



Hinduism

Ritual, Reason and Beyond

Ashok Mishra



STORYMIRROR
Stories that reflect you

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For the Ss and the As

Who gave me more than I could ever hope for in one life.

असतो मा सद्गमय, तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय, मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।

Lead me from 'Asat' to 'Sat', from darkness to light and from mortality to immortality.

(Pavamāna hymn - Brihadaranyaka 1.3.28)

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Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of transferring a word from the alphabet of one language (in our case Sanskrit written in Devanagari script) to another (in our case English). It helps people pronounce words and names in foreign languages. For example Devanagari word सूत्र (usually spelt - sutra) is transliterated as sūtra; महाभारत (usually spelt - Mahabharata) as Mahābhārata; and कृष्ण (usually spelt as Krishna) as Kṛṣṇa.

Devanagari Transliteration

Vowels

अ	a	A	आ	ā	Ā	इ	i	I	ई	ī	Ī
उ	u	U	ऊ	ū	Ū	ऋ	r̄	Ṛ	ॠ	r̄̄	Ṝ
ऌ	l̄	Ḍ	ॡ	l̄̄	Ḍ̄	ए	e	E	ऐ	ai	Ai
ओ	o	O	औ	au	Au	अं	ṁ	M	अः	ḥ	H

Consonants

क k K	च c C	ट t̄ Ṭ	त t T	प p P	tenuis stops
ख kh Kh	छ ch Ch	ठ ṭh Ṭh	थ th Th	फ ph Ph	aspirated stops
ग g G	ज j J	ड ḍ Ḍ	द d D	ब b B	voiced stops
घ gh Gh	झ jh Jh	ढ ḍh Ḍh	ध dh Dh	भ bh Bh	breathy-voiced stops
ङ ṅ N	ञ ñ Ñ	ण ṇ N	न n N	म m M	nasal stops
ह h H	य y Y	र r R	ल l L	व v V	approximants
श ś Ś	ष ṣ Ṣ	स s S			

Illustrations

आसन	āsana	asana	ऋषि	r̄ṣi	rishi
योग	Yoga	Yoga	शिव	Śiva	Shiva
महाभारत	Mahābhārata	Mahabharata	कृष्ण	Kṛṣṇa	Krishna
राम	Rāma	Rama	अन्तःकरण	antaḥkaraṇa	antahkarana
ज्ञान	jñāna	gyana	क्षोभ	kṣobha	kshobh
चक्र	cakra	chakra	सूत्र	sūtra	sutra
इच्छा	icchā	icchaa	प्रतिष्ठा	pratiṣṭhā	pratishtha
विकल्प	vikalp	vikalpa	शास्त्र	śāstra	shastra
पतञ्जलि	Patañjali	Patanjali	अङ्ग	aṅga	anga

Preface

I recall clearly the late morning six-and-a-half years ago, when we had gathered for a small family function - the *munḍana* (tonsure) ceremony of my nephew's daughter - at my apartment. There must have been 15 to 20 of us; nephews and nieces, their spouses and children, and a barber to shave the head of the barely 1-year-old baby-girl. Those familiar with this ceremony, an important *saṃskāra* in every Hindu's life, know the head shaving is followed by a feast. The child, nestled in the lap of her mother, invariably resists the barber's attempts to hold its head still as he tries to remove all the hair. To prevent the baby from twisting and turning and getting injured by the razor, some member of family usually volunteers to hold the child firmly. Nobody enjoys this part of ceremony. Most certainly not the child who cries in protest right through the shaving which is repeated three times.

As the barber held the head of my nephew's daughter, she started to scream and hearing the child cry, her father (my nephew) intervened, instructing the barber not to shave, to use a pair of scissors instead to symbolically cut off a lock of hair. Many of nephews and nieces present murmured their approval, making me react more sharply than I had intended to. If I remember correctly, I said something along these lines: if you're not happy with the head being shaved, then better not have the ceremony at all! Let's not pretend that by clipping a lock of hair you would have performed *munḍana saṃskāra*. I remember adding - we can all have a nice party even without the *saṃskāra*, but if the idea is for the child to go through *munḍana*, then let's do it properly because it is an important milestone in the life of a Hindu child, and the family. There was a momentary silence - everyone gathered there thought I was upset because a tradition was not being followed. They were taken aback because they knew me as a non-traditionalist; not a 'conservative' Hindu, but as a great liberal. The child's father remarked that he did not know shaving of the head was a *saṃskāra*, an important milestone in the life of a child. I ended up explaining in detail what *saṃskāras* are, what they mean for a Hindu, and how we've been performing *munḍana*, *upanayana* and *vivaha* as *saṃskāra* for

