

संस्कृत

Epic Civilisation Course

for IGCSE 2019 onwards

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INTRODUCTION

In this course we shall attempt to outline the civilisation depicted in the two Sanskrit epics, the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. The material for this will come from a wide variety of early texts: the Vedas, śāstra texts such as Manusmṛti and even the Purāṇas, since their source material probably originates from a very ancient time.

Where did Sanskrit come from? Who were the people who spoke Sanskrit, or at least ‘perfected’ it? (*Samṣkṛta* means ‘highly wrought’ or ‘perfected’.) The society that composed the earliest Sanskrit texts called themselves ‘ārya’ or ‘the civilised people.’ Unlike other ancient civilisations, they did not leave behind much archaeological evidence. Thus, it is difficult to piece together what everyday life was like during that time. However, the Sanskrit texts, faithfully preserved by oral transmission throughout the millennia, provide us with a window into how these people viewed the world. This course will attempt to consolidate this worldview portrayed by the Sanskrit epics with the following five units:

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1. Basic Metaphysical Teachings

At some point in our lives, most of us have asked the questions: Who am I? What is this universe? What is my place in this universe? The people who composed the Sanskrit epics also had the same questions, and they explored them in many different ways. The study of these phenomena that are beyond what is directly observable is called metaphysics. We shall begin our study of epic civilisation with some basic metaphysical principles, for they are central to the worldview presented in the texts.

1a – Brahman and Ātman

The Upaniṣads, Vedic texts that concerned themselves with philosophy (see section 3a), heavily influenced the metaphysical ideas behind the Sanskrit epics. The Upaniṣads state that in reality, the universe and everything in it are one universal being called *brahman*. This *brahman* is pure consciousness, unlimited and the witness of all. Here are some quotes from the Upaniṣads that mention the non-dual *brahman*:

सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म *sarvaṃ hy etad brahma* "All this is verily *brahman*."

(Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad v. 2)

सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* "*Brahman* is truth, knowledge, infinity."

(Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2:1:1)

एकमेवाद्वितीयम् *ekam evādvitīyam* "One only, without a second."

(Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6:2:1)

The *brahman* is also known as *ātman*, meaning 'self.' Thus, according to this philosophy, your own self is also this limitless, infinite *brahman*. Here are some quotes from the Upaniṣads that equate the universal *brahman* with the *ātman*.

अयमात्मा ब्रह्म *ayam ātmā brahma* "This Self is *brahman*."

(Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad verse 2)

तत्त्वमसि *tat tvam asi* "That thou art." (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6:8:7)

If you would like to explore this subject further, see Bhagavad Gītā 2.16-29

1b – Illusion and Ignorance

Brahman is defined as one being which is the universe and its cause. However, we do not perceive the universe as such; rather, it seems a shifting mixture of different things. This appearance of difference within *brahman* is called *māyā*, or illusion. When the unity of *brahman* is forgotten, and the apparent multifarious differences are taken as reality, this is called *avidyā*, or ignorance. Here is an analogy: the *brahman* is like a blank cinema screen. The film projected upon it is like *māyā*, illusion. *Avidyā* is thinking the film is real and forgetting that it is a drama.

1c – Knowledge and Liberation

Jñāna is the knowledge that the *brahman* is one's real self, despite outward appearances. Within this system of thought, the aim of human life is to discover that the *brahman* is our own self and the Self of the universe. This knowledge frees one from the illusion of separation and results in *mokṣa*, or liberation. Here are some quotes about *jñāna* and *mokṣa* from the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gitā, another important philosophical text that is part of the Mahābhārata (see section 3c):

अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः *ajñānenāvṛtaṃ jñānaṃ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ*
"Knowledge is veiled by ignorance and thereby creatures are deluded."
(Bhagavad Gitā 5:15)

नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः ।
मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥
nāhaṃ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyāsamāvṛtaḥ,
mūḍho 'yaṃ nābhijānāti loko mām ajam avyayam.

"I (the *brahman*) am not revealed to all, as I am veiled by illusion. This deluded world knows Me not as unborn and unchanging."
(Bhagavad Gitā 7:25)

आगममस्य पश्यन्ति न तं पश्यति कश्चन ।
ārāmam asya paśyanti na taṃ paśyati kaścana
"All see His play, but no one sees Him."
(Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4:3:14)

1d - Rebirth

The illusion of *māyā* also includes the concept of *karman*. In essence, *karman* simply means action; however, it also refers to the metaphysical principle that actions leave a 'deposit' or 'trace', causing future effects in the life of an individual. These deposits, called *saṃskāra*, can be either good or bad. Good actions produce good *saṃskāra*, which lead to the individual's happiness, prosperity and advancement. Destructive and harmful actions produce bad *saṃskāra*, which leads to misery, poverty and lower forms of being. Thus, in an individual lifetime, *saṃskāra* generates people's good or bad tendencies and the circumstances they will meet.

According to this system, when a being dies, it is reborn into a new body. The quality of its *saṃskāra* produces the new form and conditions into which it is born. The process of continual rebirth over ever-recurring ages is called *saṃsāra*. If a person is able to develop true knowledge (*jñāna*), they will be able to break free from the cycle of *saṃsāra* and never be reborn again.

1e – Primal Nature

As said in section 1a, according to this system, *brahman* is the only real absolute element in the universe. However, from the relative perspective of the illusory creation (*māyā*), there are layers or stages of existence. Within the *brahman*, the second stage that arises is unmanifest primal nature, the *avyakta*. *Avyakta* contains all potentiality, like a seed contains the possibility of a tree. Thus, this second stage is characterised by two elements: *brahman* and *avyakta*. Sometimes this second level is known as *brahman* with its reflection. In this case, *brahman* is called *puruṣa*, or spirit and its reflection is called *prakṛti*.

1f - The Three Guṇas

The next and third stage is contained within the *prakṛti*. Here the creation expresses itself with a threefold nature. One way of looking at this threefold nature of the universe is in terms of the three *guṇas* (qualities) - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* is light, intelligence and purity. *Rajas* is movement, energy and passion. *Tamas* is darkness, ignorance and inertia. It is thought that everything is composed of these three *guṇas* in various amounts. For example, divine beings have more *sattva*, men have more *rajas* and stones have more *tamas*.

Here are some quotes from 14.5-9 of the Bhagavad Gitā that elaborates more on the *guṇas*.

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥

sattvaṃ rajas tama iti guṇāḥ prakṛtisambhavāḥ,

nibadhnanti mahābāho dehe dehinam avyayam.

Sattva (goodness), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (darkness), the qualities born from nature, enchain the imperishable embodied one in the body, O mighty-armed.

