

Indian Scriptures Part-2



Sanskrit

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A Short Note on Sanskrit Literature part-2

Sanskrit literature can be classified under six orthodox heads and four secular heads. The six orthodox sections form the authoritative scriptures of the Hindus. The four secular sections embody the latter developments in classical Sanskrit literature. In part 1, the details about 1. *The Srutis*, 2. *The Four Vedas And Their Sub Divisions*, 3. *The Mantra Samhitas*, 4. *The Brahmanas and The Aranyakas*, 5. *The Upanishads*, 6. *The Upa-Vedas* and 7. *The Vedangas* were given now in part two the following notes are given:-

1. The Smritis

Next in importance to the Sruti are the Smritis or secondary scriptures. These are the ancient sacred law-codes of the Hindus dealing with the Sanatana-Varnasrama-Dharma. They supplement and explain the ritualistic injunctions called Vidhis in the Vedas. The Smriti or Dharma Sastra is founded on the Sruti. The Smritis are based on the teachings of the Vedas. The Smriti stands next in authority to the Sruti (Vedas). It explains and develops Dharma. It lays down the laws which regulate Hindu national, social, family and individual obligations. The works that are expressly called Smritis are the law books, Dharma Sastras. Smriti, in a broader sense, covers all Hindu Sastras (scriptures) save the Vedas.

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

The Hindu learns how he has to spend his whole life from these Smritis. The duties of Varnasramas (the four stages of life) are clearly given in these books. The Smritis describe certain acts and prohibit some others for a Hindu, according to his birth and stage of life. The object of the Smritis is to purify the heart of man and take him gradually to the supreme abode of immortality and make him perfect and free.

These Smritis have varied from time to time. The injunctions and prohibitions of the Smritis are related to the particular social surroundings. As these surroundings and essential conditions of the Hindu society changed from time to time, new Smritis had to be compiled by the sages of different ages and different parts of India.

The Celebrated Hindu Law-Givers

From time to time, a great lawgiver would take his birth. He would codify the existing laws and remove those that had become obsolete.

He would make some alterations, adaptations, readjustments, additions and subtractions, to suit the needs of the time and see that the way of living of the people would be in accordance with the teachings of the Veda. Of such law-givers, Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara are the most celebrated persons. Hindu society is founded on, and governed by, the laws made by these three great sages. The Smritis are named after them. We have Manu Smriti or Manava Dharma-Sastra (Laws of Manu or the Institutes of Manu), Yajnavalkya Smriti and Parsara Smriti. Manu is the greatest law-giver of the race. He is the oldest lawgiver as well. The Yajnavalkya Smriti follows the same general lines as the Manu Smriti and is next in importance to it. Manu Smriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti are universally accepted at the present time as authoritative works all over India. Yajnavalkya Smriti is

chiefly consulted in all matters of Hindu Law. Even the present day Government of India is applying some of these laws.

There are eighteen main Smritis or Dharma Sastras. The most important are those of Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara. The other fifteen are those of Vishnu, Daksha, Samvarta, Vyasa, Harita, Satatapa, Vasishtha, Yama, Apastamba, Gautama, Devala, Sankha- Likhita, Usana, Atri and Saunaka.

The Laws of Manu are intended for the Satya Yuga; those of Yajnavalkya are for the Treta Yuga; those of Sankha and Likhita are for the Dvapara Yuga; and those of Parasara are for the Kali Yuga. The laws and rules which are based entirely upon our social positions, time and climate, must change with the changes in society and changing conditions of time and climate. Then only the progress of the Hindu society can be ensured.

Need For A New Law-Code

It is not possible to follow some of the laws of Manu at present time. We can follow their spirit and not the letter. Society is advancing. When it advances, it outgrows certain laws which were valid and helpful at a particular stage of its growth. Many new things which were not thought out by the old law-givers have come into existence now. It is no use insisting people to follow now those old laws which have become obsolete.

Our present day society has changed considerably. A new Smriti to suit the requirements of this age is very necessary. Another sage will place before the Hindus of our days a new suitable code of laws. Time is ripe for a new Smriti. Cordial greetings to this age.