well-nigh 4000 years. I must have spoken - uninterrupted - for about 20 minutes. Everyone, including my wife Shikha, who, despite her modern education, believes in following customs and traditions faithfully, heard me out in pin drop silence. Even the *panḍita* didn't intervene (I was speaking in Hindi, which the *panḍita* understood perfectly well). When I finished what I realised had embarrassingly become a lecture, several of the grown-ups spoke simultaneously, complaining - no one had ever told them anything about *munḍana* being a *saṃskāra*. They were also not sure what *saṃskāra* meant! At this point of time my wife, never short of words, remarked - 'He has time to read hours on end and write on other religions, but he has no time to write a book which can tell us about Hinduism, our ancient practices, our *pūjā*.' That stung me. Quite a bit. I temporarily shelved my writing project on Islam to write a book on Hinduism.

Hinduism is such a vast topic that it can hardly be covered meaningfully even in a dozen books. Fortunately for me, I was going to write in response to a very specific comment from my wife - she wanted a book that could explain to a lay reader like her about *Sanātana Dharma*, the Vedas, the importance of Purāṇas and other religious scriptures. More importantly, why we do what we do by way of worship.

This book is an endeavour to take the reader through some of these topics with the hope that the reader receives at least some satisfactory answers.

I was an engineering student, and in my university days always wanted to be a Lecturer. Coming from a family of civil servants, I was coerced, if not softly bulldozed, into abandoning my dream. I have been engaged in the manufacture of electronic components almost my entire working life, except for a short break of 14 months when I worked for the government. Having been born and brought up in, what is these days fashionably called a 'Secular' atmosphere, I had no special interest in learning about Hinduism. But after the very disturbing events of 9/11, when I decided to write on Islam, I learned Urdu from a Moulvi. I wanted to explore why Islam was at war with itself. In order to understand how Islam was different from other religions, I studied Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Later, having decided to write on Hinduism, I thought it necessary to learn Sanskrit. However, when I attempted to study the first volume of the Ṛgveda, I discovered that ordinary Sanskrit is of no use in understanding the Vedas. I struggled to find translations of the Vedas that weren't written by Western translators of the 17th and 18th centuries. It was then that I discovered that all Indian scholars of History and Indology - with very few exceptions - have written on Vedic literature reading from the secondary sources i.e. translations (more interpretations than translations,

really). It was only towards the end of writing this book that I managed to procure a copy of Ṛgveda translations by Jamieson and Brearton. Reading *Purāṇas*, *Smṛtis*, *Gṛhya sūtras*, *Dharma sūtras*, and other literature opened a new world for me. I discovered that most modern Indians' Hinduism is a Hinduism of perception. None of the many educated old and young Hindus I interviewed possessed first-hand knowledge of any of the Hindu rituals/practices they come across in their homes from childhood. In an increasingly urbanised society, both parents are often employed and do not have the time to share mythological stories or explain why various festivals are celebrated or why holy places of pilgrimage are important. The *pandita* rarely explains anything about the *pūjā* or any part of the ritual.

In fulfilment of Shikha's wish, I have attempted to present an account of Hinduism, which endeavours to explain how this religion started in ancient India, and its journey from a Ṛgvedic *yajña*-based society to a religion steeped in animal sacrifice, ritual, and even rank ostentation. I try to explore how sage gurus Aruni, Yajñavalkya, and many others, took it to new heights - the age of Reason - resulting in the creation of the Upaniṣads, and how the attempts to resurrect *yajñas* by Jaimini (and his followers) was followed by the emergence of the *Vidhāna* practices. I also examine the fascinating strategy they employed to meet the challenges posed by Buddhism. The arrival of idol worship, and the easy to practice dharma of the *Purāṇas* which culminated in the religion that Hindus follow today, has also been discussed in some detail.