तत्र सत्त्वं निर्मलत्वात् प्रकाशकमनामयम् ।

मुखसङ्गेन बध्नाति ज्ञानसङ्गेन चानघ ॥

tatra sattvaṃ nirmalatvāt prakāśakam anāmayam,

sukhasaṅgena badhnāti jñānasaṅgena cānagha.

Regarding this, *sattva*, because of its purity, is shining and healthy. It binds by attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge, O sinless one.

रजो रागात्मकं विद्धि तृष्णाऽऽसङ्गसमुद्भवम् ।

तन्निबध्नाति कौन्तेय कर्मसङ्गेन देहिनम् ॥

rajo rāgātmakam viddhi tṛṣṇā ‘saṅgasamudbhavam,

tan nibadhnāti kaunteya karmasaṅgena dehinam.

Know that *rajas* has the nature of passion and is produced from attachment to desire. That binds the embodied one by means of the attachment to action, O son of Kuntī.

तमस्त्वज्ञानजं विद्धि मोहनं सर्वदेहिनाम् ।

प्रमादालस्यनिद्रामिस्तन्निबध्नाति भारत ॥

tamas tv ajñānajaṃ viddhi mohanaṃ sarvadehinām,

pramādālasyanidrābhis tan nibadhnāti bhārata.

However, know *tamas* as arising from ignorance, bewildering all the embodied ones. It binds with delusion, idleness and sleep, O Bhārata.

सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्मणि भारत ।

ज्ञानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत ॥

sattvaṃ sukhe sañjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata,

jñānam āvṛtya tu tamaḥ pramāde sañjayaty uta.

Sattva causes [one] to cling to happiness, *rajas* to action, O Bhārata. *Tamas*, obscuring knowledge, causes [one] to cling to delusion.

If you would like to know more about the three *guṇas*, you can learn more in chapter 18 of the Bhagavad Gītā.

1g – Creation, Maintenance and Destruction

The act of creation is called *sṛṣṭi*. Beginning in *brahman*, one level emerges from the level before until the whole creation is complete at the final level of the physical world. The maintenance of this creation in continued existence is called *sthiti*. The merging of each level back to the one before until only *brahman* remains is called *pralaya*, dissolution. The three *guṇas* preside over this process. *Rajas* is responsible for creation, *sattva* for maintenance, and *tamas* for dissolution. This threefold process repeats endlessly, and the only escape from it is by realization of its illusory nature and of the true nature of the Self.

Key Terms for Part 1

Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) The ultimate reality underlying all phenomena.

Ātman (आत्मन्) The self. The one Self in all.

Māyā (माया) The illusion that makes the universe seem to be here.

Avidyā (अविद्या) Ignorance. The belief that the *māyā* is the true reality.

Jñāna (ज्ञान) True knowledge. The knowledge that *brahman* is reality.

Karman (कर्मन्) The principle that actions create an effect in the future.

Saṃskāra (संस्कार) Traces or deposits from past actions that create conditions for rebirth.

Saṃsāra (संसार) Transmigration. The process of continual rebirth.

Mokṣa (मोक्ष) Liberation from bondage in *saṃsāra* (संसार.)

Avyakta (अव्यक्त) Unmanifest nature.

Puruṣa (पुरुष) Spirit, whose reflection is *prakṛti*.

Prakṛti (प्रकृति) Primal nature, where everything is stored in seed or causal form, which can be thought of as the reflection of *puruṣa*. Also known as *avyakta* (अव्यक्त)

Guṇāḥ (गुणाः) The three constituents of the universe, namely:

Sattva (सत्त्व) The quality of purity, intelligence, brightness.

Rajas (रजम्) The quality of activity and passion.

Tamas (तमम्) The quality of dullness and inertia.

Sṛṣṭi (सृष्टि) Creation. Presided over by *rajas*.

Sthiti (स्थिति) Sustenance. Presided over by *sattva*.

Pralaya (प्रलय) Dissolution. Presided over by *tamas*.

2. The Cosmos

How is the universe perceived in Sanskrit literature? In terms of space, the physical and the non-physical worlds make up the cosmos. In terms of time, the universe exists in a beginningless and endless cycle.

2a The Three Worlds

Within the illusion of creation, there are three levels of consciousness: waking, dream and deep sleep. Therefore, the whole creation can be considered as having three worlds or bodies – physical (waking state), subtle (dream state) and causal (deep sleep state). Each individual within creation can be thought of as having these three bodies as well. The three bodies are all composed of *brahman* or consciousness but at different levels of density, just as water can appear as vapour, liquid and ice.

The causal body, or the deep sleep state, is the finest; it holds the seed of the subtle and physical bodies. It is difficult to describe because it is a mass of undifferentiated consciousness.

The subtle, or mental body is a vast world. Its basic material is composed of five great elements (*mahābhūtāni*) in their original, unmixed forms. These primal elements each have a special property of their own.

- *ākāśa* (space) has the property of *śabda* (sound.)
- *vāyu* (air) has the property of *sparśa* (touch.)
- *agni / tejas* (fire) has the property of *rūpa* (form.)
- *jala* (water) has the property of *rasa* (taste.)
- *pr̥thivī / bhūmi* (earth) has the property of *gandha* (smell.)

When the *mahābhūtāni* are mixed together then we get the physical elements that are evident to the physical senses.

The subtle body contains the inner organ of mind, or *antaḥkaraṇa*. It is made of the following parts:

- *Buddhi* (intellect) – the *buddhi* is the organ of reason, and its function is distinguishing between what is true and false, eternal and transient, good and bad, etc. *Buddhi* is said to be like a mirror that reflects the light of the *ātman*, so the seeming wisdom of a creature is dependent on *buddhi*. If the creature's *buddhi* is still and clean, then the creature is able to correctly perceive the light of the *ātman*. However, if the *buddhi* is agitated and dark, then the opposite is true.
- *Ahaṁkāra* (ego) – the *ahaṁkāra* gives each being its separate sense of 'I' and identifies the *ātman* (Self) with the body or some other aspect of the creation. The whole universe can be perceived as a single whole known as *samaṣṭi*. However, within it are individuals called *vyasṭi*, each of who think of themselves as separate. This apparent separation is due to *ahaṁkāra*. This separation and identification of one's self with something in the creation leads to binding with *saṁsāra*, the endless round of rebirths.
- *Manas* (thought) – *manas* is the lower level of mind and is the organ of thought. *Manas* has two main aspects: *saṅkalpa* (opinion or belief) and *vikalpa* (.)doubt

or objection.) Using these two functions, *manas* considers the pros and cons of an issue. *Buddhi* then decides which side is right.

- *Citta* (heart) – The *citta* is the seat of emotions and memory.