The Inner Voice Of Dharma

He who is endowed with a pure heart through protracted Tapas (austerity), Japa, Kirtana, meditation and service of Guru and who has a very clear conscience, can be guided by the inner voice in matters of Dharma or duty or moral action. The inner voice that proceeds from a clean heart filled with Sattva is, indeed, the voice of God or Soul or Antaryamin or Inner Ruler. This voice is more than Smriti. It is Smriti of Smritis. Purify your heart and train yourself to hear this inner voice. Keep your ear in tune with the 'voice'.

The Sruti And The Smriti

The Sruti and the Smriti are the two authoritative sources of Hinduism. Sruti literally means what is heard, and Smriti means what is remembered. Sruti is revelation and Smriti is tradition. Upanishad is a Sruti. Bhagavad-Gita is a Smriti. (Bhagavad-Gita forms part of The Mahabharata, Bhishma Parva, Sections XIII - XLII (also known as Bhagavad-Gita Parva).

Sruti is direct experience. Great Rishis heard the eternal truths of religion and left a record of them for the benefit of posterity. These records constitute the Vedas. Hence, Sruti is primary authority. Smriti is a recollection of that experience. Hence, it is secondary authority.

The Smritis or Dharma Sastras also are books written by sages, but they are not the final authority. If there is anything in a Smriti which contradicts the Sruti, the Smriti is to be rejected.

2. The Itihasas (history)

(The Friendly Treatises And the Commanding Treatises)

There are four books under this heading

1The Valmiki-Ramayana, 2The Yogavasishtha, 3The Mahab-

harata, 4The Harivamsa

These embody all that is in the Vedas, but only in a simpler manner.

These are called the Suhrit-Samhitas or the Friendly Treatises, while the Vedas are called the Prabhu-Samhitas or the Commanding Treatises with great authority. These works explain the great universal truths in the form of historical narratives, stories and dialogues. These are very interesting volumes and are liked by all, from the inquisitive child to the intellectual scholar.

The Itihasas give us beautiful stories of absorbing interest and importance, through which all the fundamental teachings of Hinduism are indelibly impressed on one's mind. The laws of Smritis and the principles of the Vedas are stamped firmly on the minds of the Hindus through the noble and marvelous deeds of their great national heroes.

We get a clear idea of Hinduism from these sublime stories. The common man cannot comprehend the high abstract philosophy of the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras. Hence, the compassionate sages Valmiki and Vyasa wrote the Itihasas for the benefit of common people. The same philosophy is presented with analogies and parables in a tasteful form to the common run of mankind.

The well known Itihasas (histories) are the epics (Mahakavyas), Ramayana and Mahabharata. They are two very popular and useful Sastras of the Hindus. The Ramayana was written by the Sage Valmiki, and the Mahabharata by Sage Vyasa.

3.The Ramayana

The Ramayana, the Adi-Kavya or the first epic poem, relates the story of Sri Rama. The ideal man. It is the history of the family of the Solar race descended from Ikshvaku, in which was born Sri Ramachandra, the Avatara of Lord Vishnu, and his three brothers. The ideal characters like Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata and Sri Hanuman that we find in Ramayana firmly established Hindu Dharma in our minds.

The story of the birth of Rama and his brothers, their education and marriages, the exile of Sri Rama, the carrying off and recovery of Sita, his wife, the destruction of Ravana, the Rakshasa King of Lanka, and the reign of Sri Rama, are described in detail in Ramayana. How a man should behave towards his superiors, equals, and inferiors, how a king ought to rule his kingdom, how a man should lead his life in this world, how he can obtain his release, freedom, and perfection, may be learnt from this excellent epic. The Ramayana gives a vivid picture of Indian life. Even today our domestic, social, and national ideals are copied from the noble characters in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The great national heroes stand even today as beaconlights to guide and inspire the people of the whole world. The lives of Rama, Bharata and Lakshmana provide a model of fraternal affection and mutual service. Sri Hanuman stands as an ideal unique Karma Yogi. The life of Sita is regarded as the most perfect example of womanly fidelity, chastity and sweetness. The Ramayana is written in twenty-four thousand verses, by Sage Valmiki.

