

THE VEDIC WAY OF LIFE FOR THE FIRST TIME READER

BY

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THE VEDIC WAY OF LIFE

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DEDICATION

Dedicated with love to
Sivakamasundari,
the Divine Mother and to
the Human Mother who bears Her name,
to whom more directly,
the first author, as her son,
and the second author, as her grand-daughter,
owe so much, indeed, in a sense, all that they are.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book springs from the experiences of our personal lives, which as in the case of most Indians, are rooted in what we have called and described as the Vedic Way of Life.

This book otherwise lays no claim to any originality. We have simply drawn on and assembled facts and findings of other scholars and publications, and presented largely in wonderful contributions to the spread of knowledge through the Internet, specially the Wikipedia. This book is designed as an integrated presentation and intended to share and serve the same objectives. We acknowledge them collectively with our gratitude.

This book is intended for the first time readers who may find interest, value and purpose in the Vedic Way of Life.

We deeply grateful to Dr. Karan Singh for contributing the graceful Foreword to this book.

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FOREWORD

The Vedic civilisation is one of the oldest in human history and has come down to us unbroken for thousands of years. As I see it, there were two main streams of Vedic thought. One was the glorious philosophy of the Upanishads, which are surely the high watermark of not only of Indian but of world philosophy. The luminous thoughts that they expressed in beautiful language is one of the great treasures of the human race. The Upanishads in fact are the basis of all other systems of Hindu thought that have developed down through the long corridors of time, and even had a deep impact on Jainism and Buddhism which were opposed to them. The Upanishads, therefore, are the crest-jewel of the Vedic epiphany.

The second stream is represented by a series of rituals from birth through the various phases of life including marriage and right up to and after death. Detailed instructions were laid down for a whole series of functions and Shri Krishnaswamy has presented a fascinating description of these ceremonies. Their historical, social and anthropological significance is considerable, although quite clearly it is impossible for these detailed ceremonies and rituals to be carried on in the present day. Apart from birth, marriage and death, the others have all been absorbed into the texture of contemporary life. Nonetheless, this book will be of interest to scholars of the Vedas and to all those who are interested in the multiple dimensions of Indian culture. In the last appendix, the author has brought together a series of very interesting quotations from thinkers around the world paying homage to the Indian cultural and spiritual heritage.

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PREFACE



**THE GOD SURYA – THE SUN, THAT SUSTAINS ALL LIFE IN THE WORLD
AND REACHES DOWN TO MAN, AS BELOW,**



**AS THE GOD AGNI, IN THE FORM OF THE FIRE
THAT DIRECTLY SUPPORTS THE DAILY LIFE OF MAN**



**THESE IMAGES ARE THE CENTRAL SYMBOLS OF
THE VEDIC WAY OF LIFE**

The progress of society is best seen in the shifting and relative emphasis of spirituality, religion, ethics, education and knowledge in shaping the tenor of individual and collective life of the people. This progress has varied over time and across cultures. There are, of course, commonalities among them that are attributable to similar ways in which man responds to the compulsions of Nature and Human Nature. Each individual inevitably responds with a unique mix of physical, mental and spiritual characteristics that determine his way of life. Yet at a collective level, individual similarities or dissimilarities merge into a common, unique and shared identity and way of life that comprises culture.

The Vedic Way Of Life described in this book is a cultural construct that evolved over 5000 years ago in India and has largely prevailed to the present day in the spiritual and ethical values guiding the daily lives of its people. The Purana texts described these values in mythological stories set in long stretches of Time. The Puranas presented Time to be Eternal, but brought into the finite dimensions of human comprehension by being split into finite periods of Time. The largest finite unit of Time so conceived was the Kalpa. The Kalpa itself was but a cosmic day in the life of Brahma, the Creator, who himself also had a finite life span of 100 cosmic years, each such year being comprised of 300 cosmic days and 300 cosmic nights. The Universe was created by Brahma at the beginning of each cosmic day and dissolved at the beginning of each cosmic night. The cosmic day, or Kalpa, reached into the human scale by division into 14 Manvantaras, each Manvantara into 71 Mayayugas and each Mahayuga, in turn, into a repetitive sequence of 4 Yugas, The Yugas going by the names Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali Yugas, together lasted 43,20,000 years on the human scale. !

Today India still observes the Kali Yuga calendar, where the start of Kali Yuga is placed in 3101 B.C. What should interest us here is that the ancient mythology, the Puranas, not only described the values of society that obtained from age to age but also predicted the way the values would change in the future through the rest of the Kali Yuga. The Bhagavata Purana, dated to around three thousand years ago, predicted the future changes of human society in depressing and astonishing realism, but ultimately struck an optimistic note, of the Yuga ending with the coming of the Kalki Avatar. This shape of things to come was as reproduced in the Appendix-A of this book.

The vast spread and depth of religion, spirituality and ethical values in every section of society in India, prevailing even today, is clearly attributable to what we call the Vedic way of life, established by the ancient Rishis. This way of life involved a wide range of values, beliefs and practices rooted in spiritual and religious disciplines. All these disciplines were woven seamlessly into a masterly strategy covering the entire people, individually and collectively, and so embedded in the collective memory as to be carried into all future generations as a deeply ingrained culture. While the highest perceptions were set in the Vedas by the Rishis, all the follow-up levels of knowledge and practices were developed and guided largely by the Brahmin priestly class. These scholar-priests propagated and promoted the Vedic knowledge and practices through a country-wide network of Vedic Shakhas or branches, which at one time were said to be 1024 in number. Scholars among them founded the great schools of philosophy, and composed the mythological history of the gods and godly men in the Puranas, and human history in the Itihasas covering the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics. They also developed the Arts and Sciences through the Vedangas and the ethical, religious and social observance manuals of the Sutra, Shastra and Stotra literature. And lastly, a professional class of story-tellers, the Sutas, and the great composers and performers of the fine arts of dance, drama and music propagated all this knowledge to reach the common people through these arts and get deeply embedded individually in their psyche and collectively as their culture.

The Dharma Śāstras comprise a vast Sanskrit textual corpus of disciplines prescribing obligations covering every activity of life, religious, moral, legal and social, to be observed by everyone, individually and collectively. While they were primarily a scholastic and religious product of the ancient Vedic Brahmanical tradition, they were

designed to carry a profound moral appeal and authority that all classes of people in India could willingly and whole-heartedly accept and follow. Importantly they provided a system of sophisticated jurisprudence that was taken readily by early British colonial administrators to be the law of the land for Hindus in India. But the Dharma Śāstras went far beyond the aspect of law, and reached deep into all aspects of ethical conduct and religious observance, by describing and prescribing the life of an ideal householder, as a source of practical guidance and knowledge that led to a unique and lofty way of life.

While there are large numbers of Dharmaśāstra texts, four of them, called the Dharmasutras, are important in that they focus on the idea of dharma, the principal guide by which Hindus should live their lives. These Dharmasutras are attributed to Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vasistha. They discuss the duties of people at different stages of life, called the ashramas, like studenthood, life of a householder, retirement and renunciation. They also discuss the rites and duties of kings, judicial interventions, and even detailed personal practices like the regulations in diet, offenses and expiations, daily oblations, and funerary practices.

The Dharmasūtras belong to the literary tradition of the Vedas. The primary Vedas are the Ṛig, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva. Each Veda has two parts: the Samhitā, a collection of the foundational texts in poetry; and the Brāhmanas which are in prose text that explains the procedure and meaning of all religious rites and practices. The Brāhmanas are further divided into Āraṇyakas, which are largely esoteric, and the Upanishads, which are philosophic in content. The Vedic basis of Dharma literature is found in the Brahmana texts.

Towards the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, increasing difficulty in understanding the esoteric and archaic language of the Vedas led to the development of Vedic supplements called the Vedāngas which carried elaborations of Vedic texts and concepts, through subjects like ritual procedure, grammar, astronomy, etymology, phonetics, and metrics. Much of these basic texts are composed in an aphoristic style known as the Sutra, and all later texts were in simpler prose text. The Vedas are referred to as Sruti or, revealed texts, considered as coming from divine inspiration while all later texts elaborating and explaining the Vedas are referred to as Smriti, or remembered texts resulting from human composition.

The Dharmasūtras are a part of the Kalpa Vedanga, which is one of the six Vedangas, and give a vivid description of the rituals. The Kalpa Sutras are of three kinds: the Śrautasūtras which deal with vedic rituals; the Ghṛyasūtras which deal with domestic rituals; and Dharmasūtras which largely cover ethics. The Dharmasūtras of Apastamba, Baudhāyana form a part of the larger Kalpa Sutra. The sūtra tradition ended around the beginning of the common era and was followed by the simpler verse style called the śloka, adopted in the Itihasa epics and Purānas.

The age of Smritis ended around the second half of the first millennium CE. The Dharma Śāstras belong to this period. Dharma is a concept which is central not only in Hinduism but also in Jainism and Buddhism. It therefore has a wide scope of interpretation. The Dharma Sastra texts use a metered verse and are much more elaborate in their scope. The most important of them were:

- The Manusmṛiti (200BC-200CE) is the most important and earliest metrical work of the Dharmaśāstra textual tradition of Hinduism.
- The Yājñavalkya Smṛiti (200-500CE) has been called the “best composed” and “most homogeneous” text of the Dharmaśāstra tradition, with its superior vocabulary and level of sophistication.
- The Nāradaśmṛiti (100BC-400CE) has been called the “juridical text par excellence” and represents the only Dharmaśāstra text which deals solely with juridical matters and ignoring those of righteous conduct and penance.

- The Vishnusmriti (700-1000CE) is one of the latest books of the Dharmaśāstra tradition in Hinduism and also the only one which does not deal directly with the means of knowing dharma, focusing instead on the bhakti tradition.
- The Brhaspatismriti (200-400CE) is a modern reconstruction of a text that has not yet been found and may never have been recorded in written form. The attempt to recover this lost Dharmaśāstra has been made based on a gathering of all verses attributed to the sage Brhaspati but pays full tribute to Manu as the ultimate authority on dharma.
- The Kātyāyanasmriti (300-600CE) is another modern reconstruction similar to that of Brhaspatismrti, specializing in vyavahāra.

The actual practices of all the ritualistic prescriptions were established in a vast corpus of religious rites called Samskaras, to be followed at every stage of life of every individual. These prescriptions carried the disciplines of knowledge and observance into their practical daily lives. This book describes these Samskaras, which in their true spirit, established what we call the Vedic way of life. It is important for the First Time Reader of this book to recognize that this way of life was rooted in and dominated by philosophy, religion and ethics which gave it a universal following across all classes of people in India. This had little to do with the social, economic and political inequalities and distortions of later times reaching into the present day. Life today suffers gross injustices and inequalities in human society across the world, due to the distortions of social, economic and political forces. These forces seek scapegoats and denigrate the ancient traditions. Despite this, the Vedic way of life survives today, even if greatly restricted in its reach and influence, and still has much to offer to mankind.

INTRODUCTION



The Vedic Way of Life

The Vedic Way of Life is, as the name suggests, a way that emerges from the teachings of the Vedas. The Rig Veda, dated to more than 5000 years ago, is today acclaimed as the oldest and most profound of the world's scriptures. Its most remarkable feature is its coverage of spirituality, philosophy, knowledge, religion and ritual within a single seamless consistent presentation of principle and practice. It presents an equal appeal to the learned that is philosophical and to the lay that is psychological.

Early Western scholars denigrated the Vedas, for the simple reason that, apart from their cultural biases and political motivations, they had no idea of the sophistication of the Sanskrit language or the depth of its metaphors that concealed the vast insights of the philosophy or psychology of the Vedas. The Vedic Rishis themselves were aware that ritual could degenerate into irrationality if isolated from its true philosophical and spiritual intent. The Chandhyogya Upanishad has a charming verse, maybe allegorical, and possibly satirical, describing a novice Baka Dalbhya, instructing a pack of hungry dogs on chanting the following sloka :

ओं मदामो पिवामो देवो वरुणः प्रजापतिः
सवितान्मिहा हरन्नपतेऽन्नमिहा हरो हरोमिति १।१२।१।४

“Om, May we eat, Om, May we drink, Oh Lord of Food, bring food to us ” !

No religion can be free from ritual and prayer which are just symbolic expressions. All religions have their share of prayer and ritual, and differences between them in this regard are only in form or degree. And the prayer is mostly in the form of the uttered sound or spoken word, accompanied by a posture like bended knees, or a gesture like folded hands, or full prostration of the body on the ground. The offering of water, a leaf, a flower or a fruit to the deity of one's choice, while chanting the words and the faith with which the offering is made, are what makes the prayer complete. These indeed, says Krishna in the Gita (IX-26), are what make the prayer acceptable to God.

The real rationale of the ritual would appear to be, that below the superficial and mechanical aspects of observance of a ritual, is the deeper psychological comfort and reassurance that comes from the attendant faith in its power, that simply cannot be rationalized or articulated. Here then, is a power that comes from deep within levels of consciousness of which we know little, and perhaps from deeper levels of the unconscious of which we know nothing. A few persons of perception can understand these deeper levels, but the common mass of people can only vaguely sense them without understanding them. But it is precisely such a sensing, however vague, that is enough to account for its power and hold on everyone, whatever be the level of the person's understanding. It is the power that drives thousands of people to join in building vast temples or pyramids, or go to war with those who threaten or question their faith. The depth and detail of the Vedic ritual clearly point to a consciously devised structure that rests on this phenomenal power of faith. Dismissing blind faith is clearly an all too common blindness to the reality of its power. The Vedic prescriptions were clearly

designed to cater to people, guided by faith, often propelled by fear or desire, while also clearly providing doors to higher knowledge and higher objectives. The design also aimed, not just the advancement of the individual seeker, but for an inclusive elevation of the human race.

The very first verse of the Rig Veda can be seen as providing a starting point for that we call the Vedic Way of Life. This verse and its translation run as follows :

अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवमृत्विजम् । होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥
agnimīḷe purohitaṁ yajñasya devamṛtvijam . hōtāraṁ ratnadhātamam
Praise to Agni, the presiding priest of the sacrifice, the god who confers wealth,

**Praise to Agni, the presiding deity of the sacrifice,
the god who confers wealth**

The Rig Veda is clothed in a language of poetry and metaphor, which cannot be translated easily and certainly not literally. The translation given above is a simple and correctly interpreted one. It personifies the sacrificial fire as the deity Agni, in the role of the Divine Priest, serving as the intermediary between the Devotee and the Highest Divine. In this role, Agni conveys the offerings of the Devotee to the Divine and brings back the blessings of the Divine to the Devotee. The offerings in a sense, are themselves the fruits of the blessings, the rewards for leading a life of rectitude and purpose, as an instrument of the Divine in fulfilment of His purposes.

How precisely does Agni relate to one's physical and spiritual journey through life, to ensure fulfillment the basic objectives of life as presented in the image given at the head of this Introduction, viz. *Dharma* (Righteousness), *Artha* (Wealth), *Kama* (Love), (The word Love reflects the higher meaning of Kama better than the more commonly used word Desire), and *Moksha* (Salvation) ? The first three objectives correspond to a life of Purpose, Rectitude and Happiness. These three correspond to the eternal states of Sat, Chit and Ananda, which are the attributes of the fourth objective, Moksha. Agni also, in its widest sense, covers every type of energy that sustains life and every one of its activities through the three fundamental Vedic methods referred to as the Mantra, Yantra and Tantra.

