple ways, the only condition is to interpret them consistently so that no verse or minimum verses are rejected.

41. Bells

Various reasons are mentioned for the use of bells, some say they are to awake the Gods, some say they are to awake the devotee. In general, Gods do not need to be awakened.

Bells are generally used to cleanse our mind and clear the clutter of thoughts. The sound of bell i.e. 'tong' or 'tom' is similar to 'OM'. The vibrations are known to cleanse mind and atmosphere just like incense are used to purify or cleanse temple atmosphere and remove negative energy.

The most notable effect and often the first experience while entering the temple is that upon ringing a bell before entering the inner sanctum, our mind, which has a habit of wandering in different issues suddenly becomes aware (if you yourself ring the bell and or pay attention to the sound). This prepares one to enter into temple with empty mind which is often receptive. Spiritual vibrations of temple helps mind to think on spiritual matters than worldly matters.

Sound of bell which resembles OM (AUM) i.e. *toooooomm* is supposed to symbolize and remind every devotee that the reality (prakriti) has three stages of evolution, "srishti", "sthiti" and "laya" meaning creation, preservation and destruction.

It is a beautiful piece of imagination to express Hindu's religiosity and philosophical outlook. It expresses their artistic imagination.

Priya Prabhakar (member of quora) says,

The bell is made up of a mixture of five metals - lead, copper, zinc, nickel, and chromium - to which it is measured based on ratio and specification. The sound made by the bell is supposed to be pleasant to all creatures therefore it is part of worship to nature and God.

The ringing of bells is to ward off the evil spirits. According to the Aagma SAstra.

"uthsatanam piasatheh preenanam sahareh paramsannithana mamarthyanam ghantaayachalanath baveth"

(Translated from Sanskrit)

"Why to ring bell in temples? Yaksha, Rakshasa, Paisasa and Brahmaraakshasah, the evil spirits to go out of the temple when they hear the ringing of temple bell"

The sound of the bell is supposed to make the "Om" sound, which is quite significant in Hinduism. "Om" is a mantra or vibration that is chanted and believed to be the basic sound of the world and to contain all other sounds. It is said to be the sound of the universe.

Dr. Nipur Agarrwal and Uday has given some more information about bells. Most of the old temples in India have a large bell at the entrance that one needs to ring before entering the

temple. Making temple bells is a whole science. These bells are not made out of ordinary metal, but a whole variety of them, including cadmium, lead, copper, zinc, nickel, chromium and manganese.

The proportion at which each one of them mixed is the real science behind making a bell. Each of these bells is made to produce such a distinct sound that it can create a harmony between your left and right brains. The moment you ring that bell, it produces sharp but lasting sound vibration which lasts for minimum of seven seconds in echo mode. The duration of echo is good enough to activate all our seven healing centres of our body (7 chakras defined in Yoga). This results in emptying our brain from all our thoughts and helps us in entering a very sharp state where we can have good level of concentration.

Before you enter temple to awake you and prepare you for taste of awareness is the real reason behind temple bell. In other words “it helps to ring to wake yourself Up!”. To an extent Fragrant generators, Low light lamps all forms of Ecosystem to create awareness.

To explain further, the moment bell sound happens your brain is emptied of all thoughts. Invariably, you will enter a state of Trance where you are very receptive. This trans state is the one with inner awareness. Normally, you are so occupied in mind that the only way to awaken you is with a shock!

The bell works as antidote to the chaos of your mind. Before you enter temple it prepares you for the calming taste of of spiritual awareness you are going to experience.

Credit: [Dr. Nipun Aggarwal](#) and [Uday Krk](#)

sanAtana dharma is a vast topic. If time permits, more articles will be incorporated.

We sincerely hope that sharing information has helped others to understand Hindu Dharma atleast to some extend from the traditional POV.

Closing Invocation:

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम् पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते /
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते //
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः // [1]

*Aum pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate*

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

Aum! That is infinite (Brahman), and this (universe) is infinite.

The infinite proceeds from the infinite.

(Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe),

It remains as the infinite (Brahman) alone.

Aum! Peace! Peace! Peace!

Peace Chant of brihadAraNyaka Upanishad and iSAvAsya upanishad of yajuyveda.

|| Hari OM ||

42. A Request

Explaining Hinduism is not easy. Sri Chandrashekharendra Sarasvati Svami, 68th Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetha, who was often glorified as 'The Walking God' has explained Hindu Dharma in much detail. His discourses are penned down in a book called 'Daivattin Kural' in Tamil, which consists of 7 volumes. This book is translated in English and published under the title, 'The Voice of God'. Out of these 7 volumes, two volumes are published separately as the title 'Hindu Dharma – Varna Dharma for Universal Well being'. The entire book is available online in html format [here](#). There is another book called 'Voice of Guru – The Guru Tradition', which is an extraction of teachings related to Guru from various volumes is also very useful. Books are published by Bhartiya Vidya Bhavans. It is recommended to read both these books to fully understand Hindu Dharma.

Source: Extracted from the book, [Hindu Dharma](#), which are the collections of saying of Kanchi Paramacharya. (Missing Chapter in online version of Hindu Dharma is Uploaded [here](#).)

43. Scope of Work – Future Topics

Note: *New topics may be added at the bottom (after the last topic) or may be inserted in between two existing topics. They may be shuffled later on to suitable position.*

1. guru - more details
2. bhakti movements - Crossing varNa boundaries: bhakti is for all, recommended for kalyug
3. Hindu dharma, a logical and scientific approach towards life.
4. dharma based on logic with scientific inclination (open minded research)
5. **Creation from Sound - varNamAlA - Siva-shakti created universe**
6. sAnkhya and pUrva mimAmsA
7. Restrictions on practising yoga
8. **What are mantra-s? Do mantra-s of prosperity really work? why chant them? Why repetition is important? Are they effective of one listen without understanding it's meaning and keeping in mind the phalashruti? (Hypnosis → deep trance → autosuggestion) Importance of pointedness, sahasranAma.**
9. dharma and business
10. Cows
11. Importance of external marks / symbols / bindi, bhasma, rudrAksha (rudra-asksha), tulsi plant
12. Ayurveda - natural medicine, suSruta

Modern Hinduism

1. Tolerance and living in Peace is taken place by cowardliness
2. Pseudo-Seculars
3. Secularism: Using it as a tool to malign Hindus and Hinduism
4. Pseudo Advaitins and Vedantins
5. Independent Academicians – The Self Proclaimed All knowers of sanAtana dharma
6. Systematic Planned Attacks to Destroy Culture and scriptures by Portuguese and Britishers.

Other articles

1. Hinduism – The Land of Saints
2. Asceticism, penance and meditative life
3. Need for control of Mind and Yoga
4. Need for asceticism
5. Our journey
6. Difference between a Yogi and a Advaita Sanyasin.

॥ ॐ ॥

॥ Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇārpāṇamastu ॥

॥ Śrī Ramāṇarpāṇamastu ॥

॥ Śrī gurubhyo namaḥ ॥