The subtle world also contains two sets of senses (*indriyas*):

i. The senses of knowledge (*jñānendriyas*) correspond to the five senses. Each of these works through a primal element:

- hearing (ears) works through *ākāśa* (space)
- touch (skin) works through *vāyu* (air)
- seeing (eyes) works through *agni / tejas* (fire)
- taste (tongue) works through *jala* (water)
- smell (nose) works through *pṛthivī / bhūmi* (earth)

ii. The senses of action (*karmendriyas*) correspond to five bodily functions:

- speaking (mouth)
- grasping (hands)
- procreation (genitals)
- excretion (anus)
- moving (feet)

Here are some verses from Manusmṛti about the ten *indriyas*:

श्रोत्रं त्वक्चक्षुषी जिह्वा नासिका चैव पञ्चमी ।

पायूपस्थं हस्तपादं वाक्चैव दशमी स्मृता ॥

śrotram tvakcakṣuṣī jihvā nāsikā caiva pañcamī,

pāyūpastham hastapādamaṁ vākcaiva daśamī smṛtā.

The ear, the skin, the eyes, the tongue, and the nose as the fifth; the anus, the genitals, the hand and foot, and speech as the tenth.

बुद्धीन्द्रियाणि पञ्चैषां श्रोत्रादीन्यनुपूर्वशः ।

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि पञ्चैषां पाय्वादीनि प्रचक्षते ॥

buddhīndriyāṇi pañcaiṣāṁ śrotrādīny anupūrvaśaḥ,

karmendriyāṇi pañcaiṣāṁ pāyvādīni pracakṣate.

The five beginning with the ear are the senses of knowledge; the five beginning with the anus are the senses of action.

(Manusmṛti 2.90-91)

If you would like to know more about the *indriyas*, please see Manusmṛiti 2.88-94.

Lastly, another part of the subtle body is the *prāṇa*, the breath of life that animates all things. *Prāṇa* has five functions in the body:

- *Prāṇa* is the breath in the mouth and nose.
- *Apāna* is the breath that excretes.
- *Vyāna* is the breath that permeates the whole body.
- *Udāna* is the breath that leaves the body at death.
- *Samāna* is the breath that digests.

If you would like to know more about the *prāṇas*, please see Mahābhārata 14.23.

The physical body is the world apparent to the senses. This is inert and motivated by the subtle body. This world is formed from the mixing of the five *mahābhūtāni* (great subtle elements). It is characterised by birth, old age, and death.

If you would like to know more about the three worlds please see the Maṇḍukya Upaniṣad.

2b Cycles of Time

In Sanskrit literature, time is not linear. Rather, it is cyclical, and it moves through huge revolutions in a creation without beginning or end. A *mahāyuga* is one of these gigantic cycles that takes 4,320,000 years to complete. Contained in this *mahāyuga* are the four *yugas*, or ages:

Sanskrit name of Age	English name of Age	Length (years)
Kṛtayuga / Satyayuga	Golden Age	1,728,000
Tretāyuga	Silver Age	1,296,000
Dvāparayuga	Bronze Age	864,000
Kaliyuga	Iron Age	432,000

A *mahāyuga* begins with the Kṛtayuga, then proceeds through the Tretāyuga and Dvāparayuga, and then finishes with the Kaliyuga. Once the Kaliyuga finishes, then the Kṛtayuga of the next *mahāyuga* begins again.

Seventy-one cycles of a *mahāyuga* make up one *manvantara*. A *manvantara* is named for the Manu, or lawgiver, who presides over each of these enormous spans of time. Fourteen *manvantaras* comprise one *kalpa*. One *kalpa* is a day of Brahmā, the Creator. The creation is then dissolved for an equal period and this constitutes Brahmā's night. There are 360 of such days and nights in Brahmā's year and 120 of these years is his lifetime.

4 <i>yugas</i> =	1 <i>mahāyuga</i> (4,320,000 human years)
71 <i>mahāyugas</i> =	1 <i>manvantara</i>
14 <i>manvantaras</i> =	1 <i>kalpa</i>
2 <i>kalpas</i> =	1 day and night of Brahṁā
360 days and nights of Brahṁā =	1 year of Brahṁā
120 years of Brahṁā =	1 lifetime of Brahṁā

If you would like to know more about cycles of time see the Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.3

The Kṛtayuga is said to be a time when there is no division of subject and object, when people know of the one *brahman* as a reality. All people are wise and knowledgeable, and they practice *dharma*, or law, fully. Many peoples of the world have immemorial legends of such an age. At certain times in history, people have been inspired to live according to the standards of the Kṛtayuga, so that it has been held as an ideal to which they may aspire.

The seeds of the next age, the Tretāyuga, are sown when people begin to want something for themselves. Though the Tretāyuga is a fall in the level of *dharma* from the Kṛtayuga, it is nevertheless a time of greatness and magnificence when virtue abounds and human life is rich and harmonious. It is thought that the Rāmāyaṇa (section 3c) takes place during the Tretāyuga.

In the Dvāparayuga, the people are heroes. However, at this time, the level of *dharma* drops again from the Tretāyuga, so the good qualities are very definitely mixed with bad. Great virtues like courage, strength, magnanimity, boldness, and a spirit of adventure are intermixed with dark aspects of selfishness, with greed, cruelty, lust and arrogance. Both knowledge and power have declined from the Tretāyuga.

What distinguishes this *yuga* is the heroic mind of people at this time. They have nothing about them that is trivial or vulgar. Their minds are set upon great actions and enterprises. At a word of insult they spring to arms; at a challenge to their courage or initiative or ingenuity they set earnestly about their task. They do not complain nor quarrel over petty matters, only over things of consequence like honour and power. Doubt, timidity, miserliness, gossip – all such small-minded vices were unknown to them. Demons make worthy adversaries for these heroes, for without a demonic enemy a hero cannot measure his full stature. It is inevitable that war is a constant feature of an age of heroes, but a thread of wisdom remains that runs through their lives amidst the passions of adventure and the battlefield. Hence, the Mahābhārata (section 3c) is supposed to take place during the close of the Dvāparayuga.

It is traditionally said that the Iron Age began on 18 February, 3102 B.C. Hence, it is thought that we currently live in the Kaliyuga. The Kaliyuga, with its very low level of *dharma*, is described in detail in the Mahābhārata. It says that all ordered relations in society, such as family relations, teacher and student, etc., become disordered; the divine world is forgotten; people are only interested in wealth and pleasure; there is famine, disease and misery; kings are corrupt, and people have children and die at a very young age. However, there is one advantage of the Kaliyuga. Life is so painful that escape is desirable. A little effort towards liberation goes a long way.

Key Terms for Part 2

Mahābhūtāni (महाभूतानि) The five great subtle elements.

Ākāśa (आकाश) Space, or ether, the first great element with its property sound *śabda* (शब्द).