The Mantra, Tantra and Yantra provide a convergence of methods resting respectively on the faculties of the mind, the multifarious inner and outer activities of the body and their healthy interaction with the external world of objects. Adapted specifically to the processes of sacrifices and rituals, the Tantra provides a framework of actual physical activity of worship. The Yantra is an icon or image, a physical object, that helps the Mind to focus on the Divine. All the activities of the body including the senses refer to the Tantra aspect of worship. The senses of Sight, Hearing, Touch, Taste and Smell bring to the individual the totality of all external experience. His faculties of Thought, Memory, Intuition, Instinct, Imagination and Emotion open him to an internal experience that reaches far beyond what his senses can bring him. All these external and internal experiences merge into one vast holistic experience that use the Mantra as the vehicle to communicate with the Divine.

Agni as the sacrificial fire, thus becomes the messenger for every expression of gratitude of the Devotee to the Divine for every significant event in his life. But the work of Agni goes far beyond that. At an individual's birth, Agni assembles the different elements of matter and forms of energy from Nature into a human body and readies it to receive a soul that is awaiting its next birth. At death, Agni restores the physical elements of the body back to Nature, and then conveys the soul back to worlds beyond, and to a future cycle of life and death, and ultimately to liberation from this cycle for restoration to the Divine, which is Moksha. This is the role of Agni the deity, serving the purpose of the Divine. It is in this vast perspective that the individual has to repeatedly affirm before Agni, through the ritual, his gratitude to the Divine, at every significant event of his life. This constitutes the body of lifelong religious observances called the Samskaras,

which commits the individual to a life of religious, social and ethical purpose, and constitutes the Vedic Way of Life.

The Samskaras are thus designed to celebrate and sanctify life's crucial junctures, and under-write a life of personal, social and spiritual fulfilment. The first Samskara, Garbhadhana, celebrates the creation of human life at conception, and the last, Antyeshi, sanctifies death. It is interesting that the latter ceremony ends the mourning period of 13 days, with a luncheon get-together of family and friends, as if to celebrate the joyful lifetime of the one who has departed, and gracefully accept Death as part of Life.

Between the first and last Samskara are a progression of several Samskaras, all of which date back to the Vedic period and are prescribed and explained in scriptural texts, called the Smritis, specifically the Grhya Sutras. These texts date back to over 3000 years ago and are attributed to several Rishis like Aswalayana, Baudhayana, Parashara, Varaha, Vaikhana, Gautama and Veda Vyasa. The number of Samskaras prescribed by them vary from 12 to 40, with 19 propounded by Veda Vyasa being considered the most important rites of passage in the Hindu way of life

The 16 major Samskaras are as listed below :

1. Garbhadhana is the conception ritual for having healthy children. Lord Brahma or Prajapati is worshipped by this ritual.
2. Punswana is the fertilization ritual performed on the third month of pregnancy asking for life and safety of the fetus. Once again Lord Brahma is prayed to in this ceremony.
3. Seemantonnayana ritual is observed in the penultimate month of pregnancy for safe and assured delivery of the baby. This is a prayer to the Hindu God Dhata.
4. Jatakarma is birth ceremony of the new-born baby. On this occasion, a prayer is observed for goddess Savita.
5. Namakarana is the naming ceremony of the baby, which is observed 11 days after its birth. This gives the new-born an identity with which he or she will be associated all his life.
6. Niskramana is the act of taking the four-month-old child out for the first time into the open to sunbathe. The Sun God Surya is worshipped.
7. Annaprashana is the elaborate ceremony conducted when the child is fed cereal for the first time at the age of six months.
8. Chudakarma or Keshanta karma is the ceremonious tonsuring of the head and Lord Brahma or Prajapati is prayed and offerings made to him. The baby's head is shaved and the hair is ceremonially immersed in a river.
9. Karnavedha is the ritual of having the ear pierced. Today, it is mostly girls who have their ears pierced.
10. Upanayana also known as the thread ceremony is the investiture ceremony of the sacred thread where Brahmin boys are adorned with a sacred thread hung from the left shoulder and passed across the front and back. On this day, Lord Indra is invoked and offerings are made to him.
11. Vedarambha or Vidyarambha is observed when the child is initiated into study. In ancient times, boys were sent to live with their gurus in a 'gurugriha' or hermitage to study. Devotees pray to the Goddess Sarasvati on this occasion.

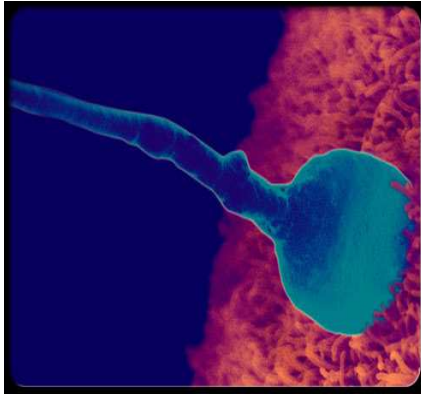
12. Samavartana is the convocation or the commencement to the study of the Vedas.
13. Vivaha is the lavish nuptial ceremony. After marriage, the individual enters the life of a 'grihastha' or conjugal life - the life of a householder. Lord Brahma is the deity of the day in the wedding ceremony.
14. Awasthyadhana or Vivahagni Parigraha is a ceremony where the marrying couple encircles the sacred fire seven times. It is also known as 'Saptapadi.'
15. Tretagnisangraha is the auspicious ritual that starts the couple on their domestic life.
16. Antyeshti is the final rite of passage or Hindu funeral rites that is performed after death.

However, eight of known as 'Ashtasamskaras', and considered essential and are maintained in active observance to the present day. They are the Namakarana - Naming ceremony; Anna Prasana - Starting to eat solid food; Karnavedha - Ear Lobe piercing; Chudakarma or Chudakarana - Tonsure; Vidyarambha - Beginning of Education; Upanayana - Sacred Thread Ceremony; Vivaha – Marriage; and Antyeshti - Funeral or Last Rites.

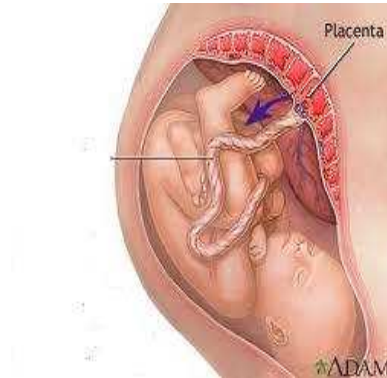
This book presents a sequence of important Samskaras in some measure of detail. The events they address are variously observed in most of the world's cultures. The Indian Samskaras however, are unique, coming to us today, from over 3000 years ago. In their measure of detail, they are rooted, not only in eternal spiritual values, but reflect an astonishing level understanding of human psychology and degree of rationality. With this background we may now turn to how the creation of life at conception, is celebrated with the first Samskara, the Garbhadhana, and sets the individual on the Vedic Way Of Life.

PART I : HERALDING A NEW LIFE

CHAPTER – 1 – PREGNANCY AND BIRTH



**The sperm
and the ovum**



**The child
in the making**

CELEBRATING PREGNANCY AT ALL STAGES

WITH

THE FIRST THREE SAMSKARAS

Garbhaadhana, Pumsavana and Seemantonnayana

The Vedic Way of Life commences with a celebration of the creation of a new life right from the stage of conception and continues through all stages of the pregnancy. Before going into the specific Samskaras conducted at these stages, it is important to take note of an every day discipline to be observed by the pregnant mother. This is part of a daily session of prayer, in which the recitation of great Stotras like the Lalitha Sahasranama or the Vishnu Sahasranama, is an important part. The Stotra presents the highest qualities personified in the Divine, and the daily recitation, with a full understanding of their meanings, is intended to internalize these qualities in the person reciting them. For a pregnant mother, the internalization is intended to reach down into the foetus and shape its personality as a form of spiritual education in advance of formal birth. There is a beautiful story in the Bhagavata Purana of how Prahlada became a devotee of Vishnu even when he was a foetus. This was due to his mother being taught the Vedic texts during her pregnancy by Narada who was taking care of her at that time. So intense was Prahlada's devotion, that Vishnu made that dramatic appearance as the Narasimha Avatar to protect Prahlada by killing his father, the evil King Hiranyakasipu who was tormenting him. Such ancient stories from the Puranas resonate to the present day in every Hindu household and make religion and spirituality such a lasting presence in the Vedic way of life.

We may now take note of how the ancients of India studied and described conception and pregnancy. The Atharva Veda dated towards the end of the 2nd. Millennium BC, in the Paippalada recension, presents every stage of human procreation, from conception, through pregnancy to delivery, in considerable detail. Conception is considered a sacred event attended by the gods, and therefore to be protected by prescription of special incantations and amulets. Hymn V – 25-10,11, and 12 describes the descent of the ova through the two Gavini ducts (the Fallopian tubes) into the uterus. Hymn VI-121-4 describes the actual delivery.

THE FIRST THREE SAMSKARAS :

Garbhaadhana is the conception ritual for having healthy children. Lord Brahma or Prajapati, is addressed by this ritual. Pumsavana is the ritual performed on the third month of pregnancy praying for life and safety of the fetus. Once again Lord Brahma is prayed to in this ceremony. The Seemantonnayana ritual is observed in the penultimate month of pregnancy for safe and assured delivery of the baby.

GARBHAADANA :

The ritual text of this Samskara is recorded in the Garbhaadhana Stotra attributed to the Sage Saunaka and addressed to the Goddess Garbhambika in a temple in Tamilnadu. The text of the Garbha Raksha Stotra reproduced in Appendix- B.



The Goddess Garbhambika in the Garbharakshambikha) temple, situated at Thirukarukaavur, Papanasam Taluk in Tanjore District in TamilNadu

The word, Garbhadana, is a combination of two Sanskrit words, Garbha, meaning the womb, and Dana, meaning a gift. Thus it literally means a gift of/to the womb, embodying perhaps one of the most beautiful concepts in the Vedic way of Life. The physical act of consummating a marriage between a man and a woman, with the object of conceiving a healthy and virtuous child, was celebrated with the ritual of Garbhaadhana. This samskara had evolved as part of an Aryan way of life, (the word Aryan referred to a noble person and carried no racial implication) and indicated a very advanced way of thinking. It presupposed a social order, with a well-established home, marriage rituals, a desire for having children, and a religious idea in beneficent

gods who blessed their devotees with virtuous and strong children. A son was referred to as 'Rinachyutha' or one who removed debt, mainly of a moral kind, such as one owed to one's ancestors : therefore it was regarded a sacred duty to have children.

While the Vedic and Pre-Sutra periods have many hymns and references to the act of consummation, it appears that the Garbhadana may have simply been a part of the wedding rituals. However in the Grihyasutras, for the first time, there is a systematic account of the Garbhadana ritual. Various vows are to be observed in order to conceive different types of sons – Brahmana srotriya, one who is well-versed in one sakha; Anuchana, one who has studied the Vedangas; Rsikalpa, one who has read the Kalpas; Rsi, one who has studies the 4 Vedas; and Deva, who is superior to all the above. The husband approaches his wife, every month, after her monthly cycle, with the object of conceiving only such meritorious children. The very act of conception was accompanied by the chanting of hymns by the husband with prayers for a safe conception. The Paddhatis or traditional practices, added the worship of Gods from Puranas and prescribed the worship of ancestors and specially the God Ganesha (the removed of obstacles) at the beginning of the Garbhaadana ritual. The tenor of the entire ritual, as with all rituals is set by the critical attitude of intention or resolve, called the Sankalpa, with which it is undertaken.

The later Sutras, the Dharmashastras and Smritis, laid down detailed prescriptions on conception; recommended and prohibited nights, astrological considerations, and taboos for certain days and months when conception should not happen. It was believed that conception that occurred later in a woman's cycle led to more meritorious children. It was also believed that the sex of a child was determined by whether conception took place on an odd-numbered night or an even-numbered night. These considerations, (some would say superstitions) merely pointed to a mental conditioning driven by desire for an auspicious result.

Manu Smriti talks of Garbhaadana as a sacred and compulsory duty and considered important for the physical and psychological well-being of both husband and wife, and therefore, by extension, to society. Thus we come across a society, where men approached their wives with the conscious intention of producing the best possible children, and approached this endeavour with the religious serenity, which they believed, would consecrate the child.

PUMSAVANA :



**The Valaikappu
Adorning the mother-to-be with bangles**

Once the pregnancy was confirmed, the Samskara referred to as the Pumsavana was performed. It was generally understood as a rite for the birth of a male child. Prayers are found in the Atharva Veda where a man prays by the side of his wife, "Unto thy womb let a foetus come, a male one, as an arrow to a quiver." Though the exact nature of the ritual is not known, some kind of celebration took place, where the juice of certain medicinal herbs was given to the pregnant woman. The specific preference for a male child is not to be understood as a bias against a girl child, but simply as reflecting a socio-economic necessity of the those times. On the other hand there was a deep respect of the role of the male as a protector and the female as the creator, reflected in male aspect of divinity as Siva and the female aspect as Parvathi, and indeed merging in an indivisible dual aspect of Divinity as the Ardhanariswara.



Ardhanariswara – in ancient and modern art

The male chauvinism or feminist assertion of today is no more than a superficial and irrational product of the modern socio-economic context.

Later texts, such as the Grihyasutras, prescribed that the Pumsavana Samskara be performed in the third or the fourth month of the pregnancy when the moon was on a male constellation (Stars apparently were believed to have a sex identity !). The pregnant woman was bathed ceremonially and given new clothes. Sprouts of the Banyan tree were pounded and the juice was inserted in the right nostril of the pregnant woman with the recitation of certain hymns. According to Ayurveda, the Banyan tree had the medicinal properties of removing all kinds of discomfort during pregnancy including biliousness and heartburn and was even supposed to protect against miscarriage. The ritual further elaborated that a bowl of water was placed on her lap while her husband touched her womb to ensure the birth of a virile son.

According to the later Smritis of Manu and Yajnavalkya, this ritual was performed when movement of the child was detected in the womb. Other texts vary over the performance of this ritual from the second to the eighth month of pregnancy and over whether this ritual should be

performed with every pregnancy. Since it was believed that the foetus was purified with this ritual, it was believed to be beneficial during every pregnancy. Later texts also suggest the use of other herbs in addition to the sprouts of the Banyan tree.

SEEMANTONNAYANA :



The Shower : the Vedic way

The Seemanta rite or Seemantonnayana was the third Samskara of the embryo. It is still performed in most traditional families where the hair of the pregnant woman is parted symbolically. The Goddess Mahalakshmi is invoked to protect the pregnant woman and her unborn child with this symbolic parting of the hair. The young woman is also regarded as the harbinger of all things auspicious as she carries the unborn child in her womb, embodying all the hopes and aspirations for her family's future.

The purpose of the Seemantha ritual was rooted in equal parts of superstition, practicality and physiology. Gods and Goddesses were invoked to protect the mother and the unborn infant from evil spirits. It was important to ritually bathe and adorn the young woman to nurture in her a sense of well-being. The presence of pregnancy hormones in a woman's body imparts a beauty, both of body and soul. It was believed that the child's mind started developing in the fifth month and therefore, hymns were recited with the belief that the child could hear them and benefit from these hymns even through the womb.

The Bhagavata Purana has the story of Prahlada who is supposed to have listened to stories about Lord Vishnu, even as he was in his mother's womb, and became one of the most ardent devotees of Narayana. When Prahlada was threatened by his own father, the demon Hiranyakasipu, Lord Narayana took the incarnation of Narasimha, part lion-part human to come and save his child-devotee. It is this same belief that recommends pregnant women to recite Stotras, listen to soothing devotional music or to read sacred books because these are believed to have a positive influence on the unborn child.

The ritual was conducted any time after the fifth month till the eighth month under a star of a male constellation. The ritual included prayers to Agni, female and male ancestors and other Gods and Goddesses. The pregnant woman sat in front of the fire while the husband ritually, parted her hair with the branches of the Darbha-grass and bunches of certain fruits to the chanting of the Gayathri Mantra. Some practices suggest the use of the Udumbara fruit or branch while others suggest the use of barley sprouts. Both were symbols of fertility.

