



# संस्कृत EPIC CIVILISATION COURSE

## INTRODUCTION

This course attempts to give in simple outline an account of the vision of human life and its aim and of creation and its nature, as these are understood by the authors and characters portrayed in the great works of the संस्कृत Epic tradition such as the रामायण, the महाभारत, the उपनिषद्, the पुराण and मनुस्मृति.

The five sections of the Course are as follows:

1. The Constituents of Creation.  
(ब्रह्मन्, आत्मन्, माया, अविद्या, अव्यक्त, मोक्ष, गुण, etc.)
2. The Causal, Subtle and Physical Worlds.  
(संस्कार, महाभूतs, अन्तःकरण, etc.)
3. The Scriptures, Sources of Authority.  
(वेद, स्मृति, महाभारत, रामायण, etc.)
4. Time and the Hierarchy of Beings  
(युगs, देव, देवी, अवतारs, etc.)
5. Human Life and its Purpose  
(पुरुषार्थs, वर्णs, आश्रमs, यज्ञ, तपस्, etc.)

[Note: It is not proposed that the Scripture quotations in संस्कृत given in the course be learnt by heart for the Examination.]

## PART ONE: THE CONSTITUENTS OF CREATION

What is the Ultimate Reality? Of what is creation made? How does it begin and end?

### ब्रह्मन् and आत्मन्

The Scriptures say that in truth there is only ब्रह्मन् and nothing else:

- सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म ॥ "All this is verily Brahman." (माण्डूक्य उपनिषद् v. 2)

This ब्रह्मन् is pure consciousness, unlimited, the Witness of all:

- सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म ॥ "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity."  
(तैत्तिरीय उपनिषद् 2:1:1)
- एकमेवाद्वितीयम् ॥ "One only, without a second." (छान्दोग्य उपनिषद् 6:2:1)
- एको देवः सर्वभूतेषु गूढः सर्वव्यापी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा ।  
कर्माध्यक्षः सर्वभूताधिवासः साक्षी चेता केवलो निर्गुणश्च ॥  
"One shining Deity, hidden in all beings, pervading all, the indwelling  
Self of all, Overseer of all actions, living in everything, the Witness,  
Bestower of consciousness, Alone, beyond the constituents of Nature."  
(श्वेताश्वतर उपनिषद् 6:11)

### माया and अविद्या

Somehow, as if at a tiny point in this blissful infinity of ब्रह्मन्, there seems to arise the universe and all its goings on, rather like the moving film arising on a blank cinema screen, or a mirage over the desert sands.

This illusion, or dream, of the universe is called माया.

Thus, although in reality there is only the one ब्रह्मन्, this appearance, like a fascinating drama, seems to arise in which each person thinks of him or herself as a separate actor and soon even forgets that it is a play.

When the universe and the things that happen within it are thought of as being real, this is called 'Ignorance' ( अविद्या ). On the other hand, to know that only ब्रह्मन् exists and that one is in truth that ब्रह्मन् and nothing else, is called 'Knowledge' ( ज्ञान ), 'Liberation' ( मोक्ष ) or 'Realization'.

- अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः ॥ "Knowledge is veiled by ignorance and thereby creatures are deluded." ( भगवद् गीता 5:15)
- नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः । मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥ "I (the Truth) am not revealed to all, as I am veiled by माया. This deluded world knows Me not as unborn and unchanging." ( भगवद् गीता 7:25)
- आराममस्य पश्यन्ति न तं पश्यति कश्चन ॥ "All see His play, but no one sees Him." ( बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद् 4:3:14)

The aim of Human life is to discover that in truth the ब्रह्मन्, unaffected by the appearance of the universe, is our own Self; and that this Self is the Self equally of all.

- अयमात्मा ब्रह्म ॥ "This Self is ब्रह्मन्." ( माण्डूक्य उपनिषद् verse 2)
- तत्त्वमसि ॥ "That thou art." ( छान्दोग्य उपनिषद् 6:8:7)

## अव्यक्त (The Unmanifest)

Although ब्रह्मन् is one, the one Self of all, the illusion ( माया ) is full of diversity and change. It also has many levels or stages of existence. These levels range from Causal, through Subtle, to Physical or Gross.

After the first stage, which is ब्रह्मन् itself, arises the Unmanifest (अव्यक्त). In the ever-present ब्रह्मन्, the अव्यक्त lies hidden, unknown and mysterious, but full of possibility, like the seed-form in which is concealed a magnificent

tree. This second level is sometimes known as ब्रह्मन् with its reflection. In it is contained the next and third stage.

## The Three गुण

At level three, Nature begins to make herself evident. This threefold Nature is described in many ways.

One way to consider this level is as three mighty gods: ब्रह्मा, the Creator, विष्णु, the Preserver and शिव (or महेश or रुद्र), the Destroyer.

ब्रह्मा is self-created. He creates the universe by means of the वेद. The वेद is the Divine Knowledge that is the pattern of all things.

विष्णु, the Preserver, sustains the creation, nourishing and protecting it, sometimes taking birth in a human or other form in order to destroy evil and support the good.

शिव dissolves everything back to its essence at the proper time.

Creation is called सृष्टि. Beginning in ब्रह्मन्, one level emerges from the level before until - at the level of पृथिवी (Earth) - the whole creation stands revealed in all its glory.

The maintenance of this creation in continued existence is called स्थिति.

The merging of each level back to the one before until only ब्रह्मन् remains is called प्रलय, dissolution.

This threefold process, presided over by the three great gods, repeats endlessly time after time. The only escape from it is by Realization of its illusory nature and of the true nature of the Self.

The threefold nature of the universe is also described in terms of the three गुण - सत्त्वगुण, रजोगुण and तमोगुण.

सत्त्व is light, intelligence and purity.

रजस् is movement, energy and passion.

तमस् is darkness, ignorance and inertia.

Everything is composed of these three गुण in various amounts: Gods and divine beings with more सत्त्व, men with more रजस्, stones with more तमस् etc. etc.

In the भगवद् गीता, the Lord कृष्ण sets out the qualities of food, discipline ( तपस् ), knowledge and action etc, in accordance with the three गुण. This should be read with care.

"The Blessed Lord said:

'सत्त्व, रजस् and तमस् are the गुण which the Law of Nature bringeth forth. They fetter the free Spirit in all beings.

'O Sinless One! Of these, सत्त्व, being luminous, strong and invulnerable, binds one by its yearning for happiness and illumination.

'रजस्, engendered by thirst for pleasure and attachment, binds the soul through its fondness for activity.

'But तमस्, the product of darkness, stupefies the senses in all embodied beings, binding them by the chains of folly, indolence and lethargy.

'सत्त्व brings happiness, रजस् commotion, and तमस्, which obscures wisdom, leads to a life of failure.

'O Prince! सत्त्व prevails when रजस् and तमस् are overcome; रजस् when सत्त्व and तमस् are overcome; and तमस् when it overcomes सत्त्व and रजस्.

'When the light of knowledge gleams forth from all the gates of the body, then be sure that सत्त्व prevails.

'O best of Indians! Avarice, the impulse to act, and the beginning of action itself, are all due to the dominance of रजस्.

'Darkness, stagnation, folly and infatuation are the result of the domination of तमस्, O joy of the कुरु clan!

'When सत्त्व prevails, the soul on quitting the body passes on to the pure regions where live those who know the Highest.

'When रजस् prevails, the soul is reborn among those who love activity; when तमस् rules, it enters the wombs of the ignorant.

'They say the fruit of a meritorious action is spotless and full of सत्त्व; the outcome of रजस् is misery, and of तमस् darkness.

'सत्त्व engenders Wisdom, रजस् avarice, and तमस् folly, infatuation and darkness.

'When सत्त्व is in the ascendant, the man evolves; when रजस्, he neither evolves nor degenerates; when तमस्, he is lost.

'As soon as a man understands that it is only the गुण which act and nothing else, and perceives That which is beyond, he attains My divine nature.

'When the soul transcends the गुण, which are the real cause of physical existence, then, freed from birth and death, from old age and misery, he quaffs the nectar of immortality.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'The food which men enjoy is also threefold, like the ways of sacrifice, austerity and almsgiving. Listen to the distinction.

'The foods that prolong life and increase purity, vigour, health, cheerfulness and happiness are those that are delicious, soothing, substantial and agreeable. These are loved by the सात्त्विक.

'Those in whom रजस् is dominant like foods that are bitter, sour, salt, over-hot, pungent, dry and burning. These produce unhappiness, repentance and disease.

'The तामसिक love food which is stale, not nourishing, putrid and corrupt, the leavings of others and unclean.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'The knowledge, the act and the doer differ according to the गुण.  
Listen to this too:

'That knowledge which sees the One Indestructible in all beings, the One Indivisible in all separate lives, may be truly called सात्त्विक knowledge.

'The knowledge which thinks of the manifold existence in all beings as separate – that comes from रजस्.

'But that which clings blindly to one idea as if it were all, without logic, truth or insight, that has its origin in तमस्.

'An obligatory action done by one who is disinterested, who neither likes it nor dislikes it, and gives no thought to the consequences that follow, such an action is सात्त्विक.