I have tried to explain and describe ritual practices of the Vedic period - an account of the '26 karma *yajñas*' and a detailed account of *Soma yajña*, the most important of all *yajñas*. This has been done so that the reader may see for himself how Hindu rituals transformed into present day *pūjā*. Descriptions of present day *pūjā*, and explanations - both the five and the sixteen offerings (*pancōpchāra* and *śodaṣōpcāra*) - are given in detail so that the reader can fully understand the intent of present day *pūjā*.

Saṃskāras and *tīrtha*, *dāna* and *vrata* raise many questions in our mind. I have tried to answer some of the common questions by describing and explaining these activities.

Two chapters have been included at the end on questions that set most Indians thinking: Do mantras have power? Do rituals have any meaning?

I hope the book provides Shikha satisfactory answers and explanations for the many things she does, and makes us do, as a religious Hindu housewife. And that it does the same for many like-minded Hindus, as well as fellow Indians, who may choose to read this book.

I have no words to express my gratitude to Vedika Jiandani. Forever patient

and indulgent, she went through the manuscript several times. Even when her day of wedding was only a few weeks away, and she had resigned from her job in order to do the hundred things that an Indian 'would be bride' has to do, she found time to make one more revision of the transliterations. I am also grateful to Harish Puppala for going through a substantial part of the manuscript and his valuable contribution.

I interviewed a fair number of people who helped me understand better what Hindus think about their own religion: religious texts, gods and goddesses, customs and practices. I am thankful to all those who allowed me to interview them, and gave their valuable time, answering my several searching questions. I am especially grateful to Anjali Tandon, Anjana 'no argument' Bhargava, Nandini Baijal, Manjari Kakar, Manjushree Sahai, Meenakshi Kumar and Dipika Arora. Many of their replies were simply quote worthy.

The contribution of Madhav Pathak, an incisive and critical mind, and Arun Tandon, for ever helpful, encouraging, and patient has been immense. I simply cannot thank them enough.

Ashutosh Dixit has been my sounding board, every time I approached him he came up with a suggestion which resolved my dilemma. My sincere thanks to him for all his help.

And lastly I want to express my gratitude to the two gentlemen - Bibhu Datta Rout and Hitesh Jain, without whose help this book would not have been published and to the team at publishing house - StoryMirror - for all their time and help.

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Mumbai



Introduction

At no stage of my schooling, primary or secondary, was I taught anything about the pre-Indus Valley civilisation. Despite my habit of modest but regular reading, until about seven years back I believed - wrongly, as I now know - that Indian civilisation started with Indus Valley. During the course of my research for this book, I spoke to numerous school going children in Northern India, Maharashtra and Goa. Without exception, they shared the same mistaken notions about the beginnings of Indian civilisation. The name Mehrgarh doesn't ring any bells for them. I also interviewed a number of graduate and postgraduate housewives and working women - many of them teachers in the above regions. I found their responses no different from that of the students they taught!

For some strange reason we see our genesis only in Vedic Āryans! We seem to think that the India of pre-Vedic days (Indus Valley, Mehrgarh and earlier) belonged to some other peoples who were not our forefathers.

How strange, and yet not strange at all.

It is not strange because, as a student, I was never taught at any stage of my schooling that the history of my ancestors is at least as old as the skeletons, the mud bricks, and the broken pot shreds of Mehrgarh. Or that my ancestors baked the clay bricks and built those beautiful double storeyed houses which had bathrooms on the upper floor from where, through the vertical pipes, the water flowed down into the covered drainage system on the streets. For us, those people of the Indus Valley (and prior) were a different race that, for reasons we aren't very sure of, completely disappeared from the face of India.

And it is strange because we - the argumentative Indians, who like to question even that which is obvious - have believed for several generations, with nary a question, that an entire race disappeared with the Indus Valley civilisation. We do not enquire: How did a fairly developed civilisation, several centuries old, completely cease to exist, thereby leaving the slate of Indian civilisation clean for Vedic Āryans and their Hindu descendants to script their own story?