Vāyu (वायु) Air, the second great element with its property touch *sparsa* (स्पर्श).

Agni (अग्नि) or *Tejas* (तेजस्) Fire, the third great element with its property form or beauty *rūpa* (रूप).

Jala (जल) Water, the fourth great element with its property taste *rasa* (रस).

Pr̥thivī (पृथिवी) or *Bhūmi* (भूमि) Earth, the fifth great element with its property smell *gandha* (गन्ध).

Antaḥkaraṇa (अन्तःकरण) Inner organ of mind

Buddhi (बुद्धि) Reason, the organ of discrimination, reflecting the light of the *ātman*

Ahaṅkāra (अहङ्कार) The organ that identifies the *ātman* with something in creation.

Samaṣṭi (समष्टि) The universe as a single person or whole.

Vyaṣṭi (व्यष्टि) The individual acting as a separate unit.

Manas (मनस्) Mind, the lower level that thinks and deliberates.

Saṅkalpa (सङ्कल्प) Mental construction, resolve, belief.

Vikalpa (विकल्प) Doubt, conflicting idea.

Citta (चित्त) The part of the causal body called the heart where the deposits of actions are stored.

Indriyāṇi (इन्द्रियाणि) Senses.

Jñānendriyāṇi (ज्ञानेन्द्रियाणि) Senses of knowledge – seeing, hearing etc.

Karmendriyāṇi (कर्मेन्द्रियाणि) Senses of action – speaking, grasping etc.

Prāṇa (प्राण) Vital breath of life that divides into various functions: *prāṇa* (प्राण), the breath in the mouth and nose, *apāna* (अपाण), the breath that excretes, *vyāna* (व्याण), the breath that permeates the whole body, *udāna* (उदाण), the breath that leaves the body at death, and *samāna* (समाण), the breath that digests.

Yuga (युग) An age

Manvantara (मन्वन्तर) 71 *mahāyugas*, supervised by one Manu (Lawgiver).

Kalpa (कल्प) 14 *manvantaras* , a day of Brahmā.

Mahāyuga (महायुग) One cycle of the four *yugas* – 4,320,000 years.

Kṛtayuga (कृतयुग) / *Satyayuga* (सत्ययुग) The Golden Age: 1,728,000 years.

Tretāyuga (त्रेतायुग) The Silver Age: 1,296,000 years.

Dvāparayuga (द्वापरयुग) The Bronze Age: 864,000 years.

Kaliyuga (कलियुग) The Iron Age: 432,000 years.

3. Important Texts

There are two types of Sanskrit texts – Vedic texts, known as *śruti*, and post-Vedic texts, known as *smṛti*. Generally speaking, we can classify *śruti* texts as pre 500 B.C.E, while *smṛti* texts come after this time.

3a Śruti – Vedic Texts

The Vedic texts are the oldest Sanskrit literature. They are sometimes classified as *śruti*, ‘that which has been heard.’ This is because it is thought that great poets ‘heard’ them through revelation. What is truly amazing is that these texts have been preserved from very ancient times (perhaps 1800-1500 B.C.E.) through oral transmission and were not written in any form until modern times.

The Vedas are the oldest of the Vedic texts. Legend has it that the sage Vyāsa, ‘the compiler,’ arranged the Vedas into three parts – Ṛg, Yajur and Sāma. After that, a fourth part known as the Atharvaveda was included in the Vedas. Some parts of the Vedas contain beautiful and mysterious hymns and poems, whereas other give rules for various important rituals.

Included as part of each Veda are the Brāhmaṇas, which give the rules for recitation of the hymns, legends of their origin and other related matters. Also each Veda contains Āraṇyakas, which were intended for those who had left their homes and had taken up residence in the forest in order to study the scriptures. They cover such matter as the inner meaning of the rituals and sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas.

Finally, the latest texts (c. 500 B.C.E.) in the Vedic literature are the Upaniṣads. Since they are at the end of the Veda they are known as *vedānta* (*veda-anta*.) They teach the ultimate knowledge of the realization of the supreme *ātman* (individual self) as the *brahman* (universal self).

3b Smṛti – Post-Vedic Sanskrit Texts

Smṛti means 'remembered'. This refers to scriptures that have recorded and transmitted the words of great sages and were composed after the Vedic literature. In this section we shall examine some early *smṛti* texts such as the a. Vedāngas b. Sūtras and c. Manusmṛti. The epics and another related class of text called the Purāṇas are also considered *smṛti*, and we shall study them more closely in section 3c.

i. Vedāngas: The six Vedāngas are the ‘limbs of the Veda.’ They support the Veda: *śikṣā* describes its pronunciation; *chandas*, with metre and singing of verses; *nirukta*, etymology; *vyākaraṇa*, the science of grammar; *jyotiṣa*, the science of astronomy and planetary influence; and *kalpa*, ritual.

ii. *Sūtra* Texts: In Sanskrit scientific texts, many concepts are expressed in *sūtras*, very short statements that set forth a systematic formulation of a science. There are many types of scientific texts, such as those on medicine, mathematics, music, architecture and archery. Sanskrit literature contains a wealth of knowledge.

One important example of *sūtra* literature is Pāṇini’s treatise on *vyākaraṇa*, or Sanskrit grammar. In this text, about four thousand *sūtras* are used to describe all of Sanskrit grammar. The *sūtras* simplify the grammar; they show that all Sanskrit words are derived from a few simple *dhātus*, or roots and an even simpler system of *pratyayas*, or endings. Another important *sūtra* text is Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras*, which established and formalized the system of *yoga*. *Yoga*’s main aim is to quiet

unnecessary mental activity. Still another important text of this category is the Brahmasūtras, which systematised the various types of *vedānta* teaching in the Upaniṣads.

iii. Manusmṛti: Manusmṛti, or The Laws of Manu, provides the system of *dharma*, or law. *Dharma* can be thought of as the way in which the creation is justly organised, the great order of the universe. The Laws of Manu discusses the laws of right and wrong, the duties of men of different callings and at different times of life. Manusmṛti belongs to a class of texts known as *śāstras*. *Śāstra* works are texts that teach a particular discipline. Thus, The Laws of Manu can be classed as *śāstra* that teaches *dharma*.

3c Epics and Purāṇas

There are two Sanskrit epics – the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. Along with the Purāṇas, a related class of literature, they are thought to have originated from ballads and legends that were composed alongside the Vedic rituals. This source material was part of an oral storytelling tradition. The epics and Purāṇas, as we know them today, were not compiled into formal literature until later. The epics and the Purāṇas are also considered to be *smṛti* texts.

i. The Rāmāyaṇa: The Rāmāyaṇa, the older of the two Sanskrit epics, is the story of the incarnation of the god Viṣṇu in the Silver Age (see section 2b) as Prince Rāma. The story begins with King Daśaratha lamenting his lack of children and deciding to perform the horse sacrifice to win the favour of the gods. After the horse sacrifice was completed, the king's three wives gave birth to four sons – Rāma, Bharata, and the twins Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna.