'But even though an action involve the most strenuous endeavour, yet if the doer is seeking to gratify his desires, and is filled with personal vanity, it may be assumed to originate in रजस्.

'An action undertaken through delusion, and with no regard to the spiritual issues involved, or to the real capacity of the doer, or to the injury which may follow, such an act may be assumed to be the product of तमस्.

'But when a man has no sentiment and no personal vanity, when he possesses courage and confidence, cares not whether he succeeds or fails, then his action arises from सत्त्व.

'In him who is impulsive, greedy, looking for reward, violent, impure, torn between joy and sorrow, it may be assumed that in him रजस् is predominant.

'While he whose purpose is infirm, who is low-minded, stubborn, dishonest, malicious, indolent, despondent, procrastinating -- he may be assumed to be in तमस्.'

\* \* \* \* \*

'There is nothing anywhere on earth or in the higher worlds which is free from the three गुण – for they are born of Nature ( प्रकृति ).' "

Now read the following conversation between the Sages विदुर and मैत्रेय from the श्रीमद् भागवत पुराण. Here विदुर asks मैत्रेय about the creation of the universe, when the One seems to become many.

मैत्रेय replies:

"O Blessed विदुर. The creation, preservation, and dissolution of the universe are all divine play. In the universe, the Self, who is the Self of all beings, appears as many. Before creation, and in dissolution, the world exists as one absolute existence, which is ब्रह्मन्. Then there is neither the seer nor the seen, neither subject nor object.

"There exists only consciousness itself. In that consciousness, which is the absolute ब्रह्मन्, is the power which divides itself into the seer and the seen, the cause and the effect. This power is called माया.

"God created this universe out of his माया, the divine power, which consists of the three गुण, namely सत्त्व, रजस् and तमस्. This माया, consisting of the गुण, is also called अव्यक्त – which is to say 'nature not yet manifested'. Mind, intelligence, ego, senses, sense organs,

subtle elements, and gross elements – in short, the whole universe – are an emanation from the divine **माया**."

विदुर ॥

"Revered master, if that is so, how can God, who is consciousness itself, and unchangeable, be called the Creator ? And why should he create ? If we say that for his pleasure and play he created this universe, we give him feelings like our own. When children engage in play, they are prompted by desire; but how can God, who is perfect, have any desire ?

"If, as you say, the absolute impersonal God is not really the Creator, but it is his power, **माया**, which creates, preserves, and dissolves, how can this **माया** be associated with God ? Furthermore, man, or the individual spirit, is in reality God, or part of God. How does he then become associated with and bound by this **माया** ? Man is truly divine. How then is he ever deluded, and why does he grovel in misery?"

मैत्रेय ॥

"Man, the ever-free Lord, is never bound; but man's belief that he is bound is **माया**, and, because of this **माया**, the unreal appears to be real. When the moon is reflected on the ocean, the waves of the ocean make it appear restless, but in reality the moon is steady and calm. It is the water that is restless. Similarly, the attributes of the non-Self are superimposed upon the Self, and it is the ignorant man who, through **माया**, identifies the attributes of finitude and bondage with himself. But this bondage is never in the true Self.

"When by following the path of renunciation one becomes pure, the grace of the divine Self, and devotion to the Lord, and love for him, arise within one's heart. Then does one know himself to be ever free. In short, when a man loves God, he frees himself from all ignorance and from all misery."

विदुर ॥

"I thank you, O मैत्रेय. The true nature of God, as well as of man, is consciousness itself. I was puzzled as to why God remains forever free and is the ruler of the universe, whereas man finds himself bound. But now I understand that माया is the servant of God, whereas it is the master of man. Herein lies the explanation of man's bondage. I also understand how ignorance, which is the cause of all this apparent universe, itself is माया.

"Indeed, here as elsewhere, extremes resemble each other. The most ignorant man is happy, and likewise the most enlightened man -- each in his own fashion. But those who are midway, being neither completely ignorant nor completely enlightened, are wretched. They have realized the ephemeral nature of the world and are dissatisfied with its pleasures, yet they do not know of the bliss of God.

"It is only by associating with holy men such as you, O मैत्रेय, and by rendering service to them, that men can develop love for the Lord and in the end find in him both joy and peace.

"O most honoured sage, I understand that the universe is a work of the Divine Power. Pray relate the story of Creation, and of how beings and things came into existence."

मैत्रेय ॥

"Creation, O विदुर, has no absolute beginning. The present universe is but one of a series of worlds that are past and of worlds that are to be. The cosmic energy alternates between periods of potentiality and of expression. The phase of potentiality is known as dissolution; the phase of expression is known as creation.

"Created things are of different kinds. The अव्यक्त, or cosmic energy, consists of three गुणs. When the equilibrium of the गुणs is

disturbed, there are manifested universal intelligence, universal ego, the mind, the senses and the organs of sense, the subtle principle of the elements, and the elements themselves. As these combine and recombine in various ways, all beings attain to existence.

"Among these there are **स्यावर**, or stationary beings, such as herbs, shrubs, creepers and plants. They have unmanifested consciousness. In them sense of touch alone has evolved.

"Then there are the brute species, the animals, in which the sense of smell is highly developed.

"Next comes man.

"Lastly, there are the **देव**s, the **पितृ**s, the **गन्धर्व**s and the **किन्नर**s. These are gods, demigods, angels, and spirits.

"All things whatsoever, O **विदुर**, were created by **ब्रह्मा**."

## सञ्ज्ञा (Special Names)

Brahman ( ब्रह्मन् )	<i>The Absolute. Truth, One without a second, etc.</i>
Ātman ( आत्मन् )	<i>The Self. The one Self in all.</i>
Māyā ( माया )	<i>Illusion. The magic that makes the universe seem to be here.</i>
Jñāna ( ज्ञान )	<i>True Knowledge. The knowledge that 'I am That'.</i>
Avidyā ( अविद्या )	<i>Ignorance. The belief that I am the body, mind, etc.</i>
Samsāra ( संसार )	<i>Lives in the World. Repeating births in various bodies.</i>
Mokṣa ( मोक्ष )	<i>Liberation. From bondage in संसार.</i>
Avyakta ( अव्यक्त )	<i>The Unmanifest. Where everything is stored in seed or causal form.</i>
Veda ( वेद )	<i>Knowledge of all Things. By which the universe is sung into existence.</i>
Sṛṣṭhi ( सृष्टि )	<i>Creation. Presided over by ब्रह्मा, the Creator.</i>
Sthiti ( स्थिति )	<i>Sustenance. Presided over by विष्णु, the Preserver.</i>
Pralaya ( प्रलय )	<i>Dissolution. Presided over by शिव, the Dissolver or Destroyer.</i>
Guṇāḥ ( गुणाः )	<i>The Three Constituents of the universe, namely:</i>
Sattva ( सत्त्व )	<i>The Quality of purity, intelligence, brightness.</i>

Rajas ( रजस् )      *The Quality of activity and passion.*

Tamas ( तमस् )      *The Quality of dullness and inertia.*

## PART TWO: THE CAUSAL, SUBTLE AND PHYSICAL WORLDS

### Reality

There is in truth only ब्रह्मन्.

### माया

Within it, creation arises at intervals like a momentary dream. Creation, although an illusion ( माया ), is also a play. It therefore has structure and order. This structure is threefold, just as its constituents, the गुणs, are threefold.

One way of seeing this threefold structure is in terms of the three states of Waking, Dream and Deep Sleep.

### The Three Bodies

Another way is to consider creation and each individual member of creation as having three bodies - Causal, Subtle and Gross (or Physical). These three bodies are all composed of ब्रह्मन् or consciousness but at three different levels of density, just as the same substance may appear as vapour, liquid and ice.

In brief, the Causal body is the finest and is अव्यक्त (Unmanifest), holding the seeds of all that comes to exist.

The Subtle body consists of the inner organs of mind (the अन्तःकरण ).

The Physical or Gross body is the body apparent to the senses. This is inert and motivated by the Subtle body.

## The Causal Body

Nothing directly may be known of the Causal World. In it are the संस्कार, deposits laid down by previous actions, often of previous lives.

## पुण्य and पाप

It should be appreciated that good actions, actions that are constructive and helpful to all, produce merit (पुण्य), leading to the individual's happiness, prosperity and advancement. Bad actions, actions that are destructive and harmful, produce sin (पाप) leading to misery, poverty and lower forms of being. How this happens is as follows.

पुण्य-संस्कार and पाप-संस्कार are stored in the Causal heart of a being as traces resulting from the qualities of people's actions. From these arise the good or bad tendencies of people and the circumstances or conditions they will meet.

## The Three-fold Nature of संस्कार

Thus संस्कार has three aspects:

- (a) सञ्चित ॥ The store of संस्कार from previous good and bad actions.
- (b) प्राग्भ्य ॥ The circumstances, fortunate and unfortunate, that a person encounters as a result of the 'seeds' in सञ्चित sprouting forth.
- (c) क्रियमाण ॥ The संस्कार of the future being produced by the quality of our present action.