The 'Āryan Debate' is far from settled. But we do know that when the Āryans arrived, India was already populated with indigenous people. What cannot be said with certainty is whether the Āryans conquered and subjugated the original inhabitants as *dāsas* (serfs, slaves) or annihilated the Indus peoples and other inhabitants. Or was it a case of 'outsider' Āryans gradually settling down as agriculturists and assimilating with the natives? Linguists are still working on the interpretations of retroflexive words while Zoologists are trying to identify the origins of the Surkotada horse.

Were Āryans indigenous Indians who, over time, radiated out towards Central Asia and Europe? Or did the Āryans originate in Europe and Central Asia, and later migrate to India? This great debate, which has raged for several decades, seems to be taking a more definitive direction thanks to exponential advances in the field of DNA study.

The latest research paper (published on 31st March 2018) detailing the findings of a group of 92 scientists from around the globe has revealed that the very ancient inhabitants of India belonged to two groups - Ancient Ancestral South Indians (AASI) and Ancestral North Indians (ANI). The Indus Valley population was created by intermingling of Iranian agriculturists and South Asian hunter-gatherers. Around the second millennium BC, Steppe pastoralists (Aryans) from Central Asia moved toward the subcontinent and encountered the Indus Valley people. The exact nature of the encounter is not known. However, it resulted in the Indus Valley people moving deeper towards the South and mixing with South Asian hunter gatherers to create the ASI. The intermixing of Steppe pastoralists with the Indus Valley population led to the creation of the ANI grouping. Majority South Asian populations are a result of further mixing between ANI and ASI. An important outcome of these findings is that most extant Indian populations are connected through the bridge of Indus Valley civilisation to earlier populations. (bioRxiv preprint first posted online Mar. 31, 2018; doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1101/292581>. Accessed on Dt 310718).

The religious inclinations and praxis of our ancestors prior to the Indus Valley period are not known to us. But we are in a much better position when it comes to knowledge of the Indus Valley period. Any understanding of how Hinduism evolved to its present form has to start from the ruins of Mehrgarh (7000 BC) near the Bolan Pass in western Pakistan, where over 3200 figurines of clay and terracotta were discovered. The excavation by a French team, led by Jean-François Jarrige, between 1974 and 1986 yielded many more articles and objects that threw light on the civilisation which existed 4000 years, if not more, before Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Unfortunately, historians can only speculate that these figurines are related to the fertility practices of those people. Nothing much is known about the religious customs or practices of the people of Mehrgarh.

However, we are better informed about the Indus Valley civilisation: the assembly halls, the public baths, the stone rings and *linga* shaped stones, a nude female figurine, the ithyphallic figure of a man sitting cross-legged in yogic posture etc., have given scholars more definitive clues about possible customs and religious inclinations of the Indus Valley people.

I interviewed a fair number of young and old educated Hindus to better understand what they thought was their religion. When asked - What are Vedas? What do they contain? Have they ever had an inclination to read these ancient books? - surprisingly, all of them, without exception, said the Vedas are the most important religious texts for Hindus, but they had never made any serious efforts to learn more about these texts. Following a standard format, I asked them to name some of the Vedic gods and goddesses. Not one of the many people I interviewed could name 'any three Vedic deities', though many did recall Indra! Unsurprisingly, for nearly all of them, there was hardly any difference between Vedic and Purānic Hinduism. All of them shook their heads in disbelief when told that almost none of the popular gods and goddesses of today existed during Rgvedic times.

This book begins with a brief discussion of the words Hindu and Hinduism, a 'gift' of the British in the 19th century. I have used the words Hindu and Hinduism anachronistically in this book. This is done because, in all my discussions about Hindu religion, I found people constantly referring to Vedic Āryans as Hindus. Not that they were not familiar with the term *Sanātana Dharma* - everyone I spoke to was acquainted with the phrase - but hardly anyone responded with *Sanātana Dharma* as an answer when asked "what is your religion?" Before embarking on a journey of Hinduism to try and understand - how a society that was entirely *yajña* centric and did not have any idols, transformed into an idol worshipping *pūjā* centric society? - understanding and familiarizing oneself with the terms Hindu and Hinduism, religion and dharma, and *Sanātana Dharma* was considered essential by this author. Accordingly, three chapters in the book deal with these topics.