4.The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata is the history of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It gives a description of the great war, the Battle of Kurukshetra, which broke out between the Kauravas and the Pandavas who were cousins and descendants of the Lunar race. The Mahabharata is an encyclopedia of Hindu Dharma. It is rightly called the fifth Veda.

There is really no theme in religion, philosophy, mysticism and polity which this great epic does not touch and expound. It contains very noble moral teachings, useful lessons of all kinds, many beautiful stories and episodes, discourses, sermons, parables and dialogues which set forth the principles of morals and metaphysics. The Pandavas obtained victory through the grace of Lord Krishna. The Mahabharata is written in one hundred thousand verses by Sage Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa

The Bhagavad-Gita

The most important part of the Mahabharata is the Bhagavad-Gita. It is a marvelous dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield, before the commencement of the great war. Bhagavan Sri Krishna became the charioteer of Arjuna. Sri Krishna explained the essentials of Hindu religion to Arjuna. Just as the Upanishads contain the cream of the Vedas, so does the Gita contain the cream of the Upanishads. The Upanishads are the cows. Lord Krishna is the cowherd. Arjuna is the calf. The Gita is the milk. The wise men are those who drink the milk of Gita.

The Gita is the most precious jewel of Hindu literature. It is a universal gospel. The Gita teaches the Yoga of Synthesis. It ranks high in the religious literature of the world.

Arjuna saw before him his dear relatives and teachers in the battlefield. He fainted and refused to fight against them. Then Lord Krishna imparted knowledge of the Self to Arjuna and convinced him that it was his duty to fight regardless of the consequences. Afterwards Arjuna gave up his Moha, or delusion. All his doubts were cleared. He fought against the Kauravas and achieved victory.

Knowledge Of Ancient Indian History and Culture

The Mahabharata contains also immortal discourse of Bhishma on Dharma, which he gave to Yudhishtira, when he was lying on the bed of arrows. The whole Mahabharata forms an encyclopedia of history, morals and religion unsurpassed by any other epic in the world.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata speak to us clearly about ancient India, about her people, her customs, her ways of living, her arts, her civilisation and culture, her manufactures, etc. If you read these two books, you will come to know how great India once was, and you will be inspired to make her great once more. No other country has produced so many great men, great teachers, great Yogis, great seers, great Rishis, great prophets, great Acharyas, great kings, great heroes, great statesmen, great patriots and great benefactors, as India. The more you know of India and Hinduism, the more you will honour and love it and the more thankful to the Lord you will be that you were born in India as a Hindu. Glory to India! Glory to Hinduism! Glory to the seers of the Upanishads! Glory, glory to Lord Krishna, the author of the Song Divine (Bhagavad-Gita).

5.The Puranas

The Puranas are of the same class as the Itihasas. They have five characteristics (Panch-Lakshana):

1. History(Sargam)
2. Cosmology (with various symbolical illustrations of philosophical principles)(Prathisargam)
3. Secondary creation(Gathi)
4. Genealogy of kings(Vamsaanucharitham)
5. Manvantaras (Age)

All the Puranas belong to the class of Suhrit-Samhitas. Vyasa is the compiler of the Puranas from age to age; and for this age, he is Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, the son of Parsara. The Puranas were written to popularize the religion of the Vedas. They contain the essence of the Vedas. The aim of the Puranas is to impress on the minds of the masses the teachings of the Vedas and to generate in them devotion to God, through concrete examples, myths, stories, legends, lives of saints, kings and great men, allegories and chronicles of great historical events. The sages made use of these things to illustrate the eternal principles of religion. The Puranas were meant, not for the scholars, but for the ordinary people who could not understand high philosophy and who could not study the Vedas.

The Darsanas are very stiff. They are meant only for the learned few.

The Puranas are meant for the masses with inferior intellect. Religion is taught in a very easy and interesting way through these Puranas.