Later Vedic traditions consisted of the recitation of hymns known as the *Udhagasanthi japa*, which was a soft, but powerful recitation to reach the unborn child. On completion of this recitation, the pregnant woman was bathed in cold consecrated water, (vide picture above) with the express purpose of stimulating the child in the womb. It was believed that this specific mantra provided certain positive vibrations to the child and prepared the mother for a safe and normal delivery. The ceremony concluded with the blessings of elder members of the family, a feast and a musical recital to create a calm and soothing atmosphere.

CHAPTER – 2 : FEEDING - ANNA PRASANAM



The first feeding of the infant with solid food was the next ritual to be celebrated. It assumed importance as a ritual since it was the next important developmental stage in the life of the infant. As the infant completed four months, or when the first teeth appeared, it was considered appropriate to wean the child off the mother's milk. The appearance of the first teeth indicated that the child was ready to be introduced to a variety of foods in a gradual manner. As the child was introduced to a variety of solid foods, the requirement for the mother's milk would wane; the mother's milk would start to diminish in quantity. This would coincide beautifully with the development of the child's digestive organs and the various foods would nourish the growth of the physical body. This ritual, therefore, marked an important stage in the first year of the child and was necessary both for the health of the mother as well as the infant.

Praises of food are found in the Vedas and the Upanishads. The ceremony, however, seems to have taken on a ritualistic garb in the later Sutra period. The Sutras offer detailed instructions on the time of performance, the foods to be used during the ceremony and the hymns to be sung. These practices may have undergone slight modifications according to later Smritis and Puranas. The Grihyasutras and Manusmriti suggest that the ceremony be celebrated in the sixth month, usually after the child has developed

teeth. The first solid offering was usually a mixture of rice cooked in milk with ghee. To this day, babies are first given a soft pudding consisting of rice, cooked in milk and honey with a little bit of ghee. Early accounts suggest that the child should be introduced to all kinds of flavours and foods, including different meats. It was noted that the father fed the child with the flesh of the Bharadvaja bird if he wished for fluency of speech in the child, with fish if the father desired the child to be swift, with the flesh of the bird Ati and partridge if he desired holy luster, with ghee and rice if he desired brilliance in the child, and curd and rice if he desired strong senses. From the above, it is clear that the Hindus did not eschew meat in the Grihyasutra period. However, this practice evolved to feeding mostly a mixture of rice, honey, milk and ghee in later periods.

Food is recognized the life-giving substance. The source of this life-giving energy was supposed to be infused in the child. Whenever food is eaten or offered to priests it was customary to chant the following shloka to infuse the food with the power to help the physical body to take in the food and digest and absorb it to sustain the various functions of the body.

**praanaaya swaahaa,
apaanaaya swaahaa,
vyaanaaya swaahaa,
udaanaaya swaahaa,
samaanaaya swaahaa,
brahmane swaahaa**

Prana is the basic form of vital life-supporting energy that takes five specialized forms to support five vital physiological functions centred first in the head, that supports Respiration; the Udaana Vaayu, centered in the throat, supporting glandular functions like thyroid, pineal etc; the Samaana Vaayu centered in the stomach supporting gastric functions; the Vyaana Vaayu, centered in the heart, supporting circulatory functions, and the Apaana at the base of the body supporting the elimination of semen, urine and faeces. One sees at once the mantra resting on a knowledge of the structure and functions of different parts of the body.

Thus the ritualistic first feeding of the child was an important milestone, serving a dual purpose; weaning the child off the mother's milk, and praying for the Life Force to support and sustain the physical body of the child as he/she grows up.

CHAPTER 3 : TONSURE : CHUDAKARANA OR MUNDAN



There is evidence that grooming was important as early as in the Indus Valley civilization from artefacts that have been found, such as combs. However, the practice of shaving the hair on the head seems to have originated for both health and cosmetic reasons. Shaving the hair with an iron blade became a necessity to keep the head clean, but the use of a blade invoked fear as well. Thus necessity and fear would appear to have mingled together, to give rise to the Chudakarana ceremony.

It was believed that shaving off the hair for children ensured longevity. The scriptures were supported by the medical books as well. According to Susruta in the Chikitsasthana, shaving and cutting the hair and nails removed impurities and gave delight, lightness, prosperity, courage and happiness. Therefore the basis of the Chudakarana ceremony was health and grooming. There does not seem to be evidence in the Grhyasutras or the Smritis to suggest that the purpose of the tonsure was to offer the shorn hair to a deity. Even though the tonsure ceremony is frequently performed, even today, in temples, there is no prescription for the performance of this samskara in temples; this practice has evolved, however, in certain families, to have a dedicative purpose.

The Atharva Veda mentions wetting the hair before shaving it. Hymns are recited praising the shaving blade and requesting it to be kind to the child! There are references to the father performing the first shaving of the hair for wealth, abundance of food and strength. In the cases when a barber is invited, he is invoked as the personification of the Sun, Savita. According to the Grhyasutras and Manu Smriti, the Chudakarana ceremony was supposed to be performed at the end of the first year or third year of the child. Later, this was modified and extended up to the fifth or even the seventh year or even with the Upanayana, as the ceremony became largely ceremonial. In common practice, the hair was cropped regularly, but the ceremonial performance of chudakarana happened during the rituals surrounding the Upanayana when it was performed just before the ritual initiation. However, most families still adhere to the practice of shaving the hair within the first three years.

As was customary with other rituals, an auspicious day was selected based on Astrology. The ceremony was performed in the daytime, preferably during the first half of the year. This period was called Uttarayana to denote the movement of the Sun in the northern hemisphere between the winter and summer solstice. This auspicious period was said to signify the daytime of the Gods. The child was bathed and was dressed in new clothes by the mother and placed on the father's lap. The father invited the barber as the personification of the sun, to shave the hair. The iron blade was exhorted with hymns, to be kind and friendly to the infant and shave the head with the blade that has shaved the heads of kings! The head was shaved three times, from left to right. Each time the head was moistened and prayers were recited for the child's long life, existence, glory and welfare. The shorn hair was discarded carefully since it was believed that it could be used for black magic. A tuft of hair was left unshaven on top. The manner of retaining the tuft of hair was determined by the family or clan traditions. It was believed that keeping the tuft of hair protected the crown of the head. According to Susruta, just below the crown of the head lay the joint of a Sira (artery) with the Sandhi (a critical juncture). The tuft was left intact to protect this vital spot. Once the child's hair was shaved, there was another ritual bath, after which the child was again dressed in new clothes. A feast was served and the barber fed and given payment and gifts. The practice of shaving the hair of the child is common among both sexes.

CHAPTER 4 : EAR-LOBE-PIERCING : KARNA VEDHA



The practice of piercing the earlobe seems to have been an ancient one. Evidence of ornaments has been found among the Archeological artifacts of many ancient civilizations such as Egypt and China. On the Indian subcontinent, the practice of piercing the ears seems to have begun purely for ornamentation, and over the centuries, took on a religious connotation. In order to prescribe the practice, health reasons were cited. Susruta, for instance, claimed that the practice of piercing the earlobe was necessary for protecting against health conditions such as hernia and hydrocele. The reasons for this are unclear.

The inclusion of Karnabheda as a religious samskara and its ceremonies are from the late Sutra period. Only one of the Sutras refers to this practice. There also seems to be a wide variance over the correct age for the performance of this Samskara. According to some accounts, the ceremony was supposed to have been performed on the tenth, twelfth or sixteenth day after the birth of the child, while other texts suggest the sixth, seventh, eighth or twelfth month of the child's first year. Some others state that the ceremony can be performed in the third or fifth year of the child, or even as late as the Upanayanam. However, practical considerations warranted the piercing at an early stage so that it would not be troublesome for the child. In common practice today, the ceremony takes place somewhere in the first year of the baby or at the first birthday celebration.

The ritual was supposed to be performed by the father. However the actual piercing was done by a surgeon or a goldsmith. Again, in the modern context, this practice seems to continue. Young mothers are equally split between taking their infants to their family doctor for this procedure or inviting a goldsmith home and performing the piercing with all the ceremonial trappings. Gold needles were recommended for babies of the Kshatriya caste, while silver was used for Brahmin and Vaishya infants and iron was used for children of other castes. The reason for this classification was most likely economic.

The ceremony itself was very simple. An auspicious day was chosen and the ceremony was held in the morning. The child was bathed and dressed in new clothes and placed on the lap of the father, who sat facing

the east. Then the right ear was pierced with recitation of appropriate Mantras. The surgeon or the goldsmith was supposed to pierce the ear in one stroke. This required great skill and presence of mind. It was a skilled person who could pierce an infant's ear with minimum fuss! The ritual ended with gifts to the surgeon or goldsmith and a ceremonial feast. Usually, close relatives and friends were in attendance during this ceremony.

In more recent times, this ceremony is combined with the first birthday celebration of the child. When the child turns a year old, on the auspicious day of his/her first birthday, all close relatives and friends are invited for the celebration. Hymns are chanted for the infant's good health and long life. The occasion itself is called the Ayush-homam, the homam or prayerful offering for the long life! Brahmin priests invoke all Gods to come and bless the child. At the conclusion of this homam, the goldsmith or surgeon is invited to also pierce the ear of the child. And, as is customary, the occasion is marked by the ritual feast for all the guests!

CHAPTER 5 – THE FIRST BIRTHDAY : AYUSHYA HOMAM

Although the Ayushya Homam is not strictly considered a Samskara based on ancient texts, the first birthday of the child is celebrated with great importance in all families. While each family may undertake to mark the occasion with some manner of social gathering, most traditional families hold a religious ceremony and feast on this joyous day.

The birthday is marked by the combination of stars according to the calendar which is used by the family. On the first anniversary of this birth, the Ayushya Homam is performed to pray for the good health and long life of the child. Priests are invited to conduct the ritual as well as close family and friends. The child is bathed and clothed in new clothes. Each family varies in its interpretation of the rituals that are needed during this occasion. Usually, Ganesha, the remover of obstacles is worshiped first through a homam (sacrificial fire). Prayers are then offered to the nine celestial bodies (navagraha) that are believed to impact the child's health and fortunes based on astrology. Further prayers are offered to the family deities to ensure good health, and a long life.

After the conclusion of the rituals, a ceremonial feast is served to all the priests and guests. The priests are given gifts. In turn, guests bring gifts and bless the infant with wishes for good fortune and a long life.

Although there is no mention of prescribed rituals on this occasion, some families perform the shaving of the hair and the piercing of the ears on the same day. In this case, the shaving of the hair will happen before the ceremonial bath and the prayers. The piercing of the ears will happen once the homam portion of the ritual is completed. This is followed by the feast.

The Ayushya homam can be conducted for anybody at any age. It is common for this celebration to be held even when someone has recovered from an illness and prayers are offered for the good health of that person. When a person completes 60 years, the Ayushya Homam is conducted with many other rituals to mark the 60th birthday or Sashtiabdhapoorthi, literally, the completion of 60 years. There is a further celebration to mark the 80th birthday also. Needless to say, these were celebrations to mark the important milestones in a person's life. The rituals marking these milestones will be covered in a later chapter.

PART II : THE FORMATIVE YEARS

CHAPTER 6 – ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE



The Samskara disciplines that prescribe much of the Vedic Way of Life and which are described in this book, are in a sense, the end product of a massive effort to explain, elaborate and implement the content and intent of the Vedas, that resulted in a body of texts called the Vedangas. This effort was undertaken by a succession of later Rishis who realized that the Vedas had a fundamental and eternal value for mankind requiring that they be canonized as a Scripture of ultimate authority. They were referred to by the word Sruti, standing for texts revealed to high minds through divine inspiration. These later Rishis therefore felt it to be their bounden duty to establish systems and methods that would ensure that the Vedas were preserved, and propagated for implementation across all place and for all time, in their pristine purity. The systems and methods that they so developed were the Vedangas, meaning Limbs of the Vedas. These texts were six in number, and great in their own right. Four of the Vedangas were addressed to the structure and function of the entire word content of the Vedas : Shiksha or Phonetics on how the words should be articulated; Nirukta or Etymology, on how the words originated; Vyakarana or Grammar, on how words should be joined in sentences to convey meaning; and Chandas how sentences should be rendered as music or poetry with brevity and beauty in metrical structures, The other two Vedangas went beyond the realm of the word, to address the realm of activities and objects : Kalpa or Ritual, on how and with what objects and actions, sacrificial rituals should be conducted; and Jyotisha or Astronomy on how the auspicious time and place for the conduct of the sacrifices should be determined.

One sees at once, that the first four Vedangas concentrated on the word of the Veda within a comprehensive sweep of every aspect of the subject of Linguistics. Every word had a deeper, higher meaning originating in the mind itself, and a superficial lower meaning resting on what we experienced from the physical world, through our senses. Grasping the meaning at both levels required two levels of vision, real insight on one, physical sight on the other. The ancient Rishis had used

words of the Vedas to thus present a total integrated vision of all existence. The Vedangas however, went on to present methods for preservation, propagation and transmission of every word of the Vedas, One method exercised the mind through the Mantra and a second exercised the body through a large body of ritualistic action, typified by the Samskara. These methods were ingenious in that their design relied, not on writing as in every other culture of the world, but wholly on memory and an oral mode of transmission through training the teacher-pupil chain across place and time. The success of these methods was spectacular, in that the Vedic texts were maintained in their authentic pristine purity over the last 5000 years !

The Teacher – Pupil chain is referred in Sanskrit as the Guru – Sishya Parampara. The most outstanding Guru-Sishya example comes from the Chandogya Upanishad, of the Rishi Uddalaka Aruni leading his son Svetuketu, step by step with a practical example, to the ultimate lesson of all knowledge : Tat Tvam Asi – That Art Thou : in short, The Divine and You are one. The Guru-Sishya Parampara extends to the Fine Arts, indeed any learning context.

Two more direct references to the pre-eminence of the Guru may be recalled. The first one is from the Taittiriya Upanishad :

ॐ सह नाववतु सह नौ भुनक्तु ।

सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।

तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om saha nāvavatu saha nau bhunaktu .

saha vīryam karavāvahai.

tējasvi nāvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai.

Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ..

Om. May He protect us both (teacher and student). May He cause us both to enjoy the bliss of liberation. May we both exert to find out the true meaning of the Scriptures. May our studies be fruitful. May we never quarrel with each other. Om peace, peace, peace.

The second reference is the famous Guru Stotra from the Skanda Purana

गुरुः ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।

गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

guruḥ brahmā gururviṣṇuḥ gururdevō mahēśvaraḥ.

guruḥ śākṣāt paraṁ brahma tasmai śrīguravē namaḥ..

**The guru is Brahma (the creator of the universe),
The guru is Vishnu (the protector of the universe),
The guru is Shiva (the destroyer of the universe),
He is the supreme Brahma (the soul of the world).
To that guru I bow.**

In the Vedic tradition, the father becomes the Guru, leading the infant's finger to write first letter Aum, in the Aksharabhyasam function, whispering the Gayatri for the first time in his son's ear at the Upanayanam, and thereafter initiates him into the Sandhyavanam discipline. These are but the foundation stones of Vedic Knowledge laid in the mind of the child, to become part of his surface memory and deeper psyche, as a prelude to the fuller formal education to follow. The fuller formal Vedic education is set in the institution of the Vedic Pataskala.