Sanātana Dharma, the ancient religion that it is, has always been interpreted differently by different people at different times. I considered it prudent to lay before the reader how three prominent thinkers and scholars of the recent past interpreted it in their own ways. Nearly 125 years back, a British lady by the name Dr Annie Besant, internationally renowned for her spiritual discourses and writings (though a theosophist), was steeped in Indian culture and Hindu religion. She co-authored a book on *Sanātana Dharma* with Dr Bhagwan Das, an educationalist, freedom activist and a great scholar of Sanskrit. Shri Aurobindo, an Indian who received Western education in England from a young age, joined the Indian Civil Service (ICS) but resigned to pursue the path of spiritualism by becoming a saint. He wrote and spoke extensively on Hinduism and *Sanātana Dharma*. For that great mind, *Sanātana Dharma* was the same as nationalism - a radically divergent interpretation

from the more conservative understanding of Annie Besant and Bhagwan Das. Dr RA Mall, a contemporary Indian scholar of religion and philosophy, has taught in Germany as well as in many other universities of Europe those very subjects. He considers *Sanātana Dharma* a secular concept. The reader will arrive at his/her own understanding of *Sanātana Dharma* having sampled these three points of view.

The traditional view traces the origin of Hindu religion to the Vedas. These sacred texts - the four Vedas - are believed to have been revealed directly to the ṛṣis orally, and are therefore called *Śruti* (heard). Each Veda comprises four different texts that were composed at different times; *Samhitās* (mantras), *Brāhmaṇas* (directions for conducting the rituals), *Āraṇyakas* (esoteric texts studied in the isolation of forests) and Upanisads (metaphysical discourses on *Ātmā* and Brahma); the four constituents together are called Veda. They are described in brief in a separate chapter, and four chapters follow that are devoted to each of the Vedas. An attempt has been made to give the description of the contents of each of the Vedas (*samhitā* part), the number of chapters, and the subject matter of each of the chapter, to help the reader understand what these different texts deal with.

I did face some trouble finding an authentic translation of the Vedas. After months of discussions with Sanskrit scholars as well as my own search of digital and physical libraries as well as book stores, I was surprised to discover that most, if not all, of what is written on the Vedas is based on nearly two-centuries old translations by German and English scholars' secondary sources. It was only when I was finishing this book that a properly detailed modern translation of the Rg Veda - by Jamieson and Brereton - came out in print. Most of what we rely on when we talk of Rgvedic *Samhitā* was translated from archaic Sanskrit into their language by English and German scholars of yore. This task was done in the absence of a standard Sanskrit-to-English dictionary. A serious debate raged at the time as to what constituted proper translation: Was it a precise word for word translation, or what the original author intended to convey, or what the original culture would mean in the culture of the translated texts? It was generally accepted that the translator had to have knowledge of the customs and culture of the people who composed the text in addition to the language of the original text. The ground reality was that there was hardly any interaction between Indians and these European translators.

Unless they were willing to undertake an arduous sea voyage - that lasted anywhere between four to six months - most of these translators were almost entirely cut off from the traditions, customs and culture of Hindus. The reader must, at all times, bear in mind the self-admitted prejudice of the sponsors of these translations - the East India Company - and that of the translators themselves who believed Christianity was the true religion, and that followers of false religions like Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism had to be converted to their faith. There is little

doubt in my mind that in the absence of a standard Sanskrit-to-English dictionary as well as lack of exposure to, and an understanding of, Hindu culture and customs, taking into account their prejudices, such translations can, at best, be termed works of interpretation.

I had always taken it for granted that, right from the beginning, we had four Vedas. My study revealed that, for nearly a millennium and a half, Hindu texts spoke of only *Traividya* or three Vedas. It was only around Manu's time that the fourth Veda - Atharva - started appearing as the fourth Veda. I have tried to present as much evidence as a work of this nature permits to highlight this important point for the benefit of the reader. In many ways, admittance of the Atharva to the house of Vedas marked a major departure: On one hand it signalled the acceptance of non-Āryan practices of black magic as Āryan practice - a harbinger of the Hindu system of assimilating foreign or divergent ideas - and on the other, it opened doors to what was gross and 'unintellectual', and certainly uncharacteristic of Āryan religion. No doubt Rg too had 'magic' verses, but those did not relate to making one's neighbour impotent! Atharva had this and much more. It is truly intriguing how this Veda found a place for itself at the high table with Rg, Sāma and Yajur.