Even to this day, the Puranas are popular. The Puranas contain the history of remote times. They also give a description of the regions of the universe not visible to the ordinary physical eye. They are very interesting to read and are full of information of all kinds. Children hear the stories from their grandmothers, Pandits and Purohits (priests) hold Kathas in temples, on banks of rivers and in other important places. Agriculturalists, labourers and bazaar people (common masses) hear the stories.

The Eighteen Puranas

There are eighteen main Puranas and an equal number of subsidiary Puranas or Upa-Puranas. The main Puranas are:

1.Vishnu Purana, 2.Naradiya Purana, 3.Srimad Bhagavata Purana, 4.Garuda (Suparna) Purana, 5.Padma Purana, 6.Varah Purana, 7.Brahma Purana, 8.Brahmanda Purana, 9.Brahma Vaivarta Purana, 10.Markandeya Purana, 11.Bhavisya Purana, 12.Vamana Purana, 13.Matsya Purana, 14.Kurma Purana, 15.Linga Purana, 16.Siva Purana, 17.Skanda Purana and 18.Agni Purana. Of these, six are **Sattvic Puranas** and glorify Vishnu; Six are **Rajasic** Puranas and glorify Brahma; six are **Tamasic** Puranas and glorify Siva.

Neophytes or beginners in the spiritual path are puzzled when they go through Siva Purana and Vishnu Purana. In Siva Purana, Lord Siva is highly eulogised and an inferior position is given to Lord Vishnu. Sometimes Vishnu is belittled. In Vishnu Purana, Lord Hari (Vishnu) is highly eulogised and the inferior status is given to Lord Siva.

Sometimes Lord Siva is belittled. This is only to increase the faith of the devotees in their particular Ishta-Devata (favourite or tutelary deity). Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu are one.

The best among the Puranas are the Srimad Bhagavata and the Vishnu Purana. The most popular is the Srimad Bhagavata Purana. Next comes Vishnu Purana. A portion of the Markandeya Purana is well known to all Hindus as Chandi, or Devimahatmya. Worship of God as the Divine Mother is its theme. Chandi is read widely by the Hindus on sacred days and Navaratri (Durga Puja) days.

Srimad Bhagavata Purana and the Ten Avatars

The Srimad Bhagavad Purana is a chronicle of the various Avatars of Lord Vishnu. There are ten Avatars of Vishnu. The aim of every Avatara is to save the world from some great danger, to destroy the wicked and protect the virtuous. The ten Avatars are: Matsya (the Fish), Kurma (the Tortoise), Varaha (the Boar), Narasimha (the Man-Lion), Vamana (the Dwarf), Parsurama (Rama with the axe, the destroyer of the Kshatriya race), Ramachandra (the hero of Ramayana, the son of King Dasharatha; Sri Rama who destroyed Ravana), Sri Krishna (the teacher of the Bhagavad Gita), Buddha (the prince-ascetic and the founder of Buddhism), and Kalki (the hero riding on a white horse, who is still to come at the end of the Kali-Yuga).

The object of the Matsya (Fish) Avatara was to save Vaivasvata Manu from destruction by a deluge.

The object of Kurma (Tortoise) Avatara was to enable the world to recover some precious things that were lost in the deluge. The Kurma gave its back for keeping (supporting) the churning rod when the gods and the Asuras (demons) churned the ocean of milk.

The purpose of Varaha Avatara was to rescue from the waters, the earth which had been dragged down by a demon named Hiranyaksha.

The purpose of Narasimha Avatara, half lion and half man, was to free the world from the oppression of Hiranyakasipu, a demon, the father of Bhakta Prahlada.

The object of Vamana Avatara was to restore the power of the gods which had been eclipsed by the penance and devotion of King Bali.

The object of Parasurama Avatara was to deliver the country from the oppression of the Kshatriya rulers. Parasurama destroyed the Kshatriya race twenty-one times.

The object of Rama Avatara was to destroy the wicked Ravana and to show how to live as an Adarshapurusha.