Thus one is born in a form and circumstances depending on the quality of the संस्कार one has collected over many previous lives.

## संसार

This process of continual rebirth over endless ages is called **संसार** and continues until Self-realization.

## चित्त

The **संस्कार** is stored in the Causal heart called the **चित्त** (not the lump of red flesh in the physical body).

## महाभूत

Before we can consider the Subtle body of Mind, we need to know that it is made of the Five Great Elements ( **महाभूतs** ) in their original form before they are mixed together to form the physical elements that are perceptible to the gross sense organs. These Primal Elements each have a special property of their own.

- |    |                          |                                       |
|----|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. | SPACE (or Ether), आकाश,  | has the property of sound ( शब्द ).   |
| 2. | AIR, वायु,               | has the property of touch ( स्पर्श ). |
| 3. | FIRE, अग्नि (or तेजस्),  | has the property of form ( रूप ).     |
| 4. | WATER, जल,               | has the property of taste ( रस ).     |
| 5. | EARTH, पृथिवी (or भूमि), | has the property of smell ( गन्ध ).   |

The Subtle Body, made of the above Elements, consists of the following organs:

## बुद्धि

Reflecting the pure light of the **आत्मन्** is the organ of Reason, called **बुद्धि**. **बुद्धि** is often called the 'Intellect' and it awakens one to discrimination between true and false, eternal and non-eternal, good and bad, right and wrong, useful and useless, important and trivial, etc. etc.

The wisdom or reasonableness of a creature will depend upon the clarity of this organ of बुद्धि. This is because बुद्धि is like a mirror reflecting the light of the आत्मन्. If the mirror is soiled or covered in dust, it will not reflect properly. Again, likened to the surface of a lake, if the lake is agitated, the reflection will be disturbed, fragmented and incapable of a true reflection. Thus the बुद्धि must be kept pure and still if wisdom and Reason are to show themselves.

To understand the next organ or instrument of mind, we need to know that the universe is one single person or whole called समष्टि. But within it are countless lesser individuals called व्यष्टि. Each individual व्यष्टि thinks itself a separate person.

## अहङ्कार

This separation is brought about by an organ called अहङ्कार. अहङ्कार gives each its separate sense of 'I'. In reality the 'I', the अहम्, is the same throughout the whole show and is the आत्मन् itself.

अहङ्कार is this pure universal अहम् saying 'I am' about a particular bunch of ideas or elements or limbs, even down to a clump of grass. Once this 'identification' has occurred the creature is bound to संसार, the endless journey of lives in this world of pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Self-realization, or Liberation, मोक्ष, requires detachment of identity from this अहङ्कार and unity with the pure अहम् once again.

## मनस्

The lower level of mind is called मनस्, the organ of thought. The thought of मनस् has two main aspects:

1. सङ्कल्प ॥ This is mental construction, assumption, opinion and belief. At its best it can be a noble resolve, at its worst an irrational obsession or false idea.
2. विकल्प ॥ This is a doubt, an alternative or objection.

Thus, using these two functions, the मनस् can consider the pros and cons of an action or subject. It takes बुद्धि to decide which side is right.

Only a मनस् under control of a pure and still बुद्धि is of any use.

## The Senses

Called the इन्द्रियs, there are two sorts of senses:

1. The senses of knowledge ( ज्ञानेन्द्रियs ), such as seeing, hearing, etc.
2. The senses of action ( कर्मेन्द्रियs ), such as speaking, handling, etc.

## Senses of Knowledge

Each of the five senses of knowledge arises from a primal element and is in fact a subtle sense. This is how we can see, hear, touch, etc. in dreams without the use of physical organs.

To sense the 'external' world these senses work through gross instruments such as the nose, tongue, etc. Thus the sense of sight works through the physical agency of the eyes to reveal the picture of the physical world. In the same way, hearing works through the ears, touch through the skin, taste through the tongue and smell through the nose.

In fact, it is the light of the आत्मन् that shines through the subtle world into the physical world and lights up the objects. The objects ( विषय ) are sounds, textures, colours, tastes and smells.

## Senses of Action

The senses of action ( कर्मेन्द्रिय ), are also five in number:

1. Speaking works through the mouth.
2. Grasping works through the hands.
3. Moving works through the feet.

4. Evacuating works through the anus etc.
5. Procreation works through the organ of generation.

## The प्राण

Also connecting the subtle with the physical world is the प्राण, the Breath of life which animates all things. In the body this Vital Force branches into five streams or functions:

1. प्राण is the breath in the mouth and nose.
2. अपान is the breath that excretes.
3. व्यान is the breath that permeates the whole body.
4. उदान is the breath that leaves the body at death.
5. समान is the breath that digests.

## The Physical or Gross World

The physical World apparent to the senses is formed from the five Great Subtle Elements ( महाभूत ), but mixed in a simple way as follows.

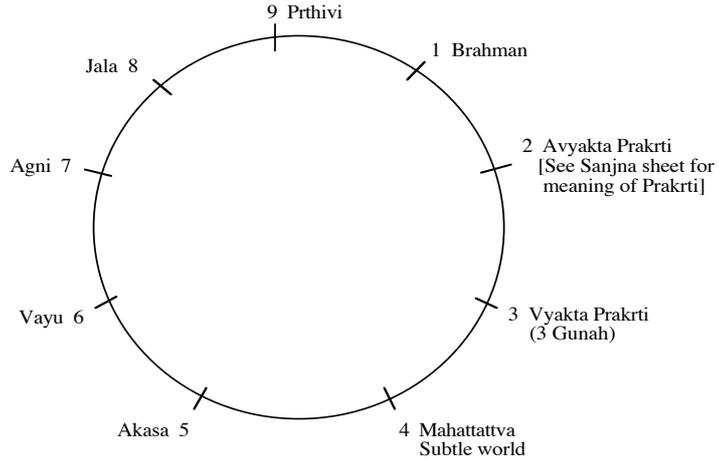
Each Physical Element (Space, Earth, Water etc.) is formed from 50% of its corresponding Subtle Element plus 12.5% of each of the other four. Thus Gross Earth is composed of 50% Subtle Earth plus 12.5% of each of Subtle Space, Air, Fire and Water.

## Circle of Nine Points

This whole scheme of the Eightfold creation with the Original ब्रह्मन् is set out in a diagram. It should be remembered that:

- (a) Each level is generated from the level before.
- (b) Each level is a grosser form.

(c) But each level is a grosser form of the same ब्रह्मन् or pure consciousness.



## सञ्ज्ञा

Antaḥkaraṇa ( अन्तःकरण )	<i>Inner organ of mind (incorporating बुद्धि, मनस् etc.)</i>
Samskāra ( संस्कार )	<i>The essence of an action left as a seed in the चित्त.</i>
Puṇya ( पुण्य )	<i>Merit, the essence of a good action.</i>
Pāpa ( पाप )	<i>Sin, the essence of a bad action.</i>
Sañcita ( सञ्चित )	<i>The store of unactivated संस्कार in the Causal Body.</i>
Prārabdha ( प्रारब्ध )	<i>The circumstances one encounters due to good and bad संस्कार.</i>
Kriyamāṇa ( क्रियमाण )	<i>The संस्कार of the future being produced by present action.</i>
Mahābhūtāni ( महाभूतानि )	<i>The Five Great Subtle Elements.</i>
Ākāśa ( आकाश )	<i>Space, or Ether, the first Great Element with its property Sound ( शब्द ).</i>
Vāyu ( वायु )	<i>Air, the second Great Element with its property Touch ( स्पर्श ).</i>
Agni ( अग्नि ) or Tejas ( तेजस् )	<i>Fire, the third Great Element with its property Form or Beauty ( रूप ).</i>
Jala ( जल )	<i>Water, the fourth Great Element with its property Taste ( रस ).</i>
Ṁrthivī ( पृथिवी ) or Bhūmi ( भूमि )	<i>Earth, the fifth Great Element with its property Smell ( गन्ध ).</i>

Buddhi ( बुद्धि )	<i>Reason, the organ of discrimination, reflecting the light of the आत्मन्.</i>
Samaṣṭi ( समष्टि )	<i>The Universe as a single person or whole.</i>
Vyaṣṭi ( व्यष्टि )	<i>The individual acting as a separate unit.</i>
Ahaṅkāra ( अहङ्कार )	<i>The organ that identifies the आत्मन् with something in creation.</i>
Aham ( अहम् )	<i>The pure 'I' or 'I am' of the आत्मन्.</i>
Manas ( मनस् )	<i>Mind, the lower level that thinks and deliberates.</i>
Saṅkalpa ( सङ्कल्प )	<i>Mental construction, resolve, belief.</i>
Vikalpa ( विकल्प )	<i>Doubt, conflicting idea.</i>
Indriyāṇi ( इन्द्रियाणि )	<i>Senses.</i>
Jñānendriyāṇi ( ज्ञानेन्द्रियाणि )	<i>Senses of knowledge – seeing, hearing etc.</i>
Karmendriyāṇi ( कर्मेन्द्रियाणि )	<i>Senses of Action – speaking, grasping etc.</i>
Prāṇa ( प्राण )	<i>Vital Breath, divides into various functions digesting, excreting etc.</i>
Prakṛti ( प्रकृति )	<i>Nature. The whole of creation, unmanifest and manifest ( व्यक्त ). [ This is the three गुणाः and all the levels of inert creation. It is lit by the light of पुरुष, the embodied आत्मन्.]</i>

## PART THREE: THE SCRIPTURES ( शास्त्र ), SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

### The Truth

The Vedic Scriptures proclaim that, in truth, there is only ब्रह्मन्, which is pure Bliss, and that the world is an illusion.