These training methods were implemented through a country-wide network of Vedic Shakhas and Vedic Pathashalas established to train the priestly class in Knowledge of the Vedas and in serving the communities in all the observance of the Samskaras and other ritualistic practices. The depth and spread of the Vedic way of life that pervades India to this day is clearly the result of this master strategy evolved in ancient Vedic times. The Vedic Shakhas and Pathashala has sadly been largely marginalized today by political and socio-economic changes of last 1000 years. The Pathashalas in particular, have been marginalized by the modern educational system, but nevertheless continue to exist, few and far between, and largely relying on public support. A typical Veda Pathashala functioning in Palghat, Kerala is described in detail in Appendix – C, to illustrate its training methods. What is critically important is how relevant these methods could be to the modern school educational system, which has tended to ignore them on questionable assumptions of rationality and modernity. Any unbiased mind will recognize these assumptions to rest on a gross under-estimation of the strength and potential of the mind of the child when it is ready for school.

What then is the rationale of the training methods of the Pathashala, which as may be seen in the above cited Appendix, concentrates on training the student from around the age of 10 to around the age of around 20, almost exclusively on memorizing and reciting the vast texts of the Vedas ? Consider what a typical student of the Vedic Pathashala accomplishes : memorizing and reciting hundreds of hymns from the Rig Veda at the age of 10; and not only recite but also explain the profound meaning of all the thousands of hymns of the entire Rig Veda by the time he reaches 20 ? Surely schools, colleges, universities or professions of today can profit from adopting and adapting the memory training methods of the traditional Pathashala. One should note the relatively high standards of performance in the modern educational and professional institutions of even those brought up in homes observing the training disciplines of the Vedic way of life.

Much as we may rue these losses to the Vedic way of life, there are greater compensations coming from all around the world in recognition of its merits. Right from the early years of the 19th Century, when great scholars of the Western world unveiled unbiased images of the Vedas, this ancient Indian heritage has drawn the fascination and unstinted admiration from the highest minds of the world. A sampling of what they had to say is set out in Appendix – E. And following from this universal acclaim, the Vedic heritage has found a new life and energy through leading schools, colleges, universities, and institutions all around the world, all of which, in one voice, proclaim the Vedic Way of Life to be what it always was, viz. a truly Universal Way of Life.

We may now turn to the first step of the child on the road to Knowledge, celebrated by the Aksharabhyam Samskara.

CHAPTER – 7 – LEARNING : AKSHARA-ABHYASAM



Akshara Abyasam is a Hindu ceremony for children where they are introduced to writing skills (especially teaching how to write the alphabet and familiarize the script of the mother tongue) in front of the Goddess Sarasvathi.

The word Akshara means letter and Abhyasa means learning. The ceremony is usually performed by the maternal uncle (mother's brothers) keeping the child in his lap. At the end he will hold the child's right hand forefinger and write the Om symbol which is considered a holy Beeja Akshara or seed letter. The symbol Om is the holiest sound, a symbol of the highest Divine, who is described as Akshara, which means Imperishable, and hence symbolizing the Eternal .

CHAPTER 8: THE SECOND BIRTH: THE UPANAYANAM



THE SACRED THREAD THE GAYATHRI MANTRA



THE SANDHYAVANDANAM

Upanayana is a Sanskrit word, that literally means 'moving closer'. Moving closer to what? To the higher knowledge, to the teacher, ultimately the Creator. The Upanayana marks a beginning of a new phase in the life of the child, often referred to as a second birth, a new birth in the spiritual world towards the higher knowledge according to the Vedic way of life. It is initiated as a formal and important introduction to this knowledge through learning the sacred chants and mantras of the Vedas as part of the Vedic tradition.

The initiation ideally is around the age of seven years, when the child is deemed to be at the suitable age for the beginning of his education. If the ceremony does not take place at the seventh year, it was allowed to perform this ritual sometime before the 16th year. After this initiation, his spiritual education commences with certain daily practices which prepare him to learn and accept higher levels of thought, according to the Vedic traditions.

The emphasis on learning and repeating the Gayathri Mantra and performance of the Sandhyavandanam as a daily discipline have a profound impact on the onward intellectual, emotional and spiritual maturation of the child, that is sadly missing from formal modern educational processes. Thankfully these disciplines are maintained in the traditional Pathashala systems described in a later Chapter.

The Upanayana ceremony seems to have had its origins in pre-Aryan times. There is mention of this rite of passage in the Rig Veda as a simple ritual to initiate the child to certain practices by a teacher. In most cases, while a priest helps conduct the ceremony, it is the father of the child who is considered the first teacher as he initiates his son into the chanting of the most sacred Gayathri Mantra. This ceremony was common to Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes, although it is usually celebrated among the Brahmin community in modern times. Once the ritual initiation had taken place, the child was considered to have been 'born-again' – the ritual considered to be a second birth for the child. It is important to note that the early accounts of this ritual indicated that girls were also initiated in the same manner. However, with the Manusmriti, this practice was restricted to male children alone, since the girl child was required to be educated in domestic matters.

A suitable day is selected based on what is considered auspicious for the child according to Astrology. A number of priests are invited to conduct the ceremony along with close family and friends. The child is bathed and dressed in the traditional dhoti.

A ceremony called the Naandhishraddham is held on the day prior to the Upanayana. The purpose of this ritual is to seek the blessings of the ancestors before the main ritual. It is customary to invite 9 Brahmins for this ritual. Prayers are offered to 3 generations of ancestors to seek their blessings. The Udhagashanti ritual is also conducted on the same day. A kalasam or brass pot is filled with water and prayers are chanted invoking Varuna, the God of rain/water. Hymns are chanted with the intention of praying for the long life of the child and to remove all evil influences from his life. Other hymns from the Vedas are also chanted. The water in the pot is thus believed to be infused with the vibration of these chants and is poured over the child to purify him. The ceremony concludes on the first day with a ceremonial feast and gifts of clothing and money to the priests.



On the day of the Upanayana, the ceremony begins with an invocation to Ganesha, the Divine remover of obstacles, to ensure the completion of the ceremony without any obstacles. This is followed by the following rituals

17. **Punyahavachana:** All the deities are invoked in a pot of water through the chanting of the appropriate mantras. The water is then sprinkled over the child, for the purification of his mind and body, and for his protection, as well as over the area where the ceremony is to be conducted, and the people present on the occasion.
18. **Kumara Bhojana:** The boy, and some of his young friends are given breakfast. It was supposed to signify one of the last occasions when the young boy would get to spend with his friends before he left for the Gurukula for his education.



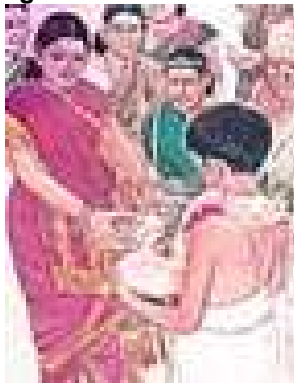
19. **Yajnopavita Dharana:** The word Yajna means Worship, the central activity of the Vedas, and is symbolized by the sacred thread. Upavita means sacred thread and Dharana means wearing. The father therefore places the thread across the child's left shoulder under the guidance of the priest. The sacred thread consists of three strands signifying Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as well as Jnana, Karma and Bhakti. The strands also signify the child assuming responsibilities towards his parents, Society and to the pursuit of Knowledge.
20. **Brahmopadesha (Gayatri Upadesha):** Initiation into the Gayatri mantra – the Supreme mantra, that protects those who recite it. The boy's father becomes his first teacher and whispers the powerful Gayatri mantra into his ears. This mantra is said to be the essence of the Vedas, and is a direct portal to attain the highest realization (the Brahman) in life.



- 21.
22. **Ajyabhaganta Homa:** A prayer directed to Agni, the god of fire, to bless the child with long life, sharp intellect, courage, and many other virtues and qualities that will allow him to study well, and become a successful and responsible member of the society later on.
23. **Suryadarshanam:** The boy is taken outside and asked to look up at the sun, through his fingers. The Sun God, Surya is invoked to protect the child. Since the Gayatri mantra is at the heart of the Upanayana ceremony, worship of the Sun is very important.



24. **Bhiksha Karana:** The boy asks for alms of rice from his mother and other women present (symbolically). This was done to instill humility and control the ego. It will allow the child to control the senses – a requirement to live by the Vedic teaching. The children were required to seek alms for their daily requirement of food. It was customary for women in households to offer rice and lentils to the young novices as they came seeking alms.



The heart of the initiation into the Vedas is through the learning of the Gayathri Mantra which originates in the Rig Veda (III-62.10) and is indeed considered to be the most sacred and most significant prayer of the Vedas. It is, for this reason, the central mantra of an obligatory daily prayer thereafter, called the Sandhya-vandana. Another name of the Gayathri Mantra is "Savitri Mantra" because it is addressed to Savitr, the Sun, the source of light and all life-giving energy, and therefore considered a symbol of that Ultimate Reality from which all existence emerges.

The Mantra is comprised of four lines , the first of which reads

ॐ भूः ॐ भुवः ॐ सुवः
 .Om bhū Om bhūva Om sūva

||
 The word AUM is of course, regarded as the most sacred and the most significant word in the Vedas, just as the Gayathri is regarded as their most sacred and significant prayer. The word AUM represents Brahman, the Ultimate Reality from which emerges the Manifested Universe. The words Bhuh, Bhuvah and Suvah are the three levels of Existence: the Earth of the humans, the Inter-space of the spirits and the Heaven of the gods. These three levels are also considered to represent the physical, the psychic and the divine levels of Human Existence. By this opening invocation the individual proclaims his being part of the Manifested Universe and the Unmanifested Reality beyond.

The next three lines of the Gayathri Mantra are:

तत् सवितुः वरेण्यम्
tat savituh: vareṇyam
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि
bhargō devasya dhīmahi
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt

These lines are a prayer that Savitr, the Sun, that symbolizes the Ultimate Reality, should, with his divine effulgence, enlighten our intellect to realize the Ultimate Truth. Freely translated, this mantra says :

We meditate upon that worshipful effulgence of the Divine Sun. May He inspire our intellect.

Use of the word “naḥ” may be specially noted. It means “we”, and being in the plural form of the First Person, it indicates that the prayer is not for oneself, but on behalf of all. This and the other words of the prayer give it a universality that can appeal to anyone of any persuasion, religious or rational. Also, as stated elsewhere in this book, the Vedas explicitly state that the knowledge they contain is to be imparted to everyone without distinction of sex, caste, creed or race. After the Gayathri Mantra, the initiation ceremony teaches the performance of the Sandhya Vandanam, literally meaning prayer to be performed at the three transit times of the Sun during the day viz. sunrise, midday and sunset. This prayer carries mantras to be recited with different ritualistic postures and actions, that emphasize a commitment to purity of thought and action, and obeisance to the Divine. And an interesting detail is the way the individual is taught to announce his identity and his commitment to the prayer, as indeed on all occasions thereafter, religious or otherwise. This is the Abhivaadaye, announcing his identity and the Sankalpa, declaring his commitment to the prayer, and indeed to the spirit of all

his undertakings, religious or otherwise. The individual announces his identity always and typically in terms of his spiritual, religious and familial roots going back through an unbroken continuity, to the specific Rishi founders of his Vedic Branch, his Sutra School, and the Gothra Family of his lineage. An elaborate version of the Sankalpa adds details of one's exact place within Space and Time, in India and the world, within the vast context of Space, and exact date and time within the vast context of Time as set in the traditional Yuga calendar whose start has been set at 3101 BC. The typical brief version in Sanskrit with its transliteration and translation runs as below. A little reflection on these Mantras would obviously inspire the individual to relate his own existence in the vastness of Space and Time and to the great forbears to whom he owes his understanding of this vast perspective :

अभिवादे वैश्वामित्र, आश्वमेधेन, कौशिक, त्रय- आर्षेय प्रवरान्वित, (कौशिक) गोत्रः
(आपस्तम्ब) सूत्रः, (यजुः) शाखाभ्यासी, श्री (—) शर्मा नामाऽहं अस्मि धोः ।
abhiwādayē vaiśvāmītra, āśvamedhena, kauśika, traya- ārṣeya pravaraṇvita,
kauśika gōtraḥ āpastamba sūtra, yajuḥ śākhābhāyāśī, śrī (— name) śarmi
nāmāśham aham bhūḥ.

Bowing to you, Sir, I announce myself as belonging to the spiritual lineage of the three Sages Viswamitra, Akarshmana and Kausika, to the religious disciplines of the Apasthamba Sutra of the Yajur Veda, and to the family lineage of the Kausika Gothra and I bear the name (so-and-so)

The typical text of the Sankalpa runs as follows :

ममोपसमस्तसुखिण्यद्वय औपमेवस्यौत्पत्त्ये शुभे दिने सोमने फुल्ले अयं ब्रह्मः द्वितीयप्राये
शिववराहकल्पे वैवस्वामन्वतरे अष्टाविंशतिमे कलियुगे प्रथमे पदे जम्बूद्वीपे मत्स्यवर्षे मत्स्यसन्धे
मेरोः दक्षिणे पर्वते अस्मिन् वर्तमाने व्यावृत्तिं प्रगवदीनां ऋतुः संवत्सरणां मध्ये —
नामसंवत्सरे(.....)
adya brahmanag dvitīyaprasādhikē śrīśaivavāsyaśrīutpattyaē śubhe dinē somanē phullē ayaṁ brahmaḥ dvitīyaprasādhē
śivavarāhakalpe vaiśvāsamantare aṣṭāviṁśatime kalīyugē prathamē padē jambūdvīpē matsya-varṣe matsya-sandhē
merōḥ dakṣiṇē pārvate aśmīn vartamānē vyāvṛtīṁ pragavadīnāṁ ṛtuḥ saṁvatsaraṇāṁ madhye —
nāmasaṁvatsare(.....)
“This day, in the second half of Brahma's life, during Svetavaraha Kalpa, during Vaivasvata Manvantara, in the first quarter of the 28th Kali Yuga, in the Bharatha Year, in the Jambudvīpa continent, in Bharathavarshs country, South of the holy mountain Meru, in the current year, within the middle of the current 60 year cycle commencing with the year Prabhava,” (I offer this prayer for the satisfaction of the Supreme God)

The ceremonies conclude with the customary meal and the distribution of clothing and gifts to the priests. The young boy, then seeks the blessings of his elders by prostrating in

the traditional manner, followed by the recitation of the introduction that he has just been taught, the Abhivaadaye, where he introduces himself.

It is a common practice, even today, for young boys to be taught the daily practices by the elder male members in the family so that they become accustomed to the chanting of the Gayatri Mantra. The Sandhyavandana is the practice of praying to the Sun during the important transitions, namely, sunrise, mid-day and sunset. The ritual practices include the ritual purification, a commitment and statement of purpose to surrender and dedicate oneself to worship, the actual chanting of the Gayatri Mantra along with the yogic practice of Pranayama (nostril breathing), the introduction of one's lineage and surrender. It must be mentioned that the daily practice of the Gayatri with the practice of Pranayama three times, served to train the young boy in basic Yogic practices, which provided the benefit of improving concentration by increasing the intake of oxygen and discharging carbon-dioxide. It is ironic that the benefits of such practices are being espoused with renewed enthusiasm now that we begin to understand the connection between body, mind and spirit – something that our ancestors took for granted as their way of life!

PART III : THE MATURE YEARS

CHAPTER - 9 : SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION -- PERSONAL & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY --

In introducing the personal Samskaras of the adult stage of life, it would be useful to first get an overview of the general disciplines of daily life that guided everyone, as both individual and collective members of society. These disciplines are set out in the body of texts called the Dharmasastras, that comprehensively cover every aspect of personal and social everyday life. All the Dharmaśāstras derive their authority with reference to the Vedas, though few, if any, of the contents of most Dharmaśāstra texts can be directly linked with extant Vedic texts. Among the many Smṛiti texts of the Dharmasastra, the most important are the Manu Smṛiti and the Yājñalkya Smṛiti.