The object of Sri Krishna Avatara was to destroy Kamsa and other demons, to deliver His wonderful message of the Gita in the Mahabharata war, and to become the centre of the Bhakti Schools of India.

The object of Buddha Avatara was to prohibit animal sacrifices and teach piety.

The object of the Kalki Avatara is the destruction of the wicked and the re-establishment of virtue.

The Tamil Puranas

Lord Siva incarnated Himself in the form of Dakshinamurti to impart knowledge to the four Kumaras. He took human form to initiate Sambandhar, Manikkavasagar and Pattinathar. He appeared in flesh and blood to help his devotees and relieve their sufferings. The divine Lilas (sports) of Lord Siva are recorded in the Tamil Puranas like Siva Purana, Periya Purana, Siva Parakramam and Tiruvilayadal Purana.

The Upa-Puranas

The eighteen Upa-Puranas are: SanatKumara, Narasimha, Brihannaradiya, Sivarahasya, Durvasa, Kapila, Vamana, Bhargava, Varuna, Kalika, Samba, Nandi, Surya, Parasara, Vasishtha, Devi-Bhagavata, Ganesa and Hamsa.

Utility of the Puranas

Study of the Puranas, listening to sacred recitals of scriptures, describing and expounding of the transcendent Lilas (divine sports) of the Blessed Lord – these form an important part of Sadhana (spiritual practice) of the Lord's devotee. It is most pleasing to the Lord. Sravana (hearing of the Srutis or scriptures) is a part of Navavidha-Bhakti (nine modes of devotion). Kathas (narrative or story) and Upanyasas open the springs of devotion in the hearts of hearers and develop Prema-Bhakti (divine love for God) which confers immortality on the Jiva (individual soul).

[Note: The nine modes of devotion are: Hearing His (God's) names and glories, singing them, remembering the Lord, worship (service) of His Feet, adoration with flowers, prostrations, regarding oneself as His servant, as His friend, and total self-surrender.]

The language of the Vedas is archaic, and the subtle philosophy of the Vedanta and the Upanishads is difficult to grasp and assimilate.

Hence, the Puranas are of special value as they present philosophical truths and precious teachings in an easier manner. They give ready access to the mysteries of life and the key to bliss. Imbibe their teachings. Start a new life of Dharma-Nishtha and Adhyatmic Sadhana from this very day.

[Note: Dharma-Nishtha = steadfastness or establishment in Dharma. Adhyatmic (pertaining to the Inner Self) Sadhana (spiritual practice)]

6.The Agamas

Another class of popular scriptures are the Agamas. The Agamas are theological treatises and practical manuals of divine worship. The Agamas include the Tantras, Mantras and Yantras. These are treatises explaining the external worship of God, in idols, temples etc. All the Agamas treat of:

1. Jnana or Knowledge
2. Yoga or Concentration
3. Kriya or Esoteric Ritual
4. Charya or Exoteric Worship

They also give elaborate details about ontology and cosmology, liberation, devotion, meditation, philosophy of Mantras, mystic diagrams, charms and spells, temple-building, image-making, domestic observances, social rules, public festivals etc.

The Agamas are divided into three sections:

1. The Vaishnava
2. The Saiva
3. The Sakta

The chief sects of Hinduism, viz., Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism, base their doctrines and dogmas on their respective Agamas. The Vaishnava Agamas or Pancharatra Agamas glorify God as Vishnu. The Saiva Agamas glorify God as Siva and have given rise to an important school of philosophy known as Saiva-Siddhanta, which prevails in South India, particularly in the districts of Tirunelveli and Madurai. The Sakta Agamas or Tantras glorify God as the Mother of the Universe, under one of the many names of Devi (Goddess).

The Agamas do not derive their authority from the Vedas, but are not antagonistic to them. They are all Vedic in spirit and character. That is the reason why they are regarded as authoritative.