In time, Rāma, Daśaratha's heir apparent, married the princess Sītā. However, trouble soon began after this. One of Daśaratha's wives, Queen Kaikeyī, persuaded Daśaratha that her son, Bharata, should become king instead of Rāma and Rāma should be banished to the forest. Rāma accepted this and went into exile with his wife Sītā and brother Lakṣmaṇa. Shortly after his departure, King Daśaratha died of grief.

In exile, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa carved out a life for themselves, although the forest was full of demons. Lakṣmaṇa injured the sister of the king of the demons, Rāvaṇa. In revenge for injury to his sister, Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā and carried her off to his city on the island of Lānkā. At about the same time, Rāma met the usurped monkey-king and, restoring him to his throne, he secured the whole monkey race as allies in his campaign against Rāvaṇa. Rāma's chief friend among the monkeys was Hanumān, a monkey with special powers, who eventually tracked down Sītā in captivity.

The great war between Rāma and the demons is recounted in detail in the epic. Also notable is Sītā's loyalty to the memory of Rāma, in spite of Rāvaṇa's threats of what would happen if she did not become his wife. Nevertheless, when Rāvaṇa was finally destroyed, Sītā had to undergo an ordeal by fire, so that the fire god could testify to her purity. Amid much rejoicing, the exile was ended and Rāma and Sītā were enthroned.

ii. The Mahābhārata: The Mahābhārata, compiled by the sage Vyāsa, is the other great Sanskrit epic. It is a huge work containing many different characters, stories and philosophical teaching, and it is darker in tone than the Rāmāyaṇa. The

main storyline deals with the conflict between the Pāṇḍava brothers and their evil cousins, the Kauravas. The eldest of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira, loses his kingdom through a game of dice to his cousin Duryodhana. The Pāṇḍava brothers then have to go into exile in the forest where they have various adventures. On their return from exile, Duryodhana refuses to give back the slightest part of the kingdom. This leads to an enormous battle which the Pāṇḍavas win, but which wipes out all the warriors on earth. This battle also heralds the beginning of the Iron Age and the final decline of the human race (see section 2b.)

Here are some important characters in the Mahābhārata:

Yudhiṣṭhira – The eldest Pāṇḍava brother. He is the son of the god Dharma and is very wise. Yudhiṣṭhira is responsible for the exile of the Pāṇḍavas because of his weakness for gambling.

Arjuna – One of the Pāṇḍava brothers. He is the most accomplished warrior in the world and a hero in the Mahābhārata.

Duryodhana – The leader of the evil Kaurava brothers. Dissatisfied and angry, Duryodhana has an inauspicious birth which leads to him being jealous of his Pāṇḍava cousins.

Draupadī – Wife of all five Pāṇḍava brothers.

Kṛṣṇa – The Pāṇḍavas' cousin on their mother's side. Kṛṣṇa, who is an incarnation of Viṣṇu (see section 4e), takes the Pāṇḍavas' side during the great battle and gives spiritual advice to Arjuna in the part of the Mahābhārata known as the Bhagavad Gītā.

Kuntī – The mother of the Pāṇḍava brothers, Kuntī was not able to have children except through a *mantra* (a special magic word) which summoned a god to father a child on her. Thus, the Pāṇḍavas are all half deities.

iii. The Bhagavad Gītā : The Bhagavad Gītā (the Song of the Lord) is one of the world's best loved Sanskrit texts, both in the East and in the West. Contained in chapter 6 of the Mahābhārata, it records a conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. This conversation takes place on a chariot between two mighty armies. Arjuna has sunk into a depression because he does not want to fight a war against his friends and family even though it is his duty as a warrior to fight against evil. Kṛṣṇa reasons with Arjuna that he should fight, for the true Self of his loved ones on the opposing side is eternal and cannot be killed. Kṛṣṇa also mentions that Arjuna should pursue his duty as a warrior with no thought of reward and with no attachment. In the end, Arjuna is convinced by Kṛṣṇa's teaching and takes up his arms to fight.

iv. The Purāṇas: Although the Purāṇas, as we have them today, are more modern than the two Sanskrit epics, their source material is probably also from Vedic times. The word *purāṇa* in Sanskrit means 'ancient' or 'ancient tale.' The Purāṇas are a collection of texts that cover a number of topics.

- An account of the creation of the universe.
- The cycles of dissolution and rebirth of creation.
- The family lines of deities, sages and prophets.
- The great cosmic periods of the universe under the supervision of the lawgivers, the Manus.
- The history of the earth and its kings.

The Purāṇas also contain many discussions of sages on various topics, accounts of various sciences and studies, the stories of the incarnations of the gods and many

other matters. There are eighteen main Purāṇas and they are considered to have been arranged by Vyāsa, the compiler of the Vedas and the epic Mahābhārata. The most famous of the Purāṇas is the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, which includes stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood.

Key Terms for Part 3

Śruti (श्रुति) 'What has been heard' i.e., Vedic literature. This is considered to be of the highest authority.

Veda (वेद) Thought to be the oldest Sanskrit literature, the *veda* is a collection of hymns compiled into four sections. These are: *R̥k* (ऋक्) *Sāman* (सामन्) *Yajus* (यजुस्) and *Atharva* (अथर्व). Traditionally, the *veda* is considered to be the eternal, non-human knowledge that shapes the creation.

Vyāsa (व्यास) *Vyāsa* means 'compiler.' Traditionally, he is considered to be the sage who compiled the *veda* into sections and who also composed the *Mahābhārata*, *Purāṇas* and the *Brahmasūtra*.

Āraṇyaka (आरण्यक) 'Forest discussions' of the *vedas*' inner meaning.

Upaniṣad (उपनिषद्) Philosophical discussions of the identity of the *ātman* (आत्मन्) with the *brahman* (ब्रह्मन्).

Vedānta (वेदान्त) The teaching of the *Upaniṣads*, literally the 'final part' or goal of the *veda*.

Smṛti (स्मृति) 'What has been remembered'. The teachings of the great sages. Secondary in authority to the *śruti*.

Vedāṅga (वेदाङ्ग) 'The support of the *veda*'. Six sciences which preserve the proper understanding and recitation of the *veda*. Their subjects are: *śikṣā* (शिक्षा) pronunciation, *chandas* (छन्दस्) metre, *vyākaraṇa* (व्याकरण) grammar, *nirukta* (निरुक्त) meaning of words, *jyotiṣa* (ज्योतिष) astronomy and *kalpa* (कल्प) performance of rituals.