### The Worldly View

On the other hand, our senses and mind tell us that the world is real, full of separate individuals and productive of pleasure and pain.

### Which is Reliable?

So here is a problem. Either our senses and mind are telling the truth or the Scriptures. Both cannot be equally right. The question is, "Which do we follow?" or, put in another way, "How do we judge the reliability of one proposition against another?"

Let us consider an analogy. A man tells of a distant country, overflowing with gold and other precious metals. Not having seen it for ourselves, how do we know whether to believe him?

First of all we would form some estimation of the man's character. Is he honest? Does he show the marks of having returned from such a land? Does he have anything to gain by lying to us?

## Clearing Doubts by Reasoning

Next, using proper reasoning, we would question him, attempting to satisfy any doubts as to such things as how he got there, what it is like, what proofs he could offer, what other witnesses there may be and so forth.

If the traveller stands up to such an examination, we would probably believe him, but this would still be mere theoretical knowledge.

## Personal Verification

Only when we follow his directions and go to the distant country ourselves will we know fully the truth of his report and be able to benefit from it. Even if he gives us a map, we would still have to tread the route in order to get to the good things he tells us of.

So it is with the Scriptures. To verify their truth we must not only follow their reasoning but also their instructions.

Thus there are three stages: hearing, reasoning (by asking questions and settling doubts) and finally following the words and finding out for ourselves.

## Scripture the Final Authority

There is a magnificent body or system of Scriptures in the Vedic tradition, all in **संस्कृत** and mutually supporting one another. These are the final authority of the tradition.

## The Eternal वेद

First among the Scriptures is the वेद. वेद, from the धातु विद्, means 'Knowledge' or 'Wisdom' ( from the same धातु ). This is the Knowledge

with which the Creation is formed and by which it is known. The वेद has no human author. It is eternal.

## श्रुति

Because it was not composed but only 'heard' by men of great purity, it is called श्रुति, 'that which has been heard'. Since first being heard, the वेद has been handed down unchanged from generation to generation.

## The Three, or Four, वेदs

In the Bronze Age ( द्वापर युग ) the great sage व्यास arranged the one वेद into three parts, called साम, ऋग् and यजुर् वेदs. There is a fourth part, called the अथर्व वेद, often included. These वेदs are in the form of beautiful, powerful and mysterious hymns. Only much later were they committed to writing.

## ब्राह्मणs

Included as part of each वेद are the ब्राह्मणs, giving the rules for recitation of the hymns, legends of their origin and other related matters.

## आरण्यकs and उपनिषद्s

Part of these ब्राह्मणs are the आरण्यकs and उपनिषद्s.

The आरण्यकs are discussions for those who have left their homes and taken up residence in the forest to study the deeper significance of the Scriptures. They cover such matters as the inner meaning of the sacrifices enjoined in the वेदs.

The उपनिषद्s are at the end of the वेद and therefore known as the वेदान्त ( वेद-अन्त ). These teach the ultimate Knowledge and realization of the Supreme आत्मन् or ब्रह्मन्. There are ten principal उपनिषद्s, beginning with the ईशा उपनिषद्.

## Higher and Lower Knowledge

The Knowledge taught in उपनिषद्s is known as the Higher Knowledge. The distinction between the Higher and Lower Knowledge is brought out in the following quotations from the मुण्डक उपनिषद् and छान्दोग्य उपनिषद् respectively:

नारद asked Sage मनत्कुमार to teach him.

मनत्कुमार said: "Say what you know; I will say what you do not."

नारद said: "Lord! I know ऋग-वेद, यजुर्-वेद, साम-वेद, अथर्व-वेद, history and tradition called the fifth वेद, grammar, ritual, mathematics, astrology, mineralogy, logic, economics, physics, metaphysics, zoology, politics, astronomy, mechanics, fine arts.

"Lord! Yet these things are but elementary knowledge; I do not know the Self. I have heard from masters, that he who knows Self, goes beyond sorrow. I am lost in sorrow. Help me to go beyond."

\* \* \* \* \*

That famous man the householder शौनक said to अङ्गिरस् : "What is it that, when known, makes us know everything in the world?"

अङ्गिरस् said: "Those who know Spirit say that there are two kinds of knowledge, a lower and a higher.

"The lower is the knowledge of the four वेदs and such things as pronunciation, ceremonial, grammar, etymology, poetry, astronomy. The higher knowledge is the knowledge of the Everlasting;

"Of that which has neither tangibility, nor antecedent, colour, eyes, ears, hands, feet; of that which is prevalent everywhere, immeasurably minute, self-evident, indestructible, always alive; of that which the wise name the Source."

## स्मृति

Secondary to the श्रुति are the स्मृति. स्मृति means 'remembered'. This refers to Scriptures which record and pass down the words of great Sages. Since these are their own words and not words which originate directly in the Eternal, they are not called श्रुति. Thus the स्मृति is secondary in authority to the श्रुति.

In this category of स्मृति is the भगवद् गीता, the Laws of Manu (known as धर्मशास्त्र or मनुस्मृति), the पुराणs, the रामायण and the महाभारत.

## The Six वेदाङ्गs

Also included in the category of स्मृति are the six वेदाङ्गs. These are the limbs ( अङ्ग ) of the वेद and are the support of the वेद, as for instance: शीक्षा, which deals with its pronunciation; छन्दस्, which deals with metre and singing of verses; व्याकरण, the science of Grammar (by पाणिनि); and ज्योतिष, the science of Astronomy and planetary influence. Others are the meaning of words and ritual.

## सूत्रs

These sciences are mainly expressed in सूत्रs, very short statements which leave out every unnecessary syllable and together set forth a systematic formulation of a science.

There are many other scientific systems in संस्कृत, such as Medicine, Mathematics etc.; and treatises on the arts such as Music, Architecture and Archery.

## ब्रह्मसूत्रs

Important among the सूत्र literature are the ब्रह्मसूत्रs. These show the harmony of the various उपनिषद्s in teaching the single truth of the ब्रह्मन्.

Finally in this section we shall consider something of the contents of the most important स्मृति Scriptures.

## The भगवद् गीता

**1. The भगवद् गीता.** भगवद् गीता means the song ( गीता ) of the Lord ( भगवत् ). It is found in the महाभारत and records the conversation between the Lord श्री कृष्ण and the great warrior अर्जुन.

This conversation takes place on a chariot between two mighty armies. The Lord explains to अर्जुन why he should fight even against his loved ones, for the आत्मन् of each is eternal and cannot be killed. अर्जुन is told that one should always follow one's innate duty, अर्जुन's duty as a warrior being to fight. However, this duty should be pursued with no thought of reward and with no attachment.

There are 18 chapters, only 700 संस्कृत verses, in the गीता and everyone should read it at least in an English translation. Many great people have based their lives on this one स्मृति alone.

## मनुस्मृति and धर्म

**2. The Laws of Manu.** This स्मृति gives the system of धर्म. धर्म, from the धातु धृ, means 'that which upholds'. धर्म is the system by which the creation is justly organised. धर्म is the great order of the universe by means of which each fulfills his part in the great play and is rewarded or punished for his good and bad deeds. धर्म is the Will of the Absolute and cannot be gainsaid.

The धर्मशास्त्र of मनु, the great lawgiver, states the laws of right and wrong, the duties of men of different callings and at different times of life. Beginning with an account of the origin of creation, it ends by saying that when the Self is seen in all and all things in oneself then no one could commit wrong (अधर्म).

## The पुराणs

**3. The पुराणs.** पुराण means 'ancient'. The पुराणs are something like the Old Testament of the Jewish and Christian traditions and are supposed to contain the following:

- (a) An account of the creation of the universe.
- (b) The cycles of dissolution and rebirth of creation.
- (c) The family lines of deities, sages and prophets.
- (d) The great cosmic periods of the universe under the supervision of the lawgivers, the मनुs.
- (e) The history of the earth and its kings.

The पुराणs also contain many discussions of sages on various topics, especially about truth; accounts of various sciences and studies, the stories of the incarnations of विष्णु such as कृष्ण and many other matters. In fact they are rather like encyclopaedias in verse form.

There are 18 पुराणs and they are said to have been composed by व्यास, the compiler of the वेदs and teller of the महाभारत. The most famous of the पुराणs are the श्रीमद् भागवत-पुराण and the विष्णु-पुराण.

## The रामायण

**4. The रामायण by the poet वाल्मीकि.** This is the story of the incarnation of the Lord विष्णु in the Silver ( त्रेत ) Age as Prince राम. This should be well known to us and a good and full English translation should be read. There follows a brief account of the contents, followed by a note on the spiritual interpretation of the work by the present-day sage, श्री शान्तानन्द सरस्वती.