The Vaishnava Agamas

The Vaishnava Agamas are of four kinds:

1. The Vaikhanasa
2. Pancharatra
3. Pratishthasara
4. Vijnana-lalita

The Brahma, Saiva, Kaumara, Vasishtha, Kapila, Gautamiya and Naradiya are the seven groups of the Pancharatras. The Naradiya section of the Santi Parva of the Mahabharata is the earliest source of information about the Pancharatras. Vishnu is the Supreme Lord in the Pancharatra Agamas. The Vaishnavas regard the Pancharatra Agamas to be the most authoritative. They believe that these Agamas were revealed by Lord Vishnu Himself. Narada-Pancharatra says: "Everything from Brahma to a blade of grass is Lord Krishna". This corresponds to the Upanishadic declaration:

"All this is, verily, Brahman-Sarvam, Khalvidam Brahma".

The following extract is from The Mahabharata, Santi Parva Section CCCXL Bhisma continued: Narada also, endued with great energy, having obtained the high favour that he had solicited, then proceeded with great speed to the retreat called Vadari, for beholding Nara and Narayana. This great Upanishad, perfectly consistent with the four Vedas, in harmony with Sankhya-Yoga, and called by him by the name of Pancharatra scriptures, and recited by Narayana Himself with His own mouth, was repeated by Narada in the presence of many listeners in the abode of Brahma (his sire) in exactly the same way in which Narayana (while that great God had showed Himself unto him) had recited it, and in which he had heard it from his own lips.

There are two hundred and fifteen of these Vaishnava texts. Isvara, Ahirbudhnya, Paushkara, Parama, Sattvata, Brihad-Brahma and Jnanamritasara Samhitas are the important ones.

The Saiva Agamas

The Saivas recognise twenty-eight Agamas, of which the chief is Kamika. The Agamas are also the basis of Kashmir Saivism which is called the Pratyabhijna system. The latter works of Pratyabhijna system show a distinct leaning to Advaitism (non-dualistic philosophy). The Southern Saivism, i.e., Saiva Siddhanta, and the Kashmir Saivism, regard these Agamas as their authority, besides the Vedas. Each Agama has Upa-Agamas (subsidiary Agamas). Of these, only fragmentary texts of twenty are extant. Lord Siva is the central God in the Saiva Agamas. They are suitable to this age, Kali Yuga. They are open to all castes and both the sexes.

The Sakta Agamas

There is another group of scriptures known as the Tantras. They belong to the Sakta cult. They glorify Sakti as the World-Mother. They dwell on the Sakti (energy) aspect of God and prescribe numerous courses of ritualistic worship of the Divine Mother in various forms. There are seventy-seven Agamas. These are very much like the Puranas in some respects. The texts are usually in the form of dialogues between Siva and Parvati. In some of these, Siva answers the questions put by Parvati, and in others, Parvati answers, Siva questioning.

Mahanirvana, Kularnava, Kulasara, Prapanchasara, Tantraraja, Rudra- Yamala, Brahma-Yamala, Vishnu-Yamala and Todala Tantra are the important works. The Agamas teach several occult practices some of which confer powers, while the others bestow knowledge and freedom. Sakti is the creative power of Lord Siva. Saktism is really a supplement to Saivism.

Among the existing books on the Agamas, the most famous are the Isvara-Samhita, Ahirbudhnya-Samhita, Sanatkumara-Samhita, Narada-Pancharatra, Spanda-Pradipika and the Mahanirvana-Tantra.

7.The Six Darsanas

These are the intellectual section of the Hindu writings, while the first four are intuitional. And the fifth inspirational and emotional. Darsanas are schools of philosophy based on the Vedas. The Agamas are theological. The Darsana literature is philosophical. The Darsanas are meant for the erudite scholars who are endowed with acute acumen, good understanding, power of reasoning and subtle intellect.

The Itihasa, Puranas and Agamas are meant for the masses. The Darsanas appeal to the intellect, while the Itihisas, Puranas, etc., appeal to the heart.

Philosophy has six divisions (Shad-darsana). The six Darsanas or ways of seeing things, are usually called the six systems or six different schools of thought. The six schools of philosophy are the six instruments of true teaching or the six demonstrations of Truth. Each school has developed, systematized and correlated the various parts of the Veda in its own way. Each system has its Sutrakara, i.e., the one great Rishi who systematized the doctrines of the school and put them in short aphorisms or Sutras.