Vyākaraṇa (व्याकरण) Science of grammar. One of the *vedāṅgas*.

Sūtra (सूत्र) A very terse statement which is part of a complete system explaining a science.

Pāṇini (पाणिनि) Author of the 4000 or so *sūtras* comprising the *vyākaraṇa*. In this science all words are shown to derive from a few simple *dhātus* (seed forms) and an even simpler system of *pratyayas* (endings).

Dhātu (धातु) Seed of a word. For example, 'vid' is the *dhātu* of *veda*.

Pratyaya (प्रत्यय) The endings of words.

Yogasūtrāṇi (योगसूत्राणि) A text outlining the principles of *yoga* (योग). Attributed to Patañjali.

Manusmṛti (मनुस्मृति) [Also called *dharmaśāstra*] The Laws of Manu sets out the laws of human life according to the universal system of *dharma*.

Śāstra (शास्त्र) Scripture, methodology, teaching.

Rāmāyaṇa (रामायण) The story of Rāma and his battles with the demons, by the sage Vālmiki.

Mahābhārata (महाभारत) The world's longest epic, by Vyāsa, narrating the story of the battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas and the events leading to it.

Mantra (मन्त्र) A special magic word.

Bhagavad Gītā (भगवद्गीता) The 'Song of the Lord', found in the Mahābhārata, records the spiritual discourse between Kṛṣṇa and the warrior Arjuna.

Purāṇa (पुराण) 'The ancient teachings'. Eighteen works traditionally attributed to Vyāsa that deal with creation and dissolution, kings, sages, incarnations etc.

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (श्रीमद्भागवतम्) The most famous Purāṇa, dealing especially with the life and exploits of Kṛṣṇa.

4. Divine Beings

The Sanskrit epics are populated by many different sorts of supernatural beings. Some of these are benevolent; others are ‘tricksters’ or even malevolent. These beings add a layer of depth and interest to the stories in the literature.

4a. Gods and Goddesses

The word for god in Sanskrit is *deva*, which means 'shining one' as well as 'playful'. The *devas* preside over the workings of the universe and reflect the great universal powers. It is thought that all these divine beings have a lifespan, although very long by our standards.

The highest of all gods and goddesses in the universe are the three great *devas* – Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. These three are responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the creation. Brahmā is the Creator. Viṣṇu is the Preserver. He sustains the creation, nourishing and protecting it, and sometimes takes birth in a human or other form in order to destroy evil and support the good. Śiva dissolves everything back to its essence at the proper time. Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva can also be thought to represent the three *guṇas* (see section 1f). Brahmā is *rajas*, Viṣṇu is *sattva*, and Śiva is *tamas*.

Each of these three has his consort or goddess (*devī*), which is his *śakti*, or power. Brahmā’s consort is Sarasvatī, who is responsible for wisdom, learning and the arts. Viṣṇu’s consort is Lakṣmī, who controls prosperity and wealth. Śiva’s consort is Pārvatī, whose power is law. It is important to realise that the *deva* and *devī* cannot exist independent of one another; they are only different aspects of the same universal force.

The following table sums up the main trinity:

<i>deva</i>	responsibility	<i>guṇa</i>	<i>devī</i>	power
Brahmā	creation	<i>rajas</i>	Sarasvatī	wisdom, learning and the arts
Viṣṇu	maintenance	<i>sattva</i>	Lakṣmī	prosperity and wealth
Śiva	dissolution	<i>tamas</i>	Pārvatī	law

Below the great trinity are other important gods, who originate in the Vedas. Here are a few you should know about:

- Indra – The lord of the lower *devas*, symbolizing the universal power of the mind.
- Yama – The god of death.
- Agni – The fire god, symbolizing the universal power of consciousness. Agni is an important god in the Vedic ritual.
- Sūrya – The sun god.
- Vāyu – The wind god.
- Prthivī – The earth goddess.

4b. Demigods

Besides the gods, there are some other fantastic creatures that inhabit the Sanskrit epics. They can be malevolent, causing many troubles for human beings.

However, they can also be beneficial, helping people achieve their goals. All in all, they are forces that human beings need to appease and of which they should be wary. Here are some you should know about:

- *Apsarases* – celestial nymphs
- *Gandharvas* – celestial musicians
- *Pitṛs* - ancestors
- *Nāgas* – serpent beings
- *Yakṣas* – guardian spirits

4c. Demons

In the Sanskrit epics, evil beings can live in many places and are able to freely plague human beings and gods. Many demons are antagonistic characters, such as Rāvaṇa in the Rāmāyaṇa. Here are some names of some types of evil spirits that you might encounter:

- *Rākṣasas* – demons who eat human flesh and disturb sacrifices. Rāvaṇa was considered to be a *rākṣasa*.
- *Piśācas* – demons who eat human flesh, imps
- *Bhūtas* – ghosts
- *Vetālas* and Pretas – zombie-like spirits

4d. The *Avatāras* (Incarnations of Viṣṇu)

As stated in section 4a, Viṣṇu's responsibility is to maintain the universe. One way Viṣṇu does this is by incarnating himself whenever things run down and *dharma*, the law, is transgressed. This phenomenon is described in Bhagavad Gītā 4.7:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ॥
 अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata,
abhyutthānam adharmasya tad ātmānaṃ sṛjāmy aham.

For whenever there is a decrease of lawfulness and an increase of unlawfulness, O Bhārata, then I manifest Myself.

The being in which Viṣṇu incarnates is called an *avatāra*. There are many different lists of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, but the following is the most famous. Some of the names will be familiar.

Matsya	Fish who saved humanity from the great flood.
Kūrma	Tortoise who stabilised the churning of the ocean.
Varāha	Boar who saved the earth from a flood.
Narasimha	Man-lion who saved the devout Prahlāda from his evil father.
Vāmana	Dwarf who humbled the king of the demons.

Paraśurāma	Killed evil warriors
Rāma	Hero of the great epic Rāmāyaṇa. Killed the evil demon Rāvaṇa.
Kṛṣṇa	There are many stories about Kṛṣṇa. He is a major character in the Mahābhārata and Bhagavad Gitā, and there are many stories about his childhood in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.
Buddha	Discovered a new philosophy in about 500 B.C. Historical figure.
Kalkin	Will come at the end of the world to help cleanse corruption and allow society to return afresh.

4e. The *R̥ṣis* (*Sages*)

The *r̥ṣis*, or sages, feature in all of the *śruti* and *smṛti* texts that we have examined. In the Vedas, they were the composers of the Vedic hymns. Later on, they were also considered to be the keepers of the sacred tradition and would remind men of the eternal truth of their nature. They practised asceticism and were considered by some to be the progenitors of the human race. The epics are full of the adventures and teachings of these sages -- Nārada, Yājñavalkya, Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Bhiṣma and many more.