The story begins with King दशरथ lamenting his lack of children and deciding to perform the horse sacrifice to win the favour of the gods. This was the greatest of all sacrifices. It failed if a single subject of the king became distressed during the many months of ritual. Only kings and queens could assist at it, and they brought

thousands of their subjects to stay in the capital city, eager to take part in the mixed scene of self-denial and festivity.

Meanwhile, there was concern in the heavenly regions because the king of the राक्षसs had been destroying and plundering in the three worlds. This king, named रावण, had long ago obtained a boon from ब्रह्मा – that he would never be killed by any god or celestial – and so he regarded himself as indestructible. However, he had not bothered to ask for protection from men, thinking them of little account. It was realised, therefore, by the gods, that they would have to find a man to deal with रावण.

Finally, it was agreed that the great विष्णु would save the worlds by incarnating himself; but he would come to earth, not as one man, but as four. The gods also decided to use their powers to create an enormous population of monkeys, who could be available as an army when the time came to deal with the Titans.

The horse sacrifice having been successfully completed, King दशरथ's wives gave birth to sons. Of Queen कौसल्या, राम was born, possessed of one half of विष्णु's glory. Of Queen कैकेयी was born भरत, with a quarter of विष्णु's splendour. Queen सुमित्रा gave birth to लक्ष्मण and शत्रुघ्न, who shared the last quarter of विष्णु's glory. All four turned out to be richly endowed with talents, both in their learning of the वेदs and in the military arts.

When it was time for them to marry, it was decided that राम should seek the hand of the daughter of King जनक. The king had not begotten her, but found her in a furrow, when he was ploughing up some sacrificial ground. He called her सीता, implying "princess from the earth"; and because of her extraordinary beauty and light, King जनक placed an almost insuperable task before every suitor. राम, however, when shown the mighty bow of the celestials, which it took 50,000 men of strength to move on an eight-wheeled cart, merely smiled: and proceeded to pick it up, string it and then break it in pieces with his hands. He won his bride, with whom he was deeply in love, and the other brothers were married at the same ceremony.

Soon after this, when the sons were aged 17, दशरथ decided that as he had been king for 60,000 years, he would retire and make राम his regent. The consecration ceremony was about to take place when an evil female servant persuaded Queen कैकेयी that her son, भरत, should be regent instead of राम.

Now, it had so happened, that long ago, Queen कैकेयी had been promised a boon by her husband, and she had never claimed it. Now she determined to hold him to his promise. She demanded that भरत be enthroned and that राम be sent for 14 years to live the life of an ascetic in the forest, living on roots and fruits, and dressed in bark. The king, in anguish, agreed – for a क्षत्रिय was always bound to give any boon asked of him. राम accepted his command, and लक्ष्मण and सीता insisted on accompanying him. Indeed, many of the citizens tried to accompany him, too, for he was already deeply loved.

Shortly after his departure, King दशरथ died of grief and भरत became regent, though he refused to accept the crown which belonged to राम. In fact, he travelled far to find राम, to bring him home on the death of their father; but राम said that he must obey the command and stay away for 14 years.

Events now led राम and लक्ष्मण into conflict with the Titans, who had been persecuting other ascetics in the forest. In revenge for injury to his sister, रावण, King of the Titans, decided he would abduct सीता, and carry her off to his impregnable city on the island of लङ्का. At about the same time, राम met the usurped monkey-king and, restoring him to his throne, he secured the whole monkey race as allies in his campaign against रावण. Although not king of the monkeys, राम's chief friend among them was हनुमान्, and it was हनुमान् who eventually tracked down सीता in captivity.

The great war between राम and the Titans is recounted in detail; also सीता's perfect loyalty to the memory of राम, in spite of रावण's threats of what would happen if she did not become his wife. Nevertheless, when रावण was finally destroyed, सीता had to undergo an ordeal by fire, so that the fire god could testify to her purity. Amid much rejoicing, on heaven and earth, the 14 years being ended, राम

and सीता returned to अयोध्या and were enthroned. This, however, was not the end of सीता's suffering; there was gossip among the citizens that she must have yielded to रावण's embraces in her long captivity, and that she was not now fit to be राम's wife. To avoid misery among the people, राम sent her to live among the ascetics again, but this time, securely under वाल्मीकि's protection, for she was expecting a child.

After some years of magnificent government and fighting against demons, when the earth became peaceful and happy, राम held a great thanksgiving sacrifice. In the course of it, two young men sang at the court the verses of the रामायण, राम's own story, already set down by वाल्मीकि. The young men turned to be सीता's twin sons, कुश and लव, who had been brought up at the hermitage. राम now sent for सीता and publicly acknowledged her virtue; whereupon the goddess of the earth rose up out of the earth, and took सीता in her arms and descended into the earth with her. At this moment, blossoms showered from the sky and a great tremor ran through the earth. राम's grief was intense, but ब्रह्मा assured him that they would meet again in the heavenly regions.

Finally, Death visited राम to tell him that although, as विष्णु, he could choose his lifetime, the task he had come to carry out had been fully performed; and that he was free to return to the heavens when he wished. Joyfully, he set out for the River सरयू, followed by all the monkeys and thousands of his subjects who wanted to go with him. There he ascended to himself, as विष्णु, and all who entered the waters of the सरयू with him also received homes in heaven.

Comment from the शङ्कराचार्य (श्री शान्तानन्द सरस्वती):

"In the life of श्री राम, as described in the रामायण, when सीता was lost and no one in the camp of राम knew the whereabouts of सीता, राम sent हनुमान् to go south and look for her. Having done so, he reported the exploits – that he had met सीता and consoled her by giving her राम's ring, killed a number of राक्षस, beaten रावण in discussion, burned houses in golden लङ्का and filled everyone with terror. While he was describing all this afterwards to राम, others

thought he was being proud and claiming all this to himself. But, at the end, he said, 'My lord, all this was done by your शक्ति and I was only an instrument.'

"This episode has a spiritual aspect as well. राम is the आत्मन् in the individual, हनुमान् is the Reason, रावण is the अहङ्कार, the राक्षस are lust, anger, greed, attachment, avarice etc. सीता is the peace which is lost to the individual; and in the search and restoration of peace to the आत्मन्, Reason has to play havoc to destroy the राक्षस and subdue the अहङ्कार. Thus, Reason ( हनुमान् ), having established the whereabouts of peace (सीता), goes to challenge अहङ्कार ( रावण ).....

"They also tried to burn Reason by covering हनुमान् 's tail with rubbish and oil, and putting fire to it. With this fire, हनुमान् burned the golden city, which was built by the राक्षसs. If Reason is allowed to play, then quite a lot of so-called valuable possessions are knocked down. After the episode, Reason goes to report all this to the आत्मन्, saying that, all through, all this was done, but not by me. The आत्मन् says, 'But I don't do anything, so who did it?' Reason explains that it is the शक्ति of the आत्मन् which alone gets all this done.

"When the school members, by use of Reason, know that all the work they do is not because of their doing, but only through the glory of the Lord, a bliss will appear which will strengthen them with further courage and hope, to keep them moving."

## The महाभारत

**5. The महाभारत of व्यास.** This great epic too should be read in a good and full translation. It is the longest story in the world and deals with the events leading up to and the battle itself between the five पाण्डव brothers and the कौरव, their cousins, that ended the previous Bronze Age ( द्वापर युग ). In amongst the story line are a great many discussions with Sages. Such passages are much more common in this work than in the रामायण. Together these two great epics are often known as the 'fifth' वेद, since they contain so much of the Vedic teaching, but dressed up as stories to make sure that

people will always want to hear them. The very barest bones of the महाभारत story are as follows:

The eldest of the पाण्डव brothers, युद्धिष्ठिर (embodiment of धर्म), loses his kingdom through a game of dice to his cousin दुर्योधन. The पाण्डव thus have to go into exile into the forest where they have various adventures. On their return from exile, दुर्योधन refuses to give back the slightest part of the kingdom and this leads to an enormous battle which the पाण्डव win, but which wipes out the क्षत्रिय (warrior) race. The Lord कृष्ण figures prominently in the Epic.

[Note: For the purposes of the GCSE Examination, the names, character and significance in the story of all the main characters of the महाभारत should be known (e.g. द्रौपदी, द्रोण, कर्ण, etc.) well enough to write a few sentences on each. The same applies to the रामायण.]

## The Commentaries

All the श्रुति and स्मृति have associated commentaries ( भाष्य ) by wise and learned sages and scholars. Such commentaries are to make clear the meaning of each word of the Scripture and the meaning of any obscure passages.

### शङ्कर

The most famous of these commentators is शङ्कर – often known as the आदि (first) शङ्कराचार्य, since he set up a line of great teachers to protect the tradition and its message. This line of शङ्कराचार्य still exists today.