The Sutras are terse and laconic. The Rishis have condensed their thoughts in the aphorisms. It is very difficult to understand them without the help of commentaries by great sages or Rishis. Hence, there arose many commentators or Bhashyakaras. There are glosses, notes and, later, commentaries on the original commentaries.

The Shad-Darsana (the six schools of philosophy) or the Shat-Sastras are:

1. The Nyaya founded by Gautama Rishi
2. The Vaisesika by Kanada Rishi
3. The Sankhya by Kapila Muni
4. The Yoga by Patanjali Maharshi
5. The Purva Mimamsa by Jaimini
6. The Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta by Badarayana or Vyasa

The Darsanas are grouped into three pairs of aphoristic compositions which explain the philosophy of the Vedas in a rationalistic method of approach. They are:

1. The Nyaya and the Vaisesika
2. The Sankhya and the Yoga
3. The Mimamsa and the Vedanta

Each set of Sutras has got its Bhashya, Vritti, Varttika, Vyakhyaana or Tika and Tippani.

Sutra

A Sutra or an aphorism is a short formula with the least possible number of letters, without any ambiguity or doubtful assertion, containing the very essence, embracing all meaning, without any stop or obstruction and absolutely faultless in nature.

The Sutrakara or the composer of the aphorisms is said to be as happy as one would be while getting the first male child, if he is but able to reduce one letter in his abstruse Sutra of far-fetched words and ideas.

The best example of the greatest, the tersest and the most perfect of Sutra literature is the series of aphorisms called the Ashtadhyayi composed by Panini. Panini is the father of all Sutrakaras from whom all others seem to have borrowed the method of composition. The Sutras are meant to explain a big volume of knowledge in short assertions suitable to be kept in memory at all times. The six Vedangas and the six systems of Hindu philosophy form the twelve sets of Sutra literature of the world. In addition to these, there are later compositions like the Narada-Bhakti Sutras, the Sandilya-Bhakti Sutras, etc., which also wish to assume an equal form with the famous Sutras mentioned above.

Bhashya

A Bhashya is an elaborate exposition, a commentary on the Sutras, with word by word meaning of the aphoristic precepts, their running translation, together with the individual views of the commentator or the Bhashyakara. The best and the exemplary Bhashya in Sanskrit literature is the one written by Patanjali on the Vyakarana (grammar) Sutras of Panini. This Bhashya is so very famous and important that it is called the Mahabhashya and its celebrated author is specially called the Bhashyakara. Patanjali is the father of Bhashyakaras. The next important Bhashya is the one on the Mimamsa Sutras written by

Sabara-Swami who learnt the art from Patanjali's commentary. The third important Bhashya was written by Sankara on the Brahma Sutras, in close following with the Sabara-Bhashya. The Bhashyas on the six sets of aphorisms dealing with Indian philosophy were written by Vatsyayana, Prasastapada, Vijnanabikshu, Vyasa, Sabara and Sankara. On the Vedanta or Brahma Sutras, there are about sixteen Bhashyas, like those of Ramanuja, Madhava, Vallabha, Nimbarka, etc.

Vritti

A Vritti is a short gloss explaining the aphorisms in a more elaborate way, but not as extensively as a Bhashya. An example is Bodhayana's Vritti on the Brahma Sutras.

Varttika

A Varttika is a work where a critical study is made of that which is said and left unsaid or imperfectly said in a Bhashya, and the way of making it perfect by supplying the omissions therein, are given.

Examples are the Varttikas of Katyayana on Panini's Sutras, of Suresvara on Sankara's Upanishad-Bhashyas, and of Kumarila Bhatta on the Sabara-Bhashya on the Karma-Mimamsa.