The Manu Smṛiti, also known as *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* is the most important and earliest metrical work of the *Dharmaśāstra* textual tradition of Hinduism. The text presents itself as a discourse given by Manu, the progenitor of mankind to a group of seers, or Rishis, who beseech him to tell them the "law of all the social classes" (1.2). Manu became the standard point of reference for all future *Dharmaśāstras* that followed it

A range of historical opinion generally dates composition of the text any time between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Most scholars consider the text a composite put together over a long period of time, although Olivelle (2010) argues that the complex and consistent structure of the text suggests a single author or redactor, who would have lived during the time of the formation of classical Hinduism in reaction to the decline of Buddhism in Northern India, during the time of the later Kushan Empire. After the breakdown of the Maurya and Sunga empires, there was a period of uncertainty that led to renewed interest in traditional social norms. In Thapar's view, "The severity of the Dharma-shastras was doubtless a commentary arising from the insecurity of the orthodox in an age of flux.

The original treatise consisted of one thousand chapters of law, polity, and pleasure given by Brahmā. His son, Manu, learns these lessons and proceeds to teach his own students, including Bhrigu. Bhrigu then relays this information in the Manu Smṛiti, to an audience of his own pupils.

This original narrative was subdivided later into twelve chapters. The book is written in simple verse as opposed to the metrical verse of the preceding dharmasutras. The treatise is written with a frame story, in which a dialogue takes place between Manu's disciple, Bhrigu, and an audience of his own students. The story begins with Manu himself detailing the creation of the world and the society within it, structured around four social classes. Bhrigu takes over for the remainder of the work, teaching the details of the rest of Manu's teachings.

It seems likely that the book was written in a manner which was very mindful to the dangers facing the Brahmin community during a time of much change and social upheaval. A renewed alliance between the Brahmin and Kshatriya communities is clearly a goal reflected in the introduction of the Vyavahārapadas. The emphasis which this topic receives can be seen as a perspective that provided socio-economic stability and solidarity on religious and ethical basis which was as important to the ruling class as it was to the religious community.

The Manusmṛiti is considered an important source for the sociological history of ancient and medieval India. Since it forms the basis of the traditional Hindu caste system, it has been subject to much criticism and controversy, having been attacked by colonial scholars, modern liberals, Hindu reformists, Dalit advocates, and Feminists

The scholar Surendra Kumar, who counts a total of 2,685 verses, finds that only 1,214 are authentic, the other 1,471 being interpolations on the text. The verses critical of the sudras and women are considered to be later interpolations, but not later than Adi Shankara (7th-8th century CE). The law in Manu Smṛiti also appears to be overtly positive towards the Brahmin (priest) caste in terms of concessions made in fines and punishments. The stance of the Manu Smṛiti about women has also been debated. While certain verses such as (III - 55, 56, 57, 59, 62) glorify the position of women, other verses (IX - 3, 17) seem to attack the position and freedom women have. The education of women is also discussed in the text. Certain interpretations of Verse (IX - 18) claim that it discourages women from reading Vedic scriptures. Verse (II - 240), however, allows women to read Vedic scriptures. Similar contradictory phrases are encountered in relation to child marriage in verses (IX - 94) and (IX - 90). The modern father figure of the Dalit Revolution, B. R. Ambedkar asserted that Manu Smṛiti was written by a sage named Brigu during the times of Pushyamitra Sango as a reaction in connection with social pressures caused by the rise of Buddhism. However, historian Romila Thapar considers these claims to be exaggerations. On the other hand

prominent Hindu revivalists, such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, held the text to be authentic and authoritative. Other admirer included Annie Besant, Ouspensky, Pandurang Shastri, Athavale and Sir. S.Radhakrishnan.

Much of the modern criticisms of the Manu Smriti can be faulted on the simple ground that they tend to judge it on the norms that prevail today. They were concepts and prescriptions that were clearly relevant to the times when they were proposed. The four fold social structure had a functional basis on the essential division of labor that was needed to sustain any society and does indeed prevail in every organized society. The primacy of the Brahmin rests on a completely spiritual base with no demands on political power or socio-economic resources, and subject to the most severe personal ethical disciplines. The Brahmin derived his authority by earning the respect of the other classes through his function as a teacher and a guide. Each of the other classes and women has their respective code of ethics and mutual respect was obligatory between all classes and between the sexes. Ethics thus had the status of the rule of law, without its usual backing of the use of force that we see today. Distortions may have existed in those times, but they were nowhere near the scale and severity of what we see today.

We may now see the objectivity of the judgment of the great Western thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche, who deemed the Manu Smriti to be "an incomparably spiritual and superior work" to the Christian Bible. He observed that "the sun shines on the whole book" and attributed its ethical perspective to "the noble classes, the philosophers and warriors, [who] stand above the mass. He criticized it nevertheless for its harsh treatment of the chandala, but this did not cloud his larger vision of the Smriti.

Yājñavalkya of Mithila was a legendary sage of Vedic India, credited with the authorship of the Shatapatha Brahmana (including the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad), besides the Yoga Yajnavalkya and the Yājñavalkya Smriti. Yājñavalkya was the son of Devarāta and was the pupil of sage Vaisampayana. Once, Vaisampayana got angry with Yājñavalkya for his interpretation of some aspects of the Yajurveda. The angry teacher asked his pupil Yājñavalkya to "give back" all the knowledge of Yajurveda that he had taught him. Accordingly, Yājñavalkya is said to have vomited all the knowledge that he acquired from his teacher in form of digested food. Other disciples of Vaisampayana took the form of partridge birds and consumed the digested knowledge (a metaphor for knowledge in its simplified form without the complexities of the whole but the simplicity of parts) because it was knowledge and they were very eager to receive the same. This version is therefore named the Taittiriya Yajur Veda after "Tittiri", the Sanskrit word for partidge. It is also called the Krishna Yajurveda or Black-Yajurveda on account of it being dark like a

vomited substance. Yājñavalkya determined not to have any human guru thereafter, and engaged in intense worship of the Sun God, Surya for the purpose of acquiring the fresh Vedic portions not known to his preceptor, Vaiśampāyana. The Sun God, pleased with Yājñavalkya penance graced the sage with such fresh portions of the Yajurveda as were not known to any other. This portion of the Yajurveda goes by the name of Śukla Yajurveda or White-Yajurveda on account of it being revealed by Sun.

Dharmaśāstra, after the formulation of the Yājñavalkyasmṛiti, was divided into three major topics : ācāra, vyavahāra, and prāyaścitta, rules about expiations and penances for violations of the rules of dharma. This categorization was elaborated in great detail in P.V. Kane's monumental History of Dharmaśāstra, as set out below.

Ācāra :

The category of ācāra comprised rules governing obligations and proper conduct for all the varnas and āśramas, closely related to Mīmāṃsā laws of proper ritual conduct. It also had the broader meaning of conventions of practice, though still carrying the moral connotation of “right practice”, i.e. the authorized practices of good people passed down over generations. The topics were detailed as below.

- Varna – the rules of the class-based social system, such as the specific duties given to each class and the rules for intermarriage.
- Consecratory, or life-cycle, rites – rituals that mark important occasions in a person's life such as birth, marriage, and the adoption of the yajñopavītam or sacred thread.
- Āśramas – the four stages of life (the student, the householder, the retired forest dweller, and the renunciate) and the duties expected during each.
- Five great sacrifices – daily sacrifices by Brahmin householders to the Vedas (through teaching), the ancestors (through libations), the gods (through fire offerings), beings (through various types of offerings), and guests (through hospitality).
- Rules for food – class-based regulations on what to eat and how to obtain food.
- Religious gifts (dāna) – the caste breakdown of who is to accept and who is to give gifts. The Vedas are followed when performing sacrifices or giving gifts, since consequences for improper gift giving and receiving can be severe.
- Funerary and ancestral rites – Under this topic would fall rules regarding proper rituals surrounding the cremation of the deceased, as well as fulfilling the dvija's obligations to his deceased ancestors through the performance of the śrāddha ritual.

Vyavahāra :

Vyavahāra is an important concept of Hindu law denoting legal procedure. Kane defines it as follows: “When the ramifications of right conduct, that are together called dharma and that can be established with efforts (of various kinds such as truthful speech, etc.) have been violated, the dispute (in a court between parties) which springs from what is sought to be proved (such as debt), is said to be vyavahāra. The king's personal dharma is inextricably linked to legal proceedings and

his dharma is determined the by the merits and demerits of his subjects, therefore it is crucial he bring about justice to injustice. This is why it is stressed in the dharmaśāstras how important it is for the king to be fair and righteous and to appoint learned persons to counsel and help him in legal matters.

- Duties of a king – Though this topic covers duties and obligations of the king (rājadharmā), and thus would seem to belong under the heading of ācāra, the office of the king was so closely intertwined with punishment and legal procedure that, even from the time of the Āpastamba Dharmasutrā, duties of the king are described along with rules of legal procedure.¹
- 25. Legal procedure, (Vyavahāra) – according to the dharmaśāstras includes: court, listening to and assessing witnesses and their testimony, deciding and enforcing punishment, and the pursuit of Justice in the face of Injustice.
- 26. Eighteen Hindu Titles of Law – make up the grounds for litigation and the performance of the legal process.

Prāyaścitta :

Prāyaścittas are seen as means of removing sin, as they are undertaken to atone for not doing what is ordained or doing something which has been forbidden.

27. Rules for renunciation – This topic deals with who is allowed to renounce as a sanyasin, from which of the āśramas they may renounce, and what implications their status as ritually dead has on their legal and social standing.
28. Categories of sin – the classification of different sins into categories depending on gravity of the sin and means of reducing it
29. Expiations and penances, (Prāyaścitta) – means of reducing sin.
30. Karma – a principle in which “cause and effect are as inseparably linked in the moral sphere as assumed in the physical sphere by science. A good action has its reward and a bad action leads to retribution. If the bad actions do not yield their consequences in this life, the soul begins another existence and in the new environment undergoes suffering for its past deeds.
31. Pilgrimage – a journey to a holy place in order obtain merit and expiate sins.
32. Vrata – religious vows or rites that can be used to reduce sin
33. Utsavas – festivals and religious celebrations.
34. Śānti – propitiatory rites undertaken in order to appease the gods when omens have revealed their displeasure

Many today blame the Vedic teachings and the Brahmin class for today's ills. It is important to note that the Vedas clearly declared that its knowledge was meant for all classes of people. The following verse from the Sukla Yajur Veda (XXVI-2) itself explicitly stated that the the benefit of the Vedas be conferred on everyone without distinction of sex, caste, creed or race :

यथेमां वाचं कल्याणीमावदन्ति जनेभ्यः ।

ब्रह्मराजन्याभ्यां शूद्राय चार्याय च स्वाय चारणाय च ।

प्रियो देवानां दक्षिणायै दातुमिह भूयासमयं

मे कामः समृध्यतामुपमादो नमतु ।।

O Mankind, as I (the Vedas) address my propitious speech to all people, Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Shudras, Vaishyas, Devotees and the Lowly, may I be loved by all who are learned and charitable.

It would also be well to know that the primacy of the Brahmin class rested entirely on his function of teaching and propagating the knowledge. And the possession or desire for such knowledge enabled anyone to be considered a Brahmin. Vyasa, himself was the off-spring of the daughter of a fisherman, but nevertheless rose to become the greatest Rishi of India with the divine status of being referred to as Bhagavan. He records Yuddhishtira in the Mahabharata, affirming that anyone committed to true learning would qualify to be a Brahmin, irrespective of the class in which he was born. Many great women too figure among the Rishi-authors of the Vedas. Brahmin communities in all parts of India clearly emerged from local communities drawn to the Vedic knowledge propagated by the country wide network of Vedic Shakhas. This phenomenon has today been adapted world-wide today as seen in the large numbers of scholars steeped in Vedic knowledge or in seriously embracing the Vedic faith as seen in the large Krishna-Consciousness movement.

Today too, Brahmins in India are in stage of deep transition, a transformation of their traditional roles and functions, due to the massive democratization of Indian society. Much of today's social reforms have been formulated or spear-headed by Brahmins. The anti-brahmin mood of the other communities is wearing off, with the far greater damage from the expanding class of social and economic exploiters within their own ranks. What remains redeeming, is the survival of the respect commended by the true ancient philosophical, religious and ethical values, and related practices in the private lives of all classes of people, reflected in what we describe as the Vedic Way of Life.

CHAPTER – 10 - MARRIAGE: VIVAHA / PANIGRAHANA



The Wedding ritual or Vivaha samskara is possibly the most important sacrament in a person's life, and solemnizes the intention of the couple, to live the rest of their lives with each other. The choice of a life partner and the commitment that is made to one another determines the tenor of the rest of their lives and shapes their personalities as they mature as responsible adults within their families and their communities. It gives shape to their dreams and aspirations as they help one another fulfill their obligations to their families and to society at large. In all cultures through the ages, the wedding ritual is important as it is a public declaration of that commitment and promises made by a man and a woman to each other to become one, in body, mind and spirit. According to Vedic traditions, it is the union between a man and a woman to walk through life in their pursuit of Dharma (preservation of the natural order), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (physical desires), and Moksha (liberation).

Throughout India, wedding rituals vary from state to state, among different communities; But there are some core elements that feature in all Hindu weddings, that have been passed down the ages. The Dharmashastras, and more specifically, the Manu Samhita, give shape to the marriage rituals with the Vedas as the basis. Over time, these practices evolved and came to be recognized by the law of the land, as being legal unions. Therefore, the mutual promises and commitment made by the man and woman, as they entered into matrimony, were embodied in a core set of rituals witnessed by their family and friends, and this practice continues even to this day. We present here the core rituals that are at the heart of the Vedic ceremony.

Once the bride and the groom, and their respective families, have agreed to the wedding, and have agreed to a suitable time and place for its celebration The actual festivities may last two to five days and proceed in the following sequence.

VARA-SATKARA : This is the start of the function where the bride's parents and relatives receive the bridegroom and his family and friends at

the entrance to the venue. The officiating priest chants a few mantras and the bride's mother welcomes the bridegroom with the traditional *aarti* and blesses the groom with rice and applies *tilak* of vermilion and turmeric powder. The bridegroom is led to the altar where the bride and bridegroom exchange the ceremonial garlands.

MADHUPARKA : The bridegroom is regarded as the embodiment of Vishnu and is seated so that the bride's parents can wash his feet. Then, a mixture of milk, honey and ghee is given to the bridegroom to drink, symbolizing the blessings for a lifetime filled with sweetness.

KANYA DAAN OR GIFT OF A MAIDEN - The bride's father places his daughter's hand in the groom's, amidst the chanting of sacred mantras. The gifting away of one's daughter in this manner, is considered to be the most auspicious and highest forms of Daan or gift. This ritual is accompanied by chants where the bride is said to leave the *Gotra* or *family lineage* of her father and assumes the *Gotra* of her husband's family. This is also one of the most poignant moments in the entire ceremony, when the parents, having nurtured the girl-child into young adulthood, have to give her away to another family, for the rest of her life. Since Hindu society is patrilineal, the girl is expected to go away to her husband's parent's home.

VIVAH-HOMA : The sacred fire, representing the god Agni is lit amidst chanting. All auspicious undertakings are thus, begun in an atmosphere of purity and spirituality. Agni is considered to be the first and most important witness to the mutual promises made by the bridal couple. The Hindu ritual, thus conducted, in the presence of Agni, has both religious and legal sanction.

PANI-GRAHANA : The groom takes the right hand of the bride in his left hand and accepts her as his lawfully wedded wife, promising to care for her and look after her throughout their lives together.