Since this book is written with the objective of placing before readers the evolution of Hindu practices, the change in the form of worship is an important topic that requires special attention. It has morphed from Vedic *yajña* to the present *pūjā*. Apart from descriptions of the various types of *yajña* practices prevailing in Vedic times, a fairly detailed description of a template of *Somayajña*, namely *agniṣṭoma*, has been provided in a separate chapter on *yajña* rituals. *Somayajña* was chosen because it is considered the most important among *śrauta* sacrifices.

A society that had moved away from the substance to the form (ritualism) underwent a remarkable change and shunned ritualism in favour of knowledge. This transformation of Hinduism, and its beautiful journey to what is more commonly known as Upanisadic period, eventually led to *Vedānta* or the end of Vedas. This journey has been divided into nine separate chapters. Towards the end of the Upanisadic period, the pendulum had swung to the other extreme. A society once completely immersed in ritualism experienced an age of reason and started speaking in terms of '*aham brahmāsmi*' (I am *Brahman*), and '*tat tvam asi*' (you are That). The unity of the Self and the Supreme became the ultimate goal of Hindu society. It was a concept so unique and so complex, it became almost impossible for a common Hindu to comprehend. He suddenly felt lost; if indeed there was only one ultimate reality which was nothing but unalloyed consciousness - the *Brahman* - having no attributes, then where, and to whom, could he turn to for help in overcoming the problems of this world?

Buddhism and Jainism had already started making deep inroads, hitting at the very core beliefs of Hinduism. Sages like Jaimini came forward to resurrect

the crumbling *Vedism*. Employing the doctrine of *Mīmāṃsā*, Jaimini argued that each and every word of Veda has meaning, and all rituals must strictly be adhered to. In *Mīmāṃsā*, even the gods came to occupy a position that was secondary to the *yajña*; through *yajña*, the gods could be compelled to deliver *kāmya*. The rituals thus came to supersede everything else; *Karmakānda* and action were, in the *Mīmāṃsā* scheme of things, supreme.

This undoubtedly was a ‘revivalist’ move by a staunch Vedic follower, an effort to stem the tide of Buddhism, Jainism and some of the other ‘anti-Vedic’ ideologies like *Ājīvikas* and *Śramanas*, which were threatening to destroy the very basis of *Vedism*. After all, the core teachings of these new ‘religions’ (Buddhism and Jainism) denied the existence of God, *ātmā*, *paramātmā*, and *svarga*, attacking the very foundation of Hindu religious thought, whether ritualistic or Upanisadic. Making ahimsa (non-violence) in thought and action the bedrock of their ideologies, and an integral part of daily practice, these religions had delivered a body blow to Hinduism which was, at the time, steeped in sacrificial (*yajña*) ceremonies that often extended over months and years (an *aśvamedha yajña* typically lasted more than an year). Many Hindus, disenchanted and disillusioned with opulent and often blood soaked ceremonies, did not need a great deal of persuasion to follow the path of Sangha (not to be confused with the modern day Sangh Parivar or RSS). They were desperately looking to tread a new path. Under such adverse conditions, Jaimini propagated an ideology which, even by the standards of those days, was ‘conservative’.

Another section of sages devised a different plan. They came up with an abridged and modified version of *Vedism* and called it *Vidhāna*. *Vidhāna* practices provide a shortcut for achieving ‘every day’ desires - *kāmya* (desired object) - which were earlier achieved through cumbersome Vedic practices that, for an average Hindu without resources, were difficult to pursue. It was in that period of turbulence, when Hinduism was failing its followers who were drawn towards Buddhism and Jainism, that an easier form of worship, *mūrti pūjā*, tiptoed in as *Devāpūjā*, edging out *Devāyajña*, an important element of *panca mahā yajña*. *Mūrti pūjā* gained popularity among Hindus fairly quickly. And thus began the great journey of idol worship and Purānic Hinduism.