Key Terms for Part 4

Deva (देव) 'Shining one'. A universal power or deity.

Devī (देवी) A female deity.

Śakti (शक्ति) The power or force of a *deva*, considered as his consort.

Brahmā (ब्रह्मा) The god responsible for creating the creation. Represents *rajas*.

Viṣṇu (विष्णु) The god responsible for maintaining the creation. Maintains order by incarnating himself with *avatāras*. Represents *sattva*.

Śiva (शिव) The god responsible for destroying creation. Represents *tamas*.

Sarasvatī (सरस्वती) Consort of *Brahmā*, the power of wisdom.

Lakṣmī (लक्ष्मी) Consort of *Viṣṇu*, the power of increase and prosperity.

Pārvatī (पार्वती) Consort of *Śiva*, the power of law.

Indra (इन्द्र) Lord of the minor gods. Universal mind, lord of the elements.

Yama (यम) Death, controller and ender of all.

Agni (अग्नि) God of fire.

Vāyu (वायु) God of wind.

Sūrya (सूर्य) God of the sun.

Pr̥thivī (पृथिवी) Goddess of the Earth.

Apsaras (अप्सरस्) Beautiful heavenly nymph.

Gandharva (गन्धर्व) Celestial musician.

Pitr (पितृ) Ancestor.

Nāga (नाग) Serpent being.

Yakṣa (यक्ष) Guardian spirit.

Rākṣasa (राक्षस) Night wandering ogre or demon.

Avatāra (अवतार) Incarnation of *Viṣṇu* when *dharma* is transgressed.

Ṛṣi (ऋषि) Sage.

5. Human Life and its Purpose

5a. Human Aims - *Puruṣārtha*

Puruṣārtha means the aspiration, aim or purpose of the human being and is traditionally described as having four aspects:

- *kāma*, enjoyment / pleasure
- *artha*, wealth
- *dharma*, virtue / duty
- *mokṣa*, liberation

A civilized life aspires to cultivate all four of these in balance. Life devoted only to the pursuit of *kāma* is shortsighted and tends to lead to misery, violence and exhaustion. *Kāma* is a basic human need, but it needs to be pursued ethically. If the senses are given proper consideration, then a person can cultivate the next *puruṣārtha*, *artha*. *Artha* is economic prosperity and wealth. It confers power, ability and advantage in the world. *Artha* also has its legitimate place, but it needs to be subservient to higher aims.

Next is *dharma*, which can be translated as virtue, justice or religion. The word *dharma* derives from the *dhātu* √*dhṛ*, which means ‘uplifting and supporting.’ Through *dharma*, human beings are more than animals, for it provides the ethical framework that can guide the two lower *puruṣārthas*. Society stays together and is supported and uplifted by *dharma*. *Dharma* is also the system by which one is rewarded for virtuous deeds and is punished for actions that are selfish or vicious.

The final *puruṣārtha* is *mokṣa*, or liberation. *Mokṣa* is the liberation from all confinements, even of the human form. This immortal and limitless state is final, permanent and untouched by all sorrow or fear.

5b. Occupation – *Varṇa*

Varṇa is defined as the occupations into which society is divided according to function. In Sanskrit literature, this is a controversial subject. There are many different opinions regarding caste, both historically and in modern India. However, for this course, we will simply define *varṇa* as occupation:

- *brāhmaṇa* – priests and teachers
- *kṣatriya* – warriors, kings or statesmen
- *vaiśya* – merchants, producers or farmers
- *śūdra* – servants or labourers

The idea in the Ṛgveda behind the *varṇa* system is that all people are born from the Universal Person, or *puruṣa*. The *brāhmaṇas* are the head, the *kṣatriyas* the arms, the *vaiśyas* the thighs and the *śūdras* the feet. Each *varṇa* is responsible for a sphere of human activity and contributes towards the smooth operation of society.

5c. Stages of Life – *Āśrama*

In Sanskrit literature, human life is divided into four stages:

- *brahmacārin* – student
- *gṛhastha* – married householder
- *vānaprastha* – forest dweller
- *sannyāsīn* – an ascetic who has completely renounced material life

The first stage is the *brahmacārin*. This is the student stage of life, and it begins in childhood. The *brahmacārin* lives a chaste life serving a teacher and learning the ancient wisdom in preparation for the challenges that life will present in the later stages. When the *brahmacārin* finishes studying and leaves the teacher, he or she gets married and enters the second stage of life, the *gṛhastha*, or householder. In this stage the *gṛhastha* raises a family and supports society on a wider scale.

Traditionally, the third stage of *vānaprastha*, or forest-dweller, begins when the first grandchild is born. At this point, the *vānaprastha* leaves home and dependants and takes to a life in the forest, sometimes accompanied by a spouse or sometimes as part of a group of disciples under a master. Here the *vānaprastha* returns to the texts studied as a *brahmacārin* and reflects deeply upon them. The *vānaprastha* also practices austerities (*tapas*) and meditation (*dhyāna*).

Finally, even this stage is abandoned and he or she enters the life of a *sannyasin*, or complete renunciation. *Sannyasin* is a life of solitary wandering, eating only what others offer for food. The mind of the *sannyasin* is free from all concern. Such a person, free of all social and bodily ties, gradually redeems all faults and becomes inwardly fixed on philosophical truths. Sometimes a person who is sufficiently strong in character may take to the forest-dwelling or *sannyasin* stages straight after the stage of studentship, thereby bypassing the householder stage.

5d. Sacrifice – *Yajña*

Yajña, or sacrifice, is the principle that actions are dedicated to something. Early Sanskrit literature describes the practice of complicated rituals involving altars, oblations in fire, and sacred chants. The Mahābhārata tells of the great *Aśvamedha* sacrifice (horse-sacrifice), which involved many people, much money and much time. Manu 3.68-70 mentions the ‘Five Great Sacrifices’ (*pañcamahāyajña*) which are intended for the householder. They are:

- *devayajña* - sacrifice, or worship, for the divine and its powers, often through songs of praise.
- *ṛṣiyajña* - sacrifice and honour for the sages, through study and recitation of their words and scriptures.
- *pitryajña* - sacrifice and respect to the fathers, our ancestors and instigators of our families, nation and traditions.
- *manuṣyayajña* - sacrifice for mankind. This is through hospitality, the setting up of hospitals, schools and other charitable foundations of benefit and uplift to men.
- *bhūtayajña* - sacrifice to the lower beings, which is through care and protection of the animals, birds and plant kingdoms.

Another way of viewing *yajña* is that all actions, whether we know it or not, are dedicated to some universal power. This power could be many things: anger, wisdom, greed, the good of all, or many other things.