PRATIGNA-KARANA : The couple walks round the fire, the bride leading, and take solemn vows of loyalty, steadfast love and life-long fidelity to each other.

MANGALYA DHAARANA OR TYING THE SACRED THREAD : The thread is often embellished by a set of gold icons and beads, and is placed by the bridegroom around the neck of the bride, with the sacred declaration as shown below. He then applies the sacred vermillion on the parting of the hair of his bride. These are the two most visible symbols of matrimony that a Hindu woman wears on a constant basis everywhere in India.



**THE MANGALYA DHARANAM – THE SACRED THREAD THAT BINDS
A LIFE-LONG BOND, DECLARED BY THE GROOM IN THE FOLLOWING MANTRA**

मङ्गल्यं तन्तुनाऽनेन मम जीवनं हेतुना ।

कस्ये क्वामि सुभगे त्वं जीव दशदः दशम् ॥

māṅgalyaṁ tantunā'nēna mama jīvana hētunā.

kaṅṭhē badhānāmi sambhagē tvaya jīva dāśadaśatama.

This sacred thread which is essential for my long life
I tie this around your neck. O Maiden of many auspicious
attributes, may you live happily for a hundred years.

The Mangalya Dharanam of the Vivaha ritual
like the Yajnopavita Dharanam described in the Upanayanam ritual,
gives the thread a profound meaning,
It shows how strong a thread can be
when it is invested with sanctity

SAPTAPADI : This forms the heart of the wedding ritual as shown in the pictures below. The couple circles the sacred fire seven times. This aspect of the ceremony legalizes the marriage according to the Hindu Marriage Act. They are joined together in by tying one end of the groom's scarf with the bride's dress. They, then, take seven steps representing

nourishment, strength, prosperity, happiness, progeny, long life and harmony and understanding, respectively. The bride is considered an embodiment of Lakshmi and brings happiness and prosperity to her husband's home. After the Saptapadi, she is considered to be 'Ardhangini' or 'half of her husband's body' denoting that they are both equal partners in their life's journey. The translations of these vows articulated by the couple during the seven steps of the Saptapadi are reproduced in the Appendix E.



LAJA-HOMAH : The couple pays homage to 'Agni' with ghee and puffed rice which symbolizes prosperity. The bride places her hands into the groom's hands and the brother of the bride puts puffed rice into them, which is then offered to the 'Agni'.

SHILA AROHANA : The bride steps onto a stone slab symbolizing that she will stand by her husband, steadfast, as they go through the ups and downs in their lives together.

VIEWING OF THE ARUNDHATI AND DHRUVA STARS : The young couple invokes the blessings of Arundhati and look in the direction of the Arundhati star since she was considered to be the ideal wife and the embodiment of chastity. Dhruva represents the one who attained immortality through single-minded devotion and perseverance. Thus the qualities of chastity, devotion and perseverance are the virtues to be emulated throughout life.

ANNA PRAASHANA : The couple makes offerings of cooked rice and ghee into the fire. They then feed a morsel of food to each other expressing mutual love and affection.

AASHIRVADAH : This is the culmination of the wedding rituals when the couple seeks the blessings of all the family elders gathered together for the occasion. The elders, in turn, bless the young couple by showering them with flower petals and rice.

Marriages are joyful occasions when the entire family gather and an opportunity to meet cousins, aunts, uncles, and other relations and friends have always got together and stayed together for several days. With many young Indians increasingly living in the West such occasions are sadly less frequent, but one is heartened to see them occurring increasingly in the West itself, with the establishment of Hindu temples and presence of traditional Hindu priests sustaining the observance of the various Samskaras. few and far between. A new generation of youngsters, straddling cultures and geographies, are today comfortable making their own choices; choosing their mates, often from other cultures and religious backgrounds, with a deep appreciation and respect for each other's cultures and practices. And in this milieu, many are choosing to continue to follow the Vedic rituals, and do so, with a deeper appreciation of the meaning behind the rituals, hymns and vows. When the meaning of the sacrament is understood, a new generation of youngsters realize how meaningful and relevant the Vedic marriage rituals truly are. These developments point to the Vedic Way of Life being increasingly seen across the world and across all cultures as having all the attributes for recognition as a truly a Universal Way of Life

CHAPTER 11 – RETIREMENT - SHASHTI-ABDAPOORTH AND ONWARDS



The ancient Vedic prescription specifies the span of human life at 120 years reflecting perhaps, the prevailing life expectancy of those tranquil times. The standard was reflected in the following form of their blessing for longevity on all occasions :

**Shatha-Maanam Bhavathi... Shatha-Ayuh Purushah
Daevaendriyae Prathi Thishtathi.**

This blessing uses the figure Shatha-Ayuh, standing for a life of 100 years, reflecting perhaps as a simple approximation or as a pragmatic figure, while giving recognition to formal observances like the Shashtiabdapoorthi and Sathabhishekam for the 60th and 80th birthdays respectively. These age milestones mark the transition to the onward ashramas or life stages of retirement called the Vanaprastha and ultimately, of Renunciation called Sanyasa. At this last stage, all sense worldly attachments, the sense of 'I' and 'Mine' is given up, as if in preparing the soul to shed the last shackles of the body. The Vedic ancients certainly had an elegant progression laid out for life and death and the onward journey of the soul towards Moksha, that ultimate liberation from the cycle of mortal existence.

The Shashti-abdapoorthi means completion of 60 years, and reaching this age was marked by a celebration. This is the age when parents become grandparents, when they mature from teachers and guides for their children, and become mentors for the younger generation of the community.

The word Shashtiabdapoorthi is derived from the Sanskrit words Shashti meaning Sixty; Abda meaning Year and Poorthi meaning Completion. The sixtieth year in one's life is a significant milestone, a memorable turning point, an occasion for recalling and reaffirming the marital and other sacred vows of one's earlier years. And the celebration is a touching reminder of the rich, mellowed life that would unfold in the years to come. The sages and the Rishis of lore have acknowledged the sanctity of the sixtieth year in one's life and have drawn out elaborate rituals to mark this special event. They looked at it as rebirth and suggested the repetition of those rituals performed at one's birth. As part of the celebrations the couple's children conduct the function as second

wedding of the parents. This is reason enough for a grand family reunion to incorporate an important fulfillment of the couple's married life.

The Shastiabdapoorthi is performed in the sixtieth year and in the same month and day of birth according to the Indian calendar. This is considered to be the best option. In case it is not possible to time it exactly on the same day, allowance is given to perform it on a convenient day during and before the completion of sixtieth year. The choice of the place to carry out this programme could be a pilgrim town, a temple, a river bank or even a householder's residence.

The rituals begin with the Shanty also referred to as Granada Shanty. In a hundred-year time scale of man's life, pre-sixty is a period of materialistic pursuit while the post-sixty span is reserved for spiritual Endeavour. The Ugraradha Shanti is a prayer for the post-sixty span a spiritually fulfilling experience. The Shanti proceeds with three elaborate rituals called the Shounakoktam, Bodhaanoktam and Shaivaagamoktam. The Shanti sequence is followed by the Kranthi, a word that means "to step ahead" and signifies heading towards a new life. The ceremony is a two day programme performed as per instructions of the Guru and elders. The ceremony is commenced in Shubha Muhurtham comprised of several Pujas followed by the Kalasha Sthapana involving worship of a wide range of deities and ending with the Navagraha and Ganapati Homam

Shastiabdapoorthi is a good bridge - builder between the householder's domestic concerns and the spiritual yearnings of the retirement stage of Vaanaprasta. During Vaanaprastha, the married couple have to fulfill their life's mission by staying together through observance of celibacy. Marriage in the younger days provides physical proximity, while the one performed now brings about spiritual affinity. Thus the Shanti - Kranthi aspects, which run through the "Shastiabdapoorthi" celebrations provide a fusion of social and spiritual obligations with a smooth transition from one to the other.

The next major birthday observance at the 80th. year is referred to as the Sathabhishekam. The belief is that one has to witness one thousand full moons and new moons to attain this stage. For this, the completion of eighty four years is necessary. Allowing for events like lunar and solar eclipses, the period is pared down to eighty three years, six months and eighteen days. However, one sees people conducting the Sathabhishekam by the time they complete 81 or 82 years of age.

Udakasanthi Japam is a must for Sathabhishekam. The person attaining the Sathabhishekam is blessed, having witnessed the 1000 full and 1000 new moons, an accomplishment referred to as "Chandrayana Sahasram" which is said to endear them to the Lord Maheswara. It is believed that waters of all the divine rivers be collected in Kumbhas or pots for Abhishekam or bathing the aged couple. This is not a prayaschita or

repentance ceremony, but is said to bring honour, happiness to the family and blessings from forefathers. The Abhisheka is performed through a special vessel with 108 pores at the bottom. The Sathabhisheka is, both body and soul purification ceremony.

The Shashtiabdapoorthi and Shathabhishekam could be considered the final social stage of Vedic observances of one's lifetime corresponding to the retirement stage of the traditional Vanaprastha Ashrama. The later and final renunciation stage of the Sanyasa Ashrama stage of leaving the social mainstream, falls outside the scope of the Samskaras. Yet ascetics of this stage make a sizeable and visible presence even today in India.



The above picture of the large number of Sadhus seen amidst the vast congregation of people celebrating the Kumbh Mela provides a vivid example. Many of these sadhus may be no more than beggars or vagrants. But beyond them, are large numbers of genuine ascetics living in Ashrams and Mutts who present the true face of the ultimate spiritual asceticism of the Vedic Way of Life.

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PART IV : DEPARTURE

CHAPTER 13 : DEATH : THE ANTYESHTI



**Suryam te Chakshurgacchatu Vatamaatmaa Dyaam Cha
Gachchha Prithivim Cha Dharmana
Apo Va Gachchha Yadi Tatra Te Hitamoshadhisu
Pratimtishtha Sharirai svaha.**

O Jiva (Soul)! After thy death, (may all the components of thy body be merged into the five elements). May the power of thy sight be absorbed in the sun and thy breath be absorbed in the air (atmosphere). May thy other parts be absorbed in appropriate elements. And in accordance with the meritorious deeds thou hast performed here, may thy spirit dwell in the appropriate body.

- The Rigveda

**Dust Thou Art, To Dust Returnest
was not spoken of the Soul**

----- H.W. Longfellow.

But for all practical purposes, the Vedic texts went into great detail of how the current life should be spent. These details fill the preceding Chapters describing the full range of Samkaras to be observed during the full lifetime. It is therefore logical to proceed now to the concluding Samskara relating to Death, the Antyeshti.

Hindus who follow Vedic or Puranic rites usually cremate their dead. Some communities either bury or burn according to custom. *Sanyasis* receive a ceremonial burial on death called *samadhi*. Infants who have not cut their teeth and persons who die of cholera or small-pox are buried. Bones and ashes of the dead are usually consigned to the nearest river and sometime a part of the same is kept for being consigned to a plate like Prayag or Kashi when convenient

When a person is on the point of death the nearest kin sits close to the dying man and comforts him, assuring him that his family would be well looked after. A small piece of

gold is laid in his mouth and a few drops of Ganga water are poured into it. When life is extinct the body is, removed from the bed, or cot and laid on the ground with the head in the north and washed with cowdung water. Holy water is sprinkled on it and a wreath of tulashi leaves is put round the neck. The chief mourner has to undergo a purificatory bath while the priest chants some *mantras*. If the deceased is an ascendant, the chief mourner and other mourners of the same degree shave their heads and mustaches, but the top-knot is kept untouched. Having done this he offers oblations of rice (*pinda*) in honour of the dead. The corpse is bathed and wrapped up in a new *dhotar* or *lugdde* according as the dead person is a man or woman. If the deceased is a female with her husband living, she is arrayed in a yellow cloth and in some of the ornaments in her customary use, decked with flowers, rubbed with turmeric paste and *kumku* marks are put up on her brow. These honours are not shown to a widow. All the relations present, men, women and children bow to the dead. Finally, the corpse is placed on a ladder-like bier of bamboo and borne by four persons on their shoulders to the cremation ground, the priest and the chief mourner walking in front of the bier. The chief mourner holds in his hand sacred fire for burning the body. Women do not accompany a funeral procession. All persons attending the procession are bare headed. With the help of the live charcoal brought along a fire called *mantragani* is prepared, the corpse is laid on the pyre and the chief mourner ignites the fire. Immediately after the body is burnt, the chief mourner goes round the pyre three times with a trickling water pot in which the fire was brought and finally throws the pot backwards over the shoulder spilling the water over the ashes. Then he pours some water mixed with sesamum and the rest of the mourners follow suit. The party then returns when the body is completely consumed. During the first ten days all persons belonging to the *gotra* of the deceased observe mourning.

The *Shraaddha* and funeral obsequies are the only ceremonies performed for the salvation of the ancestors. A special ceremony called *Narayap Bali* may be performed for those who have died of accident; but in case of one dying without issue no departure from the ordinary rites takes place. The funeral obsequies are performed during the first thirteen days after death. Oblations of rice are offered every day, in consequence of which, the soul of the dead is supposed to attain a spiritual body, limb by limb, till it is enabled to start on its further journey. Oblations are also offered on the 27th day and sometimes thereafter on the day of the death once every month for year. Of these, the six-monthly and the *bharni* oblations (*i.e.*, the *shraddha* performed on the fifth of dark half of the month of *Bhadrapada*) are essential. After a year has elapsed, the oblations of the first anniversary day are celebrated with great solemnity. The annual *shraddha* is performed on the day corresponding to the day of death in the latter half of the month of *Bhadrapad*. Where the deceased's family can afford it, a *shraaddha* is performed on the anniversary day which is known as a *kshayatithi* While performing the *shraaddha* of ones deceased father, offerings are also made to other ancestors and to deceased collaterals. Women dying within the lifetime of their husbands have special oblations offered to them during their husbands lifetime. This takes place on the 9th day of *pitrapaksha* and is called- the *Avidhava Navami* day.

CHAPTER – 14 : FROM MORTALITY TO MOKSHA

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ॥

मृत्योर्मांमृतं गमय । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद् १-३-२८

ōm asato mā sadgamaya. tamaso mā jyōtirgamaya..

mṛtyōrmāmṛtaṁ gamaya. ōm śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ..

bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad 1-3-28

OM

Lead Us From the Unreal To the Real,
Lead Us From Darkness To Light,
Lead Us From Death To Immortality,
Let There Be Peace Peace Peace.

- Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28.

The Vedic perspective conceives of life and death as a transient experience in a repeating cycle within Infinite Space and Eternal Time. Each life is seen as a temporary abode for a soul, a spark of the Divine, seeking liberation from this cycle to return to its Eternal Home, the Highest Divine. In our day, Sir S. Radhakrishnan beautifully described each lifetime as a succession of spiritual opportunities

The Vedic texts gave life and death a grand perspective that took the sting out of Death (“O Death, where is thy sting ?” : **Corinthians 15:55**) as but the ending of a Chapter in the progression from mortality to immortality, from the transient to the eternal called Moksha, These texts went on to place all existence in a vast setting of fourteen worlds where each soul might find a place in this succession of lives depending how much merit or demerit it earned in a body in each successive lifetime. They were comprised of seven higher and seven lower such worlds, making the total of fourteen.

The first seven were higher worlds, or levels of existence, called *bhu*;, *bhuva*;, *suva*;, *maha*;, *jana*;, *tapa*; and *satyam*. The first three which refer to the Earth, the Mid-Space and Heaven, were relevant to human existence and the last four were higher worlds comprising the domain of the divine. They also metaphorically represented the seven psycho-physical states of the human personality, viz. *sat*, *cit*, *ananda*, *vijnana*, *manasa*, *prana* and *anna* which translate as Truth, Consciousness, Bliss, Discrimination, Mind, Energy and Food.