The Purānas became the new Vedas, and *mūrti pūjā* the new *yajña*. Where only four Vedas and 27 (some say 400) *yajñas* existed, 18 *Maha* Purānas and an equal number of Upa-Purānas were compiled over the next few centuries. The gods, who numbered less than a hundred in the Vedic period, grew exponentially and touched a staggering 33 crores (330 million)! Purānas introduced an easy to understand, and easier to practice, version of religion. A God in anthropomorphic form could be seen, spoken to, offered prayers and, more importantly, kept in the house and worshipped without requisitioning the services of a *purohita*. The wherewithal for

yajñas, which had become a deterrent for most, was completely done away with in the Purānic scheme of bhakti. A Hindu could reap the benefits of even *aśvamedhā yajña* by *tīrth-yātrā*, *vrata* and *dāna*. Through simple and engrossing tales of the gods, their *avatāras* and demons, dharma was once again brought within reach of rich and poor alike. This was achieved with one very important distinction - women and *śūdra* were now allowed to practice this form of worship.

It is no easy task to describe what these Purānas are, or what constitutes their core contents; they go well beyond the topics spelt out as the *panca lakṣanas* (five attributes), which they themselves have laid down. The Purānas cover nearly all aspects of Hinduism - custom, religion, *ācāra* and *vyavhāra* (rules and conduct); the dos and the don'ts; atonement, crime and punishment; *samskāra*, cosmogony, philosophy etc. etc...the list is endless. In order to give the reader a flavour of this altogether different approach to Hindu dharma, topics like cosmogony and cosmography, time and *yuga*, gods and goddesses as well as tantrism are included in a chapter on Purāna. This will provide the reader an opportunity to see the wild swing from the age of reason and *Vedānta* to the seven oceans of honey, milk, curd, *ghī* etc., in Purānic cosmogony, and the replacement of the supreme reality, *Brahman*, with millions of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses.

This arrival - of many gods, and *mūrtipūjā* - heralded an entirely new form of worship, different from *yajña*. How 'devayajña', a part of *panca mahā yajñas*, an exercise every *dvija* was enjoined to undertake daily, was replaced by *devapūjā* (idol worship), is not known with any degree of exactitude. But it is almost certain that *devapūjā* replaced *devayajña*. Given the important place various types of *pūjā* occupy in the average Hindu's life, and how little he tends to know when he, as a *yajmāna* (principal actor in the ceremony), is guided through the *pūjā* by a priest, I have provided very detailed accounts of short and long forms of *pūjā* (*pancopchāra* and *śodasopchāra*) in a chapter dedicated to *pūjā*. After reading these accounts, I hope that readers receive a deeper understanding of why we do what we do during a *pūjā*.

The Purānas undoubtedly were a significant factor in halting the march of Buddhism, and reigniting the flame of dharma in the residents of Bhāratavarsa. But the seeds of *Śaivism* and *Vaisnavism* had already sprouted in parts of India. The invasions by forces of Islam, a religion that thrived on forced conversion, coupled with the numerous social ills that afflicted Hindu society, which was itself becoming moribund due to the caste system and many other abhorrent practices, evoked a unique reformist movement from within - the Bhakti movement. Saints from high and low castes alike came forward to lead this movement by example. Tulsī, Sūr and Caitanya were *brāhmaṇas*, Mīrā was a *ksatriya*, while Nānaka came from the trading community. Kabīr, Dādu, Raidas were all from lower castes. Irrespective of their own caste, they brought a new wave of awareness to Hindu

society. Both *saguna* and *nirguna* (with and without attributes) ideologies were presented in simplified forms that a common man could easily comprehend, and practice. Hinduism was revitalised by these saints, and the *Bhakti* movement was one important reason Hinduism survived a thousand years of Islamic rule.

In this author's view, every Hindu, whether practising or non-practising, does observe one or more *samskāra*. They could be classed as essential attributes of Hinduism. Three chapters have been devoted to this topic, and a detailed description of the two primary *samskāras* i.e. *upanayana* and *vivāha* is given separately. While interviewing people, I had found that though they were familiar with the word *samskāra*, they did not quite understand what it entails. The first of the three chapters tries to explain the meaning of *samskāra*, and the context in which it is used in Hindu religion. The number of *samskāras*, and how they shrank from the original 40 to the present day 16, is also explored at length in this chapter. The next chapter contains descriptions of each *samskāra*, and explains how, and why, they are performed.