## सञ्ज्ञा

Śāstra ( शास्त्र )	<i>Scripture ( lit. what is taught)</i>
Veda ( वेद )	<i>The knowledge that forms the creation and by which it is known. Manifesting as hymns, it was compiled into three (sometimes four) sections. The वेद is eternal and of non-human origin.</i>
Vyāsa ( व्यास )	<i>The Sage who compiled the वेद into sections and who also composed the महाभारत, the पुराणs and the ब्रह्मसूत्र etc.</i>
R̥k ( ऋक् ) )	<i>Names of the divisions of the वेद .</i>
Sāma ( साम ) )	
Yajus ( यजुस् ) )	
and )	
Atharva ( अथर्व ) )	
Dhātu ( धातु )	<i>Seed of a word, e.g. विद्, the धातु of 'वेद'.</i>
Śruti ( श्रुति )	<i>'What has been heard.' The वेद, which is the highest authority, 'the Word of the Lord' as it were. This includes the उपनिषद्s etc.</i>
Brahmaṇas ( ब्राह्मणs )	<i>The more explanatory part of the वेदs, giving rules for recitation, legends etc.</i>
Āraṇyakas ( आरण्यकs )	<i>'Forest discussions' of the वेदs' inner meaning.</i>
Upaniṣads ( उपनिषद्s )	<i>Explanations of the ultimate truth of the आत्मन् and ब्रह्मन्.</i>
Vedanta ( वेदान्त )	<i>The teaching of the उपनिषद्s [lit. the 'final part' or 'goal' ( अन्त ) of the वेद ].</i>

Vedāṅga ( वेदाङ्ग )	<i>'The support of the वेद' (अङ्ग = limb). Six sciences which preserve the proper understanding and recitation of the वेद. Their subjects are: pronunciation, metre, grammar, meaning of words, astronomy and performance of sacrifices.</i>
Vyākaraṇa ( व्याकरण )	<i>Science of Grammar. One of the वेदाङ्गs.</i>
Pāṇini ( पाणिनि )	<i>Author of the 4000 or so सूत्राणि comprising the व्याकरण. In this science all words are shown to derive from a few simple धातुs and an even simpler system of प्रत्ययs (endings).</i>
Smṛti ( स्मृति )	<i>'What has been remembered'. The teachings of the Great Sages. Only secondary in authority to the श्रुति.</i>
Sūtra ( सूत्र )	<i>A very terse statement which is part of a complete system explaining a science.</i>
Brahmasūtrāṇi ( ब्रह्मसूत्राणि )	<i>The system of सूत्रs explaining the harmony of the उपनिषद्s in teaching that oneself is ब्रह्मन्. Composed by व्यास.</i>
Bhagavadgītā ( भगवद्गीता )	<i>The 'Song of the Lord', found in the महाभारत, recording the spiritual discourse between the Lord श्री कृष्ण and the great warrior अर्जुन.</i>
Manusmṛti ( मनुस्मृति )	<i>[Also called Dharmaśāstra ( धर्मशास्त्र )] The Laws of Manu, setting out the laws of human life according to the universal system of धर्म.</i>
Dharma ( धर्म )	<i>'That which upholds', the system of duties, rewards, punishments etc., which is the Will of the Absolute. Universal Justice, ensuring happiness for all who follow the law of their own nature.</i>

- Purāṇas ( पुराणस ) *'The Ancient Teachings'. Eighteen works by व्यास dealing with creation and dissolution, kings, sages, incarnations etc.*
- Śrīmad Bhāgavatam ( श्रीमद् भागवतम् ) *The most famous पुराण, dealing especially with the life and exploits of कृष्ण.*
- Rāmāyaṇa ( रामायण ) *The story of राम and his battles with the राक्षसs, by the sage वाल्मीकि.*
- Mahābhārata ( महाभारत ) *The world's longest epic, by व्यास, telling the story of the battle between the पाण्डव and the कौरव and the events leading to it.*
- Bhāṣya ( भाष्य ) *A commentary to a major work.*
- Śaṅkara ( शङ्कर ) *The great philosopher, also known as आदि शङ्कराचार्य, who re-established the Vedic tradition through philosophic debate and commentaries on the principal उपनिषद्s, the गीता, the ब्रह्मसूत्राणि and other works.*



## PART FOUR: TIME AND THE HIERARCHY OF BEINGS

### The Truth

"There is only ब्रह्मन्. Thou art That. The universe is unreal." Having asserted that, the Vedic tradition describes this unreal universe as a very large place.

### The Hierarchy of the Three Worlds

Unreal though it is, it is an ordered hierarchy of three realms (लोक) – the heavens, the Earth and the netherworlds. Embodiment in any of these three realms is dependent on the quality of one's actions in previous lives. It is even possible, through long-term and faultless cultivation of fine actions, to earn the position of a ब्रह्मा, Creator of all.

### Heavens and Netherworlds

The Vedic tradition describes seven heavens and seven underworlds. In the heavens dwell those who have lived good lives, while in the netherworlds it is the opposite. Except for some in the very highest heavens, all have eventually to come back to Earth in order to work out their salvation.

Before considering these beings of the three worlds some idea of the various time-scales of the universe would be useful.

### महायुग

Taking as our unit the solar year with which we are familiar, 4,320,000 of these is termed a महायुग. Contained in this महायुग are the four युगs, or ages, known in the Western tradition as the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron ages.

## The Four युगs

- In संस्कृत the Golden Age is called the कृत-युग or सत्य-युग and lasts 1,728,000 years.
- The second, or Silver Age, is called the त्रेत-युग and lasts 1,296,000 years.
- The third, or Bronze Age, called the द्वापर-युग, lasts 864,000 years.
- The fourth, or Iron Age, called कलि-युग, lasts 432,000 years.

## मन्वन्तर

Seventy-one cycles of महायुग make up one मन्वन्तर. A मन्वन्तर is so called after the मनु, or Lawgiver, who presides over each of these enormous spans of time.

## कल्प

Fourteen मन्वन्तर comprise one कल्प. This is a day of ब्रह्मा, the Creator. The creation is then dissolved for an equal period and this constitutes ब्रह्मा's night. There are 360 of such days and nights in his year and 120 of these years is his lifetime.

This gives us some idea of the time-scales involved. The process of emergence and dissolution of the universe is expressed poetically in the following भगवद्-गीता verses:

"The worlds, with the whole realm of creation, come and go; but, O Arjuna! whoso comes to Me, for him there is no rebirth.

"Those who understand the cosmic day and cosmic night know that one day of creation is a thousand cycles, and that the night is of equal length.

"At the dawning of that day all objects in manifestation stream forth from the Unmanifest, and when evening falls they are dissolved into It again.

"The same multitude of beings, which have lived on earth so often, all are dissolved as the night of the universe approaches, to issue forth anew when morning breaks. Thus is it ordained.

"In truth, therefore, there is the Eternal Unmanifest, which is beyond and above the Unmanifest Spirit of Creation, which is never destroyed when all these beings perish.

"The wise say that the Unmanifest and Indestructible is the highest goal of all; when once That is reached, there is no return. That is My Blessed Home."

As for the four युगs, here are some brief descriptions:

## The कृत-युग (Golden Age)

"In the beginning, before there was any division of subject and object, there was one existence, ब्रह्मन् alone, one without a second. That time is called the कृत-युग, or the Golden Age, when people skilled in knowledge and discrimination realised that one existence."

( *Purāṇic verse* )

In the Golden Age men remembered without difficulty the one Self that lives in the hearts of all. They had no doubts about the presence of the Self, so that they were relieved of all the fears and anxieties that arise from duality, from the belief that a man exists separated from God and from the rest of the universe.

"In the beginning, in the Golden Age, men had but one caste, known as हंस. All were equally endowed with knowledge, all were born knowers of Truth; and since this was so the age was called कृत, which is to say, 'Attained'."

( श्रीमद् भागवतम् Book 11, Ch.17, v.10 )

Memory of the Golden Age is buried deep within every man. Many peoples of the world have immemorial legends of such an age. At certain times in history, groups of men have been inspired to live according to the standards of the Golden Age, so that it has been held as an ideal to which they may aspire, however much they may in fact fall short. The early followers of Christ were such a group of men, as the Acts of Apostles relates:

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."  
(Acts of Apostles Ch.4, v.32 )

Shakespeare, product of the similarly inspired age of the Renaissance, put the same vision in the words of Gonzalo from 'The Tempest':

"All things in common nature should produce  
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,  
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,  
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people."

## The त्रेत-युग (Silver Age)

In the Golden Age no-one wanted anything for himself, for the only self that was acknowledged was Oneself or ब्रह्मन्. But the seeds of a lesser age, of silver, were sown when men began to want something for themselves. This is the story of the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden.

Though the Silver Age is a fall in the whole level of consciousness from the Golden Age, it is nevertheless a time of greatness and magnificence when virtue abounds and human life is rich and harmonious. This beauty and vitality is exemplified in the City of अयोध्या ruled by King दशरथ, father of the divine राम, as described in the रामायण.

"Among the inhabitants of अयोध्या, there was no man or woman who was not endowed with beauty and wealth and none who were not devoted

to the king and state. Those who dwelt there, worshipped the Gods and the uninvited guest; they were both magnanimous and charitable. All attained to a ripe age as virtuous and truth-loving people, their homes were filled with children, grandchildren and virtuous women. The warriors were subject to the learned ब्राह्मण and the merchants to the warrior caste; the rest of the people served these ब्राह्मण, warriors and merchants."