The remaining lower seven worlds were likened to hell, bearing the names *atala*, *vitala*, *sutala*, *rasatala*, *talatala*, *mahatala* and *patala*. They were considered to be peopled by demons and evil spirits and fallen humans, and would seem to reflect the baser elements and influences in human nature.

This grand perspective of all Existence was clearly designed by the ancients to be studied and reproduced within the human mind to give the individual a vision of where he stood in the vastness of Space and Time. In practical terms, this vision was intended to motivate man to ascend into perfection and not descend into ignominy. It urged him to remain humble, not think or make too much of himself, and to live seeking to be one with God, or as put so beautifully by Tukaram :

**I went in search of God and could not find him.
Then, at last, I discovered that I, the seeker was
the sought, I was the God. that I was seeking !.**

It is this spirit alone that could lead man, as the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad declared, from Death to Immortality, or as re-phrased in this Chapter heading, from Mortality to Moksha.

APPENDIX - A

The progress of human society through the Kaliyuga, as foretold
in the Bhagavata Purana three thousand years ago

**kalim āgatam ājñāya kṣetre 'smin vaiṣṇave vayam
āsīnā dīrgha-satreṇa kathāyām sakṣaṇā hareḥ** 1-1-21

Knowing well that the age of Kali has already begun, we are assembled here in this holy place to hear at great length the transcendental message of Godhead and in this way perform sacrifice.

**tvam naḥ sandarśito dhātrā dustaram nistitīṣatām
kalim sattva-haram pumsām karṇa-dhāra ivārṇavam** 1-1-22

We think that we have met Your Goodness by the will of providence, just so that we may accept you as captain of the ship for those who desire to cross the difficult ocean of Kali, which deteriorates all the good qualities of a human being.

**śrī-śuka uvāca tataś cānu-dinam dharmah
satyam śaucam kṣamā dayā kālena balinā rājan
naḥkṣyaty āyur balam smṛtiḥ** 12-2-1

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Then, O King, religion, truthfulness, cleanliness, tolerance, mercy, duration of life, physical strength and memory will all diminish day by day because of the powerful influence of the age of Kali.

**vittam eva kalau nṛṇām janmācāra-guṇodayaḥ
dharma-nyāya-vyavasthāyām kāraṇam balam eva hi** 12-2-2

In Kali-yuga, wealth alone will be considered the sign of a man's good birth, proper behavior and fine qualities. And law and justice will be applied only on the basis of one's power.

**dāmpatyē 'bhirucir hetur māyaiva vyāvahārike
strīṭve pumstve ca hi ratir vipratve sūtram eva hi** 12-2-3

Men and women will live together merely because of superficial attraction, and success in business will depend on deceit. Womanliness and manliness will be judged according to one's expertise in sex, and a man will be known as a brāhmaṇa just by his wearing a thread.

**liṅgam evāśrama-khyātāv anyonyāpatti-kāraṇam
avṛttiyā nyāya-daurbalyam pāṇḍitye cāpalam vacaḥ** 12-2-4

A person's spiritual position will be ascertained merely according to external symbols, and on that same basis people will change from one spiritual order to the next. A person's propriety will be seriously questioned if he does not earn a good living. And

one who is very clever at juggling words will be considered a learned scholar.

**Anāḍhyataivāsādhutve sādhitve dambha eva tu
svīkāra eva codvāhe snānam eva prasāadhanam 12-2-5**

A person will be judged unholy if he does not have money, and hypocrisy will be accepted as virtue. Marriage will be arranged simply by verbal agreement, and a person will think he is fit to appear in public if he has merely taken a bath.

**dūre vāry-ayanam tīrtham lāvaṇyam keśa-dhāraṇam
udaram-bharatā svārthaḥ satyatve dhārṣṭyam eva hi
dākṣyam kuṭumba-bharaṇam yaśo 'rthe dharma-sevanam 12-2-6**

A sacred place will be taken to consist of no more than a reservoir of water located at a distance, and beauty will be thought to depend on one's hairstyle. Filling the belly will become the goal of life, and one who is audacious will be accepted as truthful. He who can maintain a family will be regarded as an expert man, and the principles of religion will be observed only for the sake of reputation.

**evam prajābhir duṣṭābhi ākīrṇe kṣiti-maṇḍale
brahma-viṭ-kṣatra-śūdrāṇām yo balī bhavitā nṛpaḥ 12-2-7**

As the earth thus becomes crowded with a corrupt population, whoever among any of the social classes shows himself to be the strongest will gain political power.

**prajā hi lubdhai rājanyair nirghṛṇair dasyu-dharmabhiḥ
ācchinna-dāra-draviṇā yāsyanti giri-kānanam 12-2-8**

Losing their wives and properties to such avaricious and merciless rulers, who will behave no better than ordinary thieves, the citizens will flee to the mountains and forests.

**śāka-mūlāmiṣa-kṣaudra-phala-puṣpāṣṭi-bhojanāḥ
anāvṛṣṭyā vinañkṣyanti durbhikṣa-kara-pīḍitāḥ 12-2-9**

Harassed by famine and excessive taxes, people will resort to eating leaves, roots, flesh, wild honey, fruits, flowers and seeds. Struck by drought, they will become completely ruined.

**śīta-vātātapa-prāvṛḍ- himair anyonyataḥ prajāḥ
kṣut-ṭṛḍbhyām vyādhibhiś caiva santapsyante ca cintayā 12-2-10**

The citizens will suffer greatly from cold, wind, heat, rain and snow. They will be further tormented by quarrels, hunger, thirst, disease and severe anxiety.

trimśad vimśati varṣāṇi paramāyuhḥ kalau nṛṇām 12-2-11

The maximum duration of life for human beings in Kali-yuga will become fifty years.

kṣīyamāṇeṣu deheṣu dehinām kali-doṣataḥ
varṇāśramavatām dharme naṣṭe veda-pathe nṛṇām
pāṣaṇḍa-pracure dharme dasyu-prāyeṣu rājasu
cauryāṇṛta-vṛthā-himsā- nānā-vṛttiṣu vai nṛṣu
śūdra-prāyeṣu varṇeṣu cchāga-prāyāsu dhenuṣu
grha-prāyeṣv āśrameṣu yauna-prāyeṣu bandhuṣu
aṇu-prāyāsv oṣadhīṣu śamī-prāyeṣu sthāsnūṣu
vidyut-prāyeṣu megheṣu śūnya-prāyeṣu sadmasu
ittham kalau gata-prāye janeṣu khara-dharmiṣu
dharma-trāṇāya sattvena bhagavān avatariṣyati 1-2-12 to 16

By the time the age of Kali ends, the bodies of all creatures will be greatly reduced in size, and the religious principles of followers of varṇāśrama will be ruined. The path of the Vedas will be completely forgotten in human society, and so-called religion will be mostly atheistic. The kings will mostly be thieves, the occupations of men will be stealing, lying and needless violence, and all the social classes will be reduced to the lowest level of śūdras. Cows will be like goats, spiritual hermitages will be no different from mundane houses, and family ties will extend no further than the immediate bonds of marriage. Most plants and herbs will be tiny, and all trees will appear like dwarf śamī trees. Clouds will be full of lightning, homes will be devoid of piety, and all human beings will have become like asses. At that time, the Supreme Personality of Godhead will appear on the earth. Acting with the power of pure spiritual goodness, He will rescue eternal religion.

APPENDIX - B

Garbha Raksha Stotram

(Attributed to the Sage Saunaka)

(Translation of P.R.Ramachander in the Wikipedia)

Ehyehi Bhagawan Brahman , Praja kartha, praja pathe, Pragrahsheeniva balim cha imam , Aapathyaam raksha garbhineem. 1	Please accept this sacred Offering ,Lord Brahma, Who creates people, And who is the lord of the people, And be pleased to protect, This lady who is in the family way, From all dangers.
Aswini deva devesou, Pragrhoneethaam balim dwimam, Saapathyaam Garbhineem cha imam, Cha Rakshatham pooja yanaya. 2	Oh Aswini Devas, Who are the doctors of Gods, Please accept this sacred offering, And be pleased to protect, This lady who is in the family way., Because of this worship offered to you. From all dangers.
Rudraascha ekaadasa prokthaa, Pragruhananthu balim dwimam, Yushmaakam preethaye vrutham, Nithyam rakshathu Garbineem. 3	Oh Holy Rudras who are eleven, Please accept this sacred offering, Which has been made as per your wish, To get your mercy and blessing, And be pleased to protect daily , This lady who is in the family way.
Aadhithya dwadasa prokthaa, Pragrahneethwam balim dwimam, Yushmagam thejasaam vrudhya, Nithyam rakshatha garbhineem. 4	Oh Holy Sun Gods who are twelve, Please accept this offering, So that your great luster increases , Be pleased to accept this sacred offering, And be pleased to protect daily , This lady who is in the family way.
Vinayaka Ganadhyaksha , Shiva Puthra Maha Bala, Pragrahneeshwa balim cha imam, Sapathyam raksha garbhineem. 5	Oh Vinayaka, Oh Ganesa, Oh Son of Lord Shiva, Oh God who is very strong, Please accept this sacred offering, And be pleased to protect , This lady who is in the family way. From all dangers.
Skanda Shanmukha Devesa , Puthra preethi vivardhana, Pragrahneeshwa Balim cha imam , Sapathyaam raksha Garbhineem. 6	Oh Skanda, Oh God with six heads, Oh God who is the chief of devas, Oh God who increases the love for our sons, Please accept this sacred offering, And be pleased to protect, This lady who is in the family way, From all dangers.
Prabhaasa, Prabhavassya , Prathyoosho maruth nala, Druvoo dhura dhuraschaiva , Vasavoshtou prakeerthitha, Pragrahnee thwam Balim cha imam , Nithyam raksha garbhineem. 7	Oh Prabhasa, Oh Prabhava, Oh Syama, Of Prathyusha, Oh Marutha, Oh Anala , Oh Dhruva, Oh Dhuradhura, Who are the eight sacred Vasus, Please accept this sacred offering, And be pleased to protect daily, This lady who is in the family way.
Pithur devi, Pithusreshte, Bahu puthri , maha bale, Bhootha sreshte Nisa vase , Nirvruthe, sounaka priye, Pragrahneeshwa balim cha imam , Sapathyam raksha garbhineem. 8	Oh Goddess of my manes, Oh Goddess who is greater than my manes, Oh Goddess who has all women as daughters, Oh Goddess who is very strong, Oh Goddess who is greater than all beings, Oh Goddess who protects us at night, Oh Goddess , who does not have any blemishes, Oh Goddess who was worshipped by Sounaka, Please accept this sacred offering, And be pleased to protect,

Raksha Raksha Mahadeva,
Baktha anugraha Karaka,
Pakshi vahana Govinda,
Sapathyam raksha Garbhineem. 9

This lady who is in the family way,
From all dangers.
Oh God who is greatest,
Be pleased to protect and protect,
Oh God who showers blessing on his devotees,
Oh Govinda, who rides on a bird,
Be pleased to protect,
This lady who is in the family way.,
From all dangers.

Note for observance :

Daily sit in front of a photo of Goddess with any small offering(Fruits , milk or any other food article and recite as follows:-

During the second month read the first two slokas 108 times daily,
During the third month read the first three slokas 108 times daily,
During the fourth month read the first four slokas 108 times daily,
During the fifth month read the first five slokas 108 times daily,
During the sixth month read the first six slokas 108 times daily,
During the seventh month read the first seven slokas 108 times daily,
During the eighth month read the first eight slokas 108 times daily,
During the ninth month read all the nine slokas 108 times daily,

Such observance is believed to ensure safe delivery

APPENDIX – C : WORKING OF A VEDA PATHASHALA

COURSE CURRICULUM

At the patasala, students are taught the Vedas from its basic level to Krama in a span of eight years. At this stage, they are conferred the title “ Kramapaati ”.

Those Kramapaatis who opt for advanced studies are taught “Jata” and “Ghanam” for a further period of two years and they are conferred the title “Ghanapaati”.

Such Ghanapaatis can pursue a more advanced course in the Vedas, outside our institution to become “Salakshana Ghanapaati”, which is the ultimate title in this discipline of education.

In our institution, we impart fastidious training to students to retain the original sounds of the mantras.

The syllabus for Krama course is as follows:

	YAJUR VEDA	RIG VEDA
First year	Aksharaprayasam & Brahmanam (Arunam)	Aksharaprayasam & 1 st AshtakamPart.
Second Year	Brahmanam (1 st & 2 nd Ashtakam)	Samhitha (Ashtakam 1 st & 2 nd)
Third Year	Brahmanam (2 nd & 3 rd Ashtakam), Katakam & Arunam	Samhitha (Ashtakam 3 rd & 4 th part)
Fourth Year	Samhitha (1 st to 4 th Kandam)	Samhitha (Ashtakam 4 th & 5 th)
Fifth Year	Samhitha (4 th to 6 th Kandam)	Samhitha (Ashtakam 6 th & 7 th part)
Sixth Year	Samhitha (7 th kandam) Padham (1 to 3 Kandams)	Samhitha (7 th & 8 th) & Padham (1 st to 3 rd Ashtakams)
Seventh Year	Padha (4 to 6 Kandams)	Padham (4 th to 8 th Ashtakams) & Kramam part
Eighth Year	Padham (7 th kandam) Kramam poorthi (1 to 7 Kandams)	Kramam poorthi.

The syllabus for Jata & Ghanam course for Yajur veda is as follows:

Nineth Year	Jata poorthi and Ghanam (1 st to 3 rd Kandams)	---
Tenth Year	Ghanam (4 th to 7 th Kandams)poorthi.	---

**Syllabus of Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Vedavidya Pratishahan,
Ujjain, M.P : (Organization of the Ministry of HRD, Government of India)**

SNV Patasala, administered and run by Veda Sasthra Vidhya Trust is a registered institution under “Veda Patasala Scheme” by MSRVVP, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh (an autonomous organization of the Ministry of HRD, Government of India).

The Syllabus for learning Vedas as prescribed by the MSRVVP and adopted in our Institution from the basic level

to Samhithai will take a span of six years. To recognize the same under University level, the Pratishthan had applied with Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, a Deemed University which is under Ministry of HRD, New Delhi.

Under letter No : 9-2/RSKS/Acd/Misc/2009-2010/92 dated 23rd June, 2011 the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, a Deemed University, (Established under the Ministry of HRD) having its place at 56-57, Institutional Area, Janakpuri, New Dehli 110 058 has recognized the syllabus of Vedas as prescribed by MSRVVP and accordingly our students who have completed first four years will be recognized as “Veda Bhushan” which is equivalent to 10th Standard and students who have completed full six year course will be recognized as “Veda Vibhushan” which is equivalent to 12th Standard of high school curriculum.

Students are required to undergo periodical in-house tests and once every year they are examined by highly qualified Vedic Pandits from the Sringeri Mutt to ensure their recitation skills. At times His Holiness Himself conducts such tests. This is a unique feature of our Institution.

Evaluation is based on the following marks procured by the students in such tests.

98% and above	First Class
Between 90% to 97%	Second Class with warning for further improvement.
Below 90%	The student is declared failed and demoted or removed from the school.

Five Ghanapaatis who have graduated from our school are considered to be among the best in South India, and are reckoned as experts to participate in advanced Vedic Programmes (Vedic Yagnas).

Apart from Vedic education, the school also teaches subjects like English, Sanskrit and Mathematics to instill confidence in students to face the needs of the modern society.

Typical Class Room



APPENDIX - D

The Vows Of Sapthapathi

The Saptapathi rites involves taking seven steps walking around the fire. According to Hindu Law codes (Yalgnavakya Smrithi), completion of the seventh step is the moment of completion of marriage for all legal purposes. For each step the couple have to take a vow in the form of a sacred mantra as below.