5e. Discipline – *Tapas*

The primary meaning of *tapas* is self-discipline or asceticism. However, it is mentioned in texts as having many forms and different purposes. The word *tapas* comes from the *dhātu* \sqrt{tap} , which means to burn brightly or to purify. According to the purpose of the *tapas*, sometimes one has to undergo great suffering to release certain powers. Another definition of *tapas* is the unswerving performance of one's duty in the face of pleasure, pain, like and dislike, and other pairs of opposites in this world. The description of *tapas* of the body, speech and mind are described in Bhagavad Gītā 17.14-16:

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।

ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥

devadvijaguruprājñapūjanam śaucam ārjavam,

brahmacaryam ahimsā ca śārīram tapa ucyate.

Reverence for the gods, the twice-born, teachers, and wise men; cleanliness, uprightiness, chastity and non-violence – all this is *tapas* of the body.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥

anudvegakaram vākyaṃ satyaṃ priyahitam ca yat,

svādhyāyābhyasanam caiva vāṅmayam tapa ucyate.

Speech that does not cause fear, that is truthful, pleasant and beneficial, and the recitation of the scriptures – this is *tapas* of speech.

मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।

भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत् तपो मानसमुच्यते ॥

manahprasādaḥ saumyatvaṃ maunam ātmavinigrahaḥ,

bhāvasaṁśuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam ucyate.

Mental peace, kindness, silence, self-control and purity – this is *tapas* of mind.

Lastly, the Mahābhārata, in Śāntiparva 250:4, states that “the highest *tapas* consists of one-pointedness of mind and senses.” All in all, we can see that *tapas* is a multifaceted but important concept.

5f. Merit and Sin – *Punya* and *Pāpa*

Merit (*puṇya*) and sin (*pāpa*), are concepts that come under close examination in the Sanskrit epics. *Punya* is the result of good actions, words and thoughts, and it is important for a number of reasons. First, the person who practices *puṇya* becomes civilized and help to civilise society. Second, if someone practices *puṇya*, they gain a better embodiment in their next round of reincarnation. This can take the form of a fortunate human embodiment in the material world or a godly body in *svarga*, heaven. It is even possible, through long-term and faultless cultivation of good actions, to earn the position of a *brahmā*, or a Creator. However, the merit acquired from living a good life eventually runs out, and the being has to return to Earth in order to work out their liberation.

Sanskrit texts propound many lists of virtues that lead to *puṇya*; for example, the following brief verse (10.63) from the Laws of Manu lists five virtues that all human beings should hold to for a civilized life:

- *ahimsā* - harmlessness of thought, speech and action
- *satyam* - speech which is truthful
- *asteyam* - abstention from theft
- *śaucam* - cleanliness;
- *indriyanigraha* - control of the senses

In 16:1-3 of the Bhagavad Gītā, a more complete list of virtues is given:

- *abhayam* - fearlessness;
- *dānam* - generosity;
- *dama* - control of mind, senses, speech and body;
- *svādhyāya* - regular study and recitation of the scriptures;
- *akrodha* – absence of anger;
- *śānti* - peace, stillness and contentment;
- *dayā* - compassion for all.

As we all know, however, the world is a mixture of merit and sin, and *puṇya* is not the only factor. *Pāpa*, or sin, is the result of evil actions, words and thought. If someone primarily practices *pāpa*, they gain a lower embodiment during their next round of reincarnation. This can take the form of an unfortunate human embodiment, or an animal, plant, worm, etc. Extremely evil actions can cause someone to be born into a body that gets tortured in hell, or *naraka*. After the being’s sentence is served, it returns to Earth and is born in lowly embodiments, slowly working its way up to being a human being.

Pāpa destabilizes individuals and leads to chaos in society. In 16:4 of the Bhagavad Gītā, a list of vices leading to *pāpa* is given:

- *dambha* - hypocrisy
- *darpa* - arrogance

- *abhimāna* - conceit
- *krodha* - anger
- *pāruṣya* – harshness
- *ajñāna*- ignorance

The Sanskrit epics highlight the fact that human beings are a mixture of virtue and vice. Many characters are complex and are not clichéd ‘good guys’ or ‘bad guys.’ Good tends to prevail, but its victory is bittersweet. In the end, the epics indicate this important point -- reality is beyond merit and sin.

Key Terms for Part 5

Puruṣārtha (पुरुषार्थ) The aspiration and purpose of human life. This has four aspects: *kāma*, sensual enjoyment; *artha*, wealth; *dharma*, virtue; and *mokṣa*, liberation.

Kāma (काम) Desire and sensual enjoyment

Artha (अर्थ) Wealth, prosperity

Dharma (धर्म) Virtue. 'That which upholds', the system of duties, rewards, punishments etc. Universal justice, which ensures happiness for all who follow the law of their own nature.

Mokṣa (मोक्ष) Liberation

Varṇa (वर्ण) Caste, occupation. There are four main divisions:

Brāhmaṇa (ब्राह्मण) The class of priests and teachers

Kṣatriya (क्षत्रिय) The class of warriors, kings and statesmen

Vaiśya (वैश्य) The class of merchants, producers and farmers

Śūdra (शूद्र) The class of servants and labourers

Āśrama (आश्रम) A stage in life. There are four main divisions:

Brahmacārin (ब्रह्मचारिन्) The student stage of chastity, study and obedience

Gṛhastha (गृहस्थ) The householder stage

Vānaprastha (वानप्रस्थ) The forest-dweller stage

Sannyāsin (सन्न्यासिन्) The stage of complete renunciation as a wandering mendicant

Dhyāna (ध्यान) Meditation

Yajña (यज्ञ) Sacrifice. This can be a complicated ritual or dedicated action. Five sacrifices are enumerated in Manu: *devayajña* (to the gods), *ṛṣiyajña* (to the sages), *pitṛyajña* (to the ancestors), *manuṣyayajña* (to human beings), and *bhūtayajña* (to the lower creatures).

Tapas (तपम्) Disciplined action that purifies and enhances energy

Punya (पुण्य) Merit, the essence of good deeds

Pāpa (पाप) Sin, the essence of bad deeds

Ahiṃsā (अहिंसा) Harmlessness of thought, speech and action

Satyam (सत्यम्) Unfailing truthfulness in speech

Asteyam (अस्तेयम्) Abstention from theft

Śaucam (शौचम्) Cleanliness

Abhayam (अभयम्) Fearlessness

Dānam (दानम्) Generosity

Dama (दम) Control of mind, speech, senses and body

Svādhyāya (स्वाध्याय) Regular study of the scriptures

Akrodha (अक्रोध) Absence of anger

Śānti (शान्ति) Peace

Dayā (दया) Compassion

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