## The द्वापर-युग (Bronze Age)

The men of the द्वापर-युग were heroes. At that time the qualities were no longer pure but mixed, like bronze itself, which is an alloy of copper and tin. Great virtues like courage, strength, magnanimity, boldness, and a spirit of adventure were intermixed with dark aspects of selfishness, with greed, cruelty, lust and arrogance; for both knowledge and power had declined from the Silver Age, and a change had come over the nature of men.

What distinguished the Bronze Age from the Iron Age that followed it was especially the heroic mind of men at the earlier time. They had nothing about them which was trivial or vulgar. Their minds were set upon great actions and enterprises. At a word of insult they sprang to arms; at a challenge to their courage or initiative or ingenuity they set earnestly about their task. They asked for and gave no quarter; they did 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. Their sins were heroic in scale, so that there was a demonic side to the Age of Bronze. Demons make worthy adversaries for heroes and without a demonic enemy a hero cannot measure his full stature.

It was inevitable that war was a constant feature of an age of heroes, but a thread of wisdom remained which ran through their lives amidst the passions of adventure and the battlefield. It enabled them to remember the Self with some regularity, so that even in a battle they might be still within and play out their part as warriors with the enthusiasm and detachment of great actors on a stage. They forgot themselves and committed mighty crimes, like Achilles' treatment of the body of Hector before the walls of Troy, but memory returned and the

spirit of sacrifice burned again as it did, though more strongly, in the Silver Age.

## The कलि-युग (Iron Age)

The qualities of this Age, the present Age which began on the 18th of February, 3102 B.C., should be familiar to us. Here are some excerpts from a description of this Age in the विष्णु-पुराण.

"The observance of place in society, regulation of behaviour and obedience to law will not prevail in the कलि-युग, nor will the actions taught in the वेद . . . nor will the rules that connect the teacher and his pupil be in force. The laws that regulate the conduct of husband and wife will be disregarded and sacrifice to the Divine will no longer be offered. . . .

"Every text will be considered a scripture that people choose to follow. . . . He who gives away much money will be the master of men. . . . The minds of men will be wholly occupied in acquiring wealth; and wealth will be spent solely on selfish gratifications. . . . No man will part with the smallest fraction of the smallest coin, though entreated by a friend. Men of all degrees will conceit themselves to be equal with ब्राह्मण. . . . The people will be almost always in dread of dearth and apprehensive of scarcity. . . . There will never be abundance in the कलि-युग and men will never enjoy pleasure and happiness. They will take their food without previous ablution and without worship or offering.

"The women will be fickle, short and gluttonous . . . paying no heed to the commands of their husbands or parents. . . . Princes, instead of protecting will plunder their subjects and, under the pretext of levying taxes, will rob merchants of their property. . . . The duration of life will decrease. . . . Men will possess little sense, vigour or virtue, and will therefore perish in a very brief period. . . .

"In the कलि-युग men will say, 'Of what authority are the वेदs ? What are gods or Holy men ? What need is there of purification ?'

"Then will the clouds yield scanty rain and the corn will be poor. . . .  
Endowed with little sense, men, subject to all the infirmities of mind,  
speech and body, will daily commit sins; and everything that is  
calculated to afflict beings, vicious, impure and wretched, will be  
generated in the कलि-युग."

The पुराण, however, does go on to speak of one advantage of the कलि-युग.

"Then, in the कलि-युग, shall a man acquire by a trifling exertion as  
much eminence in virtue as is the result of arduous penance in the कृत-  
युग."

There are many other such descriptions in the संस्कृत literature, all rather  
chillingly prophetic of the way things are moving in this present Age.

Having considered the time-scales of this apparently vast illusion, we shall  
take a brief look at the beings who inhabit the three worlds – first, the  
inhabitants of the heavens.

## The देवs

The heavenly beings of the Vedic tradition have elements in common with  
both the Greek gods and the angelic hierarchy of traditional Christianity. देव  
means 'shining one' as well as 'playful'. The देवs preside over the workings of  
the universe and reflect the great powers of the one Supreme आत्मन्.

It should be remembered that all these beings, although divine ('divine' has  
the same धातु as देव ) have a lifespan, albeit incredibly long by our standards.  
Only ब्रह्मन् escapes dissolution. It is the pure consciousness that is ब्रह्मन्, that  
shines as the great pageant of the three worlds and it is That into which they  
inevitably dissolve.

## The Supreme Trinity and Their Consorts

The highest of all beings in the universe are the three great देव – शिव, विष्णु and ब्रह्मा.

Each of these has his consort or Goddess. This is his शक्ति, his power, while he is the wielder of that power. Thus she is often called a देवी.

For शिव there is पर्वती, the force of Law.

For विष्णु there is लक्ष्मी, the force of Prosperity and Increase.

For ब्रह्मा there is सरस्वती, the force of Wisdom.

While these are the greatest of the Gods and Goddesses, beneath them is a whole pantheon of minor gods, angels, celestial musicians and nymphs. These will be met with in the Scriptures and Epics and we shall be considering only the most important here.

The question arises, "What are these Gods, Goddesses and Demons etc. in reality?"

Of course, they are not sorts of human beings with twice as many arms or ten times as many heads as usual, any more than angels in reality have silly little wings, play harps and sit on clouds. Sometimes they can appear to saints in these forms but in fact they are universal forces. The particular colours, attributes and exploits associated with them are symbolic of their natures and capacities. For example, the six-petalled lotus-flower that विष्णु holds in one of His four hands symbolises his six great powers – Knowledge, Detachment, Fame etc. Similarly, the ten heads of रावण symbolise the power of अहङ्कार to proliferate and appear in countless thoughts and guises in the mind.

Thus the देव, देवी and राक्षस etc. pervade all things, particularly the human mind, and we are continually invoking one or other – Divine or Demonic – according to our intentions. Anger, for instance, is a राक्षस that takes possession, while Wisdom is a देवी who instructs those who propitiate Her in the correct manner.

इन्द्र, यम, अग्नि etc.

इन्द्र ॥ The Lord of the lower देवs, symbolising universal मनस्, Lord of the Elements.

यम ॥ The Lord of Death, who controls and brings to an end all things.

अग्नि ॥ अग्नि has many important functions, often symbolising Consciousness itself. It is also the fire which eats the sacrifice and bears it aloft to its recipient.

The other great elements are also considered as देवs, such as वायु and सूर्य. पृथिवी, the Earth, is also considered a Goddess and in fact has been revered as such by all traditional cultures.

\* \* \* \* \*

The देवs are all powers of the one Supreme आत्मन् – universal powers, with विष्णु being the universal चित्त and ब्रह्मा the universal बुद्धि etc.. The following mysterious conversation between the Sage याज्ञवल्क्य and a questioner gives a sense of the true picture. Many deities are mentioned, more than we shall consider, but they are all aspects of one Self.

" विदग्ध शाकल्य asked: 'याज्ञवल्क्य ! How many gods are there?'

याज्ञवल्क्य said: 'Three hundred and three and three thousand and three, as is mentioned in the list of the hymns to all gods.'

'Right,' said विदग्ध, 'but how many in reality?'

'Thirty-three.'

'Right; but how many in reality?'

'Six.'

'Right; but how many in reality?'

'Three.'

'Right; but how many in reality?'

'Two.'

'Right; but how many in reality?'

'One and a half.'

'Right; but how many in reality?'

'One God only.'

'Then what are those three hundred and three and three thousand and three?'

'The divine powers; the more important being thirty-three.'

'What are those thirty-three?'

'Eight वसुs, eleven रुद्रs, twelve आदित्यs, इन्द्र and प्रजापति.'

'What are the वसुs?'

'Fire, earth, wind, sky, sun, moon, stars, heaven.'

'What are the eleven रुद्रs?'

'Five living fires, five senses and the personal Self. When they leave our body, they make us cry out; hence their name रुद्रs.'

'What are आदित्यs?'

'Twelve months of the year; they pass carrying everything; hence their name.'

'Who is इन्द्र? Who is प्रजापति?'

'इन्द्र is thunder; प्रजापति is sacrifice.'

'What is the symbol of thunder?'

'The thunderbolt.'

'What is the symbol of sacrifice?'

'The sacrificial animal.'

'What are the six gods?'

'Fire, earth, wind, air, sun, sky; all the world lives therein.'

'What are the three gods?'

'The three worlds; all the gods live therein.'

'What are the two gods?'

'Food and breath.'

'What is one and a half?'

'The wind.'

'The wind is one, why is it called one and a half?'

'Because as the wind blows, everything grows.'

'Who is the one God?'

'Life is the one God. It is that Spirit.' "

( बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद् 3 : 9 : 1-9 )

## The अप्सरस, गन्धर्वस etc.

As well as the main देवस in heaven, the Scriptures tell of beautiful nymphs called अप्सरस, celestial minstrels called गन्धर्वस and many other sorts of beings such as the पितृस, the ancestors, and numerous great Sages.