Step 1. Groom: "O maiden ! Our love has become firm by walking one step with me. You will offer me the food and be helpful in every way. I will cherish you and provide for the welfare and happiness of you and our children.

Step 1. Bride: "My Lord, this is my humble submission to you. You kindly gave me responsibility of the home, food and taking charge of the finance. I promise you that I shall discharge all responsibilities for the welfare of the family and children.

Step 2. Groom : O maiden ! You have now walked the second step with me. Fill my heart with strength and courage and together we shall protect the household and children.

Step 2. Bride: My lord, in your grief, I shall fill your heart with strength, In your happiness, I shall rejoice. I promise you that I will please you always with sweet words and take care of the family and children and you shall love me alone as your wife.

Step 3. Groom: O maiden ! Now you have walked three steps with me. By virtue of this, our wealth and prosperity are bound to grow. I shall look upon all other women as my sisters. Together, we will educate our children and may they live long.

Step 3. Bride: My lord, I will love you with single minded devotion as my husband. I will treat all other men as my brothers. My devotion to you is of a chaste wife and you are my joy. This is my commitment and pledge to you.

Step 4. Groom: O maiden ! It is a great blessing that you have walked four steps with me. You have brought auspiciousness and sacredness into my life. May we be blessed with obedient and noble children. May they be blessed with long life.

Step 4. Bride: My lord, I will decorate you from your feet up with flowers, garlands and anoint you with sandal wood paste and fragrance. I will serve you and please you in every way.

Step 5. Groom: O maiden ! Now that you have walked the five steps with me, you have enriched my life. May God bless

Step 5. Bride: My lord, I share both in your joys and sorrows. Your love will make me trust and honor you. I will carry out your

you. May our loved ones live long and share in our prosperity.	wishes.
Step 6. Groom: O maiden ! You have filled my heart with happiness by walking six steps with me. May you fill my heart with great joy and peace from time to time.	Step 6. Bride: My lord, in all acts of righteousness, in material prosperity and in every form of enjoyment and divine acts, I promise you that I shall participate and shall always be with you.
Step 7. Groom: O maiden ! As you walked the seven steps with me, our Love and friendship became eternal. We experienced spiritual union in God. Now you have become completely mine and I offer my life to you. Our marriage will be for ever.	Step 7. Bride: My lord, as per the law of God and the Holy scriptures [Vedas] I have become your spouse. Whatever promises we gave, we have spoken with pure mind. We will be truthful to each other in all things. We will love each other for ever.
After these seven steps, the marriage become legal by Hindu law codes. Then, they both say: "Now let us make a vow together. We shall share the same food, share the strengths, the same tastes. We shall be of one mind, we shall observe the vows together; I shall be the Sama, you the Rigveda; I shall be upper world, you the earth; I shall be the Sukhilam. you the Holder; Together we shall live and beget children, and other riches. Come thou, Oh, sweet-worded girl."	

Appendix – E

OBSERVATIONS OF THE WORLD'S GREAT MINDS ON THE INDIAN HERITAGE

Aurobindo (1872-1950)

India saw from the beginning, and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance, she never lost hold of the insight, that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

"In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death!"

Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899)

"It may be with truth be asserted that no description of Hinduism can be exhaustive which does not touch on almost every religious and philosophical idea that the world has ever known. It is all-tolerant, all-comprehensive, all-compliant, all-absorbing. It has its spiritual and its material aspect; it's esoteric and exoteric; it's subjective and objective; it's rational and irrational. It has one side for the practical; another for the severely moral; another for the devotional and the imaginative; another for the philosophical and speculative."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

" I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad-Gita. It was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835)

"Bhagvad-Gita is the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue.....perhaps the deepest and loftiest thing the world has to show."

Voltaire (1694-1778)

" I am convinced that everything has come down to us from the banks of the Ganges, - astronomy, astrology, metempsychosis, etc."

Jules Michelet (1798-1874)

Each year, it is necessary to respire, to take breath again, to revive ourselves at the great living sources that forever keep their eternal freshness. Where can we find them if not at the cradle of our race, on the sacred summits from where descend the Indus and the Ganges....?

Max Muller (1823-1900) :

"If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which will deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant – I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively in the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly a human life, not for this life only but a transfigured and eternal life – again I should point to India".

Swami Vivekananda (December, 1900, New York) :

"My whole life has been changed by the touch of one of those divine men about whom I am going to speak to you next Sunday; and the time is coming when these thoughts will be cast abroad over the whole world. Instead of living in monasteries, instead of being confined to books of philosophy to be studied only by the learned, instead of being the exclusive possession of sects, they will be sown broadcast over the whole world, so that they may become the common property of the saint and the sinner, of men, women and children, of the learned and the ignorant. They will then permeate the atmosphere of the whole world, and the very air that we breathe will say with every one of its pulsations "Thou art That "

Romain Rolland (1866-1944)

If there is one place on the face of the earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India....For more than 30 centuries, the tree of vision, with all its thousand branches and their millions of twigs, has sprung from this torrid land, the burning womb of the Gods. It renews itself tirelessly showing no signs of decay.

Niels Bohr, (1885-1962)

I go into the Upanishads to ask questions.

Erwin Schrödinger (1887--1961)

This life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of this entire existence, but in a certain sense the whole; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in one single glance. This, as we know, is what the Brahmins express in that sacred, mystic formula which is yet really so simple and so clear; tat tvam asi, this is you. Or, again, in such words as "I am in the east and the west, I am above and below, I am this entire world."

Dr. Carl Sagan, (1934-1996)

The Hindu religion is the only one of the world's great faiths dedicated to the idea that the Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite, number of deaths and rebirths. It is the only religion in which the time scales correspond, to those of modern scientific cosmology. Its cycles run from our ordinary day and night to a day and night of Brahma, 8.64 billion years long. Longer than the age of the Earth or the Sun and about half the time since the Big Bang. And there are much longer time scales still.

The most elegant and sublime of these is a representation of the creation of the universe at the beginning of each cosmic cycle, a motif known as the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. The god, called in this manifestation Nataraja, the Dance King. In the upper right hand is a

drum whose sound is the sound of creation. In the upper left hand is a tongue of flame, a reminder that the universe, now newly created, with billions of years from now will be utterly destroyed.

A millennium before Europeans were willing to divest themselves of the Biblical idea that the world was a few thousand years old, the Mayans were thinking of millions and the Hindus billions.

Count Hermann Keyserling (1880-1946)

Benares is holy. Europe, grown superficial, hardly understands such truths anymore.....I feel nearer here than I have ever done to the heart of the world; here I feel everyday as if soon, perhaps even today, I would receive the grace of supreme revelation...The atmosphere of devotion which hangs above the river is improbable in strength; stronger than in any church that I have ever visited. Every would be Christian priest would do well to sacrifice a year of his theological studies in order to spend his time on the Ganges; here he would discover what piety means.

Mark Twain (1835-1910)

Land of religions, cradle of human race, birthplace of human speech, grandmother of legend, great grandmother of tradition. The land that all men desire to see and having seen once even by a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the globe combined.

Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975).

It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in self-destruction of the human race. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way. Here we have the attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together in to a single family.

So now we turn to India. This spiritual gift, that makes a man human, is still alive in Indian souls. Go on giving the world Indian examples of it. Nothing else can do so much to help mankind to save itself from destruction.

There may or may not be only one single absolute truth and only one single ultimate way of salvation. We do not know. But we do know that there are more approaches to truth than one, and more means of salvation than one. This is a hard saying for adherents of the higher religions of the Judaic family (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), but it is a truism for Hindus. The spirit of mutual good-will, esteem, and veritable love ... is the traditional spirit of the religions of the Indian family. This is one of India's gifts to the world.

At the close of this century, the world would be dominated by the West, but that in the 21st century "India will conquer her conquerors."

Albert Einstein, (1879-1955)

When I read the Bhagavad Gita and reflect about how God created this universe everything else seems so superfluous. We owe a lot to Indians who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made.

Julius Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967)

Access to the Vedas is the greatest privilege this century may claim over all previous centuries. The general notions about human understanding... which are illustrated by discoveries in atomic physics are not in the nature of things wholly unfamiliar, wholly unheard of or new. Even in our own culture they have a history, and in Buddhist and Hindu thought a more considerable and central place. What we shall find [in modern physics] is an exemplification, an encouragement, and a refinement of old wisdom.

The juxtaposition of Western civilization's most terrifying scientific achievement with the most dazzling description of the mystical experience given to us by the Bhagavad Gita, India's greatest literary monument.

Octavio Paz (1914-1998)

The Hindu genius is a love for abstraction and, at the same time, a passion for the concrete image. At times it is rich, at others prolix. It has created the most lucid and the most instinctive art. It is abstract and realistic, sexual and intellectual, pedantic and sublime. It lives between extremes, it embraces the extremes, rooted in the earth and drawn to an invisible beyond.

Queen Fredricka of Greece (1931- 1981)

Klaus L. Klostermaier (Born 1933)

Hinduism has proven much more open than any other religion to new ideas, scientific thought, and social experimentation. Many concepts like reincarnation, meditation, yoga and others have found worldwide acceptance. It would not be surprising to find Hinduism the dominant religion of the twenty-first century. It would be a religion that doctrinally is less clear-cut than mainstream Christianity, politically less determined than Islam, ethically less heroic than Buddhism, but it would offer something to everybody. It will appear idealistic to those who look for idealism, pragmatic to the pragmatists, spiritual to the seekers, sensual to the here-and-now generation. Hinduism, by virtue of its lack of an ideology and its reliance on intuition, will appear to be more plausible than those religions whose doctrinal positions petrified a thousand years ago.

George Bernard Shaw, (1856-1950)

The Indian way of life provides the vision of the natural, real way of life. We veil ourselves with unnatural masks. On the face of India are the tender expressions which carry the mark of the Creator's hand. The apparent multiplication of gods is bewildering at the first glance, but you soon discover that they are the same GOD. There is always one uttermost God who defies personification. This makes Hinduism the most tolerant religion in the world, because its one transcendent God includes all possible gods. In fact Hinduism is so elastic and so subtle that the most profound Methodist, and crudest idolater, are equally at home with it.

Christopher W. B. Isherwood (1904-1986)

I believe the Gita to be one of the major religious documents of the world. If its teachings did not seem to me to agree with those of the other gospels and scriptures, then my own system of values would be thrown into confusion, and I should feel completely bewildered. The Gita is not simply a sermon, but a philosophical treatise.

Sir Charles Eliot (1862-1931)

I do not think that Christianity will ever make much progress in Asia, for what is commonly known by that name is not the teaching of Christ but a rearrangement of it made in Europe and like most European institutions practical rather than thoughtful. And as for the teaching of Christ himself, the Indian finds it excellent but not ample or satisfying. There is little in it which cannot be found in some of the many scriptures of Hinduism... The claim of India to the attention of the world is that she, more than any other nation since history began, has devoted herself to contemplating the ultimate mysteries of existence and, in my eyes, the fact that Indian thought diverges widely from our own popular thought is a positive merit. ...Hinduism has not been made, but has grown. It is a jungle, not a building. It is a living example of a great national paganism such as might have existed in Europe if Christianity had not become the state religion of the Roman Empire, if there had remained an incongruous jumble of old local superstitions, Greek philosophy, and oriental cults such as the worship of Sarapis or Mitras.Compared to Islam and Christianity, Hinduism's doctrines are extraordinarily fluid, and multiform. India deals in images and metaphors. Restless, subtle and argumentative as Hindu thought is, it is less prone than European theology to the vice of distorting transcendental ideas by too stringent definition. It adumbrates the indescribable by metaphors and figures. It is not afraid of inconsistencies which may illustrate different aspects of the infinite, but it rarely tries to cramp the divine within the limits of a logical phrase.The Hindu has an extraordinary power of combining dogma and free thought, uniformity, and variety. Utmost latitude of interpretation is allowed. In all ages Hindus have been passionately devoted to speculation. It is also to point out that from the Upanishads down to the writings of Tagore in the present day literature from time to time enunciates the idea that the whole universe is the manifestation of some exuberant force giving expression to itself in joyous movement.

Muhammad Dara Shikoh (1627-1658 AD) the favorite Sufi son of Moghul emperor, Shah Jehan.

After gradual research; I have come to the conclusion that long before all heavenly books, God had revealed to the Hindus, through the Rishis of yore, of whom Brahma was the Chief, His four books of knowledge, the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda. The Quran itself made veiled references to the Upanishads as the first heavenly book and the fountainhead of the ocean of monotheism.

Annie Wood Besant (1847-1933)

After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophical and none so spiritual that the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. Make no mistake, without Hinduism, India has no future. Hinduism is the soil in to which India's roots are stuck and torn out of that she will inevitably wither as a tree torn out from its place. And if Hindus do not maintain Hinduism who shall save it? If India's own children do not cling to her faith who shall guard it. India alone can save India and India and Hinduism are one. This is the India of which I speak - the India which, as I said, is to me the Holy Land. For those who, though born for this life in a Western land and clad in a Western body, can yet look back to earlier incarnations in which they drank the milk of spiritual wisdom from the breast of their true mother - they must feel ever the magic of her immemorial past, must dwell ever under the spell of her deathless fascination; for they are bound to India by all the sacred memories of their past; and with her, too, are bound up all the radiant hopes of their future, a future which they know they will share with her who is their true mother in the soul-life.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), *President of India* (1962-1967).

Hinduism is not just a faith. It is the union of reason and intuition that can not be defined but is only to be experienced. Evil and error are not ultimate. There is no Hell, for that means there is a place where God is not, and there are sins which exceed his love.^[7]

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial. What extracts from the Vedas I have read fall on me like the light of a higher and purer luminary, which describes a loftier course through purer stratum. It rises on me like the full moon after the stars have come out, wading through some far stratum in the sky.

Whenever I have read any part of the Vedas, I have felt that some unearthly and unknown light illuminated me. In the great teaching of the Vedas, there is no touch of sectarianism. It is of all ages, climes and nationalities and is the royal road for the attainment of the Great Knowledge. When I am at it, I feel that I am under the spangled heavens of a summer night.

The Vedas contain a sensible account of God. The veneration in which the Vedas are held is itself a remarkable feat. Their code embraced the whole moral life of the Hindus and in such a case there is no other truth than sincerity. Truth is such by reference to the heart of man within, not to any standard without.

The Hindus are most serenely and thoughtfully religious than the Hebrews. They have perhaps a purer, more independent and impersonal knowledge of God. Their religious books describes the first inquisitive and contemplative access to God.

Will Durant (1885-1981)

It is true that even across the Himalayan barrier India has sent to us such questionable gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables, hypnotism and chess, and above all our numerals and our decimal system. But these are not the essence of her spirit; they are trifles compared to what we may learn from her in the future. Perhaps in return for conquest, arrogance and spoliation, India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of the mature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit, and a unifying, a pacifying love for all living things.

India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages: she was the mother of our philosophy; mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all. Nothing should more deeply shame the modern student than the recency and inadequacy of his acquaintance with India....This is the India that patient scholarship is now opening up like a new intellectual continent to that Western mind which only yesterday thought civilization an exclusive Western thing. "As flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their name and form, thus a wise man, freed from name and form, goes to the divine person who is beyond all." Such a theory of life and death will not please Western man, whose religion is as permeated with individualism as are his political and economic institutions. But it has satisfied the philosophical Hindu mind with astonishing continuity. Even in Europe and America, this wistful theosophy has won millions upon millions of followers, from lonely women and tired men to Schopenhauer and Emerson.

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Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
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