Vyakhyana or Tika

A Vyakhyana is a running explanation in an easier language of what is said in the original, with little elucidations here and there. A Vyakhyana, particularly of a Kavya (poetry and prose), deals with eight different modes of dissection of the Sloka, like Pada-Chheda, Vighraha, Sandhi, Alankara, Anuvada, etc. This forms an important aspect in the study of Sanskrit Sahitya Sashtra (science of Sanskrit literature). An Anu-Vyakhyana- like the one written by Sri Madhavais a repetition of what is already written, but in greater detail. An Anuvada is merely a running translation or statement of an abstruse text of the original. Tika is only another name for Vyakhyana. The best Vyakhyanas are of Vachaspati Misra on the Darsanas, especially on Sankara's Brahmasutra-Bhashya.

Tippani

Tippani is just like a Vritti, but is less orthodox than the Vritti. It is an explanation of difficult words or phrases occurring in the original. Examples are Kaiyata's gloss on the Mahabhashya of Patanjali, Nagojibhatta's gloss on Kaiyata's gloss, or Appayya's gloss on Amalananda's gloss on the Bhamati of Vachaspati Misra.

Other Scriptures

The Tevaram and the Tiruvachakam which are the hymns of the Saiva saints of South India, the Divya-Prabandham of the Alvar saints of South India, the songs of Sant Kabir, the Abhangas of Sant Tukaram and the Ramayana of Sant Tulasidas- all of which are the outpourings of great realised souls- are wonderful scriptures. They contain the essence of the Vedas.

The Secular Writings

The Subhashitas

The Subhashitas are wise sayings, instructions and stories, either in poetry or in prose. Examples are Bhartrihari's three centuries of verses, the Subhashita-Ratna-Bhandagara and Somadeva Bhatta's Katha-Sarit-Sagara or Kshemendra's Brihat-Katha-Manjari. The Pachatantra and the Hitopadesa also belong to this category.

The Kavyas

These are highly scholarly compositions in poetry, prose or both. The greatest of poetical Kavyas are those of Kalidas (The Raghuvamsa and Kumara-sambhava), Bharavi (The Kiratarjuniya), Magha (The Sisupalavadha), and Sri Harsha (The Naishadha). The best prose Kavyas in the whole of Sanskrit literature were written by Bhattacharya (The Kadambari and Harshacharita), the great genius in classical Sanskrit. Among those containing both poetry and prose, the Champu- Ramayana and the Champu-Bharata are most famous. These are all wonderful masterpieces which will ever remain to glorify India's literary calibre.

The Natakas (dramas)

These are marvelously scholastic dramas embodying the Rasas (expressions, mostly facial) of Srngara (decorate or beautify), Vira (brave), Karuna (compassion), Adbhuta (astonishment), Hasya (laugh), Bhayanka (fearsome), Bibhatsa (disgusting or loathsome) and Raudra (terrible). It is told that none can write on the ninth Rasa, viz., Santi (peaceful). It is attainable only on final Liberation. The best dramas are written by Kalidasa (Sakuntala), Bhavabhuti (Uttara- Rama-Charita), and Visakhadatta (Mudrarakshasa).

The Alankaras

These are grand rhetorical texts, treating of the science of perfection and beauty of ornamental language and of effective composition with elegance and force, both in poetry and in prose. These are the fundamentals of Sanskrit Sahitya (literature), even superior to the Kavyas and the Natakas. The best Alankara Granthas (Granthas = volumes) are those of Mammata (Kavyaprakasa) and Jagannatha (Rasagangadhara).

Conclusion

These constitute the entirety of Sanskrit literature- sacred and secular. The Sruti is the root; the Smritis, Itihasas and Puranas are the trunk; the Agamas and Darsanas are the branches; and the Subhashitas, Kavyas, Natakas and Alankaras are the flowers of India's literary tree. The Smritis, the Itihasas, the Puranas, the Agamas and the Darsanas are only developments of the Veda. Their ultimate source is the Veda.

Their one common aim is to enable man to annihilate his ignorance and attain perfection, freedom, immortality, and eternal bliss through knowledge of God or the Eternal. Their purpose is to make man like God and one with Him.

It is divine grace for any Sanskritic that, he can pursue the all above our cultural heritage and importance thru Moolabhasha it self.

REFERENCE

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