## The Underworlds

In the netherworlds there are also many types of beings. There are the नागस, serpents of some sort, the राक्षसस, night-wanderers who eat human flesh and disturb the devotions of Holy men and who can change their form at will.

There are also various kinds of vampires, goblins and ghosts, called वेतालस, प्रेतस, पिशाचस and भूतस etc..

## The अवतारस (Incarnations)

The function of the Lord विष्णु is to sustain the universe that ब्रह्मा calls into being and that शिव later dissolves.

One way by which this is effected is by विष्णु incarnating himself whenever things run down and the great law of धर्म is too flagrantly transgressed. As is said in the भगवद् गीता by विष्णु's most perfect incarnation:

"The Lord श्री कृष्ण said: 'I have been born again and again, from time to time; thou too, O अर्जुन ! My births are known to Me, but thou knowest not thine.

'I have no beginning. Though I am imperishable, as well as Lord of all that exists, yet by My own will and power do I manifest Myself.

'Whenever spirituality decays and materialism is rampant, then, O अर्जुन ! I reincarnate Myself.

'To protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the kingdom of God, I am reborn from age to age.

'He who realises the divine truth concerning My birth and life, is not born again; and when he leaves his body, he becomes one with Me.

'Many have merged their existence in Mine, being freed from desire, fear and anger, filled always with Me, and purified by the illuminating flame of self-abnegation.

'Howsoever men try to worship Me, so do I welcome them. By whatever path they travel, it leads to Me at last.' "

Thus the incarnation sets an example for men to follow and an ideal to worship and eventually unite with.

The stories of various incarnations are told in the Scriptures, as कृष्ण in the महाभारत and पुराणs, as राम in the रामायण and, of course, also as Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

## The Sages

Finally in this Part, there are the Sages, also working to remind men of the eternal truth of their nature. The Scriptures are full of the exploits and teachings of these Sages – नारद, याज्ञवल्क्य, वसिष्ठ, भीष्म and many more. Even in our own day such sages arise to help those who sincerely seek help on the path towards goodness and Truth.

## सञ्ज्ञा

Loka ( लोक )	<i>World, e.g. Heaven, Earth and Netherworld.</i>
Mahāyuga ( महायुग )	<i>One cycle of the four युगs – 4,320,000 years.</i>
Kṛta ( कृत ) [or Satya ( सत्य )] Yuga ( युग )	<i>The Golden Age: 1,728,000 years.</i>
Treta Yuga ( त्रेत युग )	<i>The Silver Age: 1,296,000 years.</i>
Dvāpara Yuga ( द्वापर युग )	<i>The Bronze Age: 864,000 years.</i>
Kali Yuga ( कलि युग )	<i>The Iron Age: 432,000 years.</i>
Manvantara ( मन्वन्तर )	<i>71 महायुगs, supervised by one मनु (Lawgiver).</i>
Kalpa ( कल्प )	<i>14 मन्वन्तरs , a day of ब्रह्मा.</i>
Deva ( देव )	<i>'Shining one'. A universal power or deity.</i>
Śakti ( शक्ति )	<i>The power or force of a देव, considered as his wife.</i>
Parvatī ( पर्वती )	<i>Consort of शिव, the power of Law.</i>
Lakṣmī ( लक्ष्मी )	<i>Consort of विष्णु, the power of Increase and Prosperity.</i>
Sarasvatī ( सरस्वती )	<i>Consort of ब्रह्मा, the power of Wisdom.</i>

Devī ( देवी )	A स्त्री-लिङ्ग Deity.
Indra ( इन्द्र )	Lord of the minor gods. Universal मनस्, Lord of the Elements.
Yama ( यम )	Death, controller and ender of all.
Agni ( अग्नि ) )	Elemental देवs.
Vāyu ( वायु ) )	
Sūrya ( सूर्य ) )	
Ṙṥhivī ( पृथिवी ) )	
Apsaras ( अप्सरस )	Beautiful heavenly nymphs.
Gandharvas ( गन्धर्वस )	Celestial musicians.
Pitṛs ( पितृस )	The fathers, virtuous ancestors.
Nāgas ( नागस )	Serpents.
Rākṣasas ( राक्षसस )	Night wandering ogres or demons.
Vetālas ( वेतालस ) )	Vampires, goblins, ghosts, etc..
Piśācas ( पिशाचस ) )	
Pretas ( प्रेतस ) )	
Bhūtas ( भूतस ) etc. )	
Avatāra ( अवतार )	Incarnation of the Lord विष्णु when धर्म is transgressed.
Nārada ( नारद ) )	Sages.
Vasiṣṭha ( वसिष्ठ ) )	
Bhīṣma ( भीष्म ) )	
Yājñavalkya ( याज्ञवल्क्य ) )	



## PART FIVE: HUMAN LIFE AND ITS PURPOSE

### पुरुषार्थ

पुरुषार्थ means the aspiration, aim or purpose of the Human being. पुरुषार्थ is spoken of in the Vedic tradition as having four aspects:

- काम, Enjoyment;
- अर्थ, Wealth;
- धर्म, Virtue; and
- मोक्ष, Liberation.

A civilized life aspires to cultivate all four of these in balance. Most lives do not. For example, modern life tends to give emphasis to the first and lowest of these aims, काम, sensory enjoyment. The result of this unbalanced and short-sighted pursuit of personal pleasure is necessarily misery, violence and exhaustion.

It is indeed important that the senses are fed with clean impressions and this is the proper realm of काम, but sensory desires should be under control and not interfere with the higher functions of पुरुषार्थ.

पुरुषार्थ's second aspect is अर्थ, economic prosperity and wealth. This too has its legitimate place, but should always be subservient to higher aims. अर्थ, wealth or means, gives power and ability and is of much practical use and advantage in the world, hence the expression, 'a man of means'.

Thirdly, and much more importantly, is धर्म, virtue, justice, religion. This is obedience to the fine laws of the universe, the laws set forth in all great Scriptures. In many of the noble traditions of Mankind these are called 'the Laws of God'. They are the rules of the Game, of the Great Drama.

The word धर्म derives from the धातु धृ which carries the sense of 'uplifting and supporting'. It is by obedience to धर्म that society is upheld

and thrives in mutual cohesion. It is by obedience to the धर्म of his own nature that Man is lifted above the beasts. As well as being the foundation of civilized society, धर्म is also the system by which one is rewarded for virtuous deeds and pays for actions which are selfish or vicious.

When a firm devotion to धर्म is established, then the lower aspects of काम and अर्थ take their proper places. This ensures a happy, useful and fruitful life in the world.

Fourthly, transcending the other three aspects of पुरुषार्थ, is मोक्ष, Liberation. मोक्ष is the breaking out of the being from all confinements, even that of the human form. Unity is re-established with the one Self of all. This immortal and limitless state is final, permanent and untouched by all sorrow or fear.

It is mainly with धर्म, a virtuous life, that the rest of this final part of the course will be concerned, but it should be understood that, ultimately, धर्म is only a stepping stone to मोक्ष. It is nonetheless a necessary stepping stone, for मोक्ष requires the clarity of mind and purity of heart that only a virtuous life can provide.

## वर्ण

The life of धर्म, the virtuous life, is set forth in the मनुस्मृति, the Laws of the Sage मनु. Therein is given the teaching of the four वर्णस, the four types, or castes, of men.

- First is the ब्राह्मण, the wise and learned priest and teacher.
- Second is the क्षत्रिय, the courageous warrior, king or statesman.
- Third is the वैश्य, the merchant, producer or farmer.
- Fourth is the शूद्र, the servant or labourer.

The भगवद्गीता describes the qualities of each of these types in its final chapter:

"O अर्जुन ! The duties of the spiritual teachers, the soldiers, the traders and the servants, have all been fixed according to the dominant गुण in their nature.

"Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, as well as uprightness, knowledge, wisdom, and faith in God – these constitute the duty of a spiritual Teacher ( ब्राह्मण ).

"Valour, glory, firmness, skill, generosity, steadiness in battle, and ability to rule – these constitute the duty of a क्षत्रिय. They flow from his own nature.

"Agriculture, protection of the cow and trade, are the duty of a वैश्य ; again in accordance with his nature. The duty of a शूद्र is to serve, and that too agrees with his nature.

"Perfection is attained when each attends diligently to his duty."

Thus, these divisions of men are dictated by the nature of those men. This nature, function and destiny, when dedicated to the Highest, becomes a path of liberation.

This fourfold division of Mankind is reflected in the ideal society envisaged in Plato's '*Republic*' and also in the feudal society of medieval Europe with its categories of Church, Nobility, Merchants and Serfs. Each society will reflect or distort this natural organisation of functions to its corresponding advantage or disadvantage.

## आश्रम

मनु also sets out the four stages of a civilized life. These, strangely enough, are called आश्रम (the same word that means 'hermitage').

The first stage, or आश्रम, is ब्रह्मचारिन्. This is the stage of the student. The ब्रह्मचारिन् lives a chaste life serving his Teacher and learning the ancient Wisdom in preparation for the challenges that life will present in the later stages.