These days most Hindus do not perform most *samskāras*, and even the *samskāras* they do perform - like *nāma karna*, *annaprāsana*, *munḍana* or *cudākarma*, *vidyārambha* etc. - are not performed in the prescribed form. But there are three *samskāras* which all Hindus continue to perform assiduously - *upanayana*, *vivāha* and *antyeṣṭi* (last rites). We do not take note of *upanayana* because, these days, in most cases it is not performed as a stand-alone *samskāra*. *Upanayana* is now performed a day before, or on the day of *vivāha*, and is mistaken as a prelude to *vivāha* ceremonies. In fact, in certain ways, it is a more important *samskāra* than the others - only after *upanayana* does a Hindu become a *dvija* or twice born. Without it, he is unsuitable to perform any religious rite! A detailed account of both, *upanayana* and *vivāha*, is provided in a separate chapter.

Vivāha is the single most important *samskāra* that a Hindu performs in his lifetime. It is also one of the most ancient, first finding mention in the Rgveda itself. The age, caste, *gotra*, *sapinda* et cetera continue to be important considerations at the time of marriage. This author took the opportunity of including a discussion on *jāti* and *varna* as part of the chapter on *vivāha* rather than giving them separate space in the book, which they ideally warrant.

Though very important, *antyeṣṭi samskāra* has not been selected for discussion in this book.

A question most Hindus often ask is, 'What is meaning of the various rituals we perform as part of every religious ceremony?' A modern day *pūjā* scene looks something like this: the *yajamāna* sitting in a *pūjā* is made to do a hundred things, big and small, at the behest of the *pandita*. He follows these instructions like a robot, almost never enquiring why he is to do those things, or what is their significance. None of those present dare question the *pandita* either; most

sit reverentially with folded hands, while a few converse about inconsequential matters. Other than the *pandita's* instructions, which are usually spoken in the vernacular, the main proceedings are conducted in Sanskrit, a language that is now heard only in classrooms, or niche TV news bulletins. Those present at the *pūjā* understand almost nothing of what is being chanted, or done. It is not uncommon that the *pandita* himself understands little of what he is doing. It is not surprising then that rituals have become tedious, boring affairs that inevitably lead to the question: Why do we do this at all? What is the meaning of ritual?

No ritual is ever complete without the chanting of mantras. These mantras are in Sanskrit, and even more difficult to understand than the rituals. When questioned, those in the know tell us mantras have great power. So are the rituals meaningless? And are the mantras powerful and efficacious?

These questions can be looked at from two different perspectives: the traditional view, and the scholarly (Indian and Western) point of view. This is such a vast subject that a book of this size can hardly do justice to discussion of these two questions in the few pages that can be spared for this purpose. However, given the importance of these questions, one cannot ignore them altogether. The author has devoted one chapter each to these two questions.

Firstly, do mantras have power? Are they efficacious?

Mantras are collections of words in Sanskrit, and anybody familiar with the language will be able to comprehend their meaning. All mantras are laudatory in nature, addressed to various gods and goddesses, and at times to inanimate objects. They are recited during the course of *pūjā* for obtaining the desired results (*kāmya*). In another form of worship - *japa* - mantras are repeated over and over with some *kāmya* in mind. Their power and efficacy, at first level, can only be measured vis-a-vis the outcome of the *kāmya* through either of the above two forms of worship. But herein lies the catch: the texts prescribe that the *kāmya* is delivered provided the ritual is performed without a single error, with perfection, with complete dedication, and total focus on the deity (to the exclusion of all other thought). Since no ritual or *japa* can, in practice, ever be performed satisfying such stringent conditions, believers and traditionalists could exploit this 'trapdoor' when asked why the desired results are not delivered even after a ritual is performed. Any discussion on efficacy or the power of the mantra on these lines is therefore not likely to yield results.

The other route is non-traditional and/or scholarly. Applying this method, scholars have tried to question the efficaciousness of mantras by raising fundamental questions: for instance, do the mantra's qualify as proper language? If not, they are rendered meaningless and (hence) cannot possess any power. This is the route of Linguistic analysis; scholars like Frits Staal have followed this method to question the power and efficaciousness of mantras. There can be many other

ways of examining/challenging the power of mantras. In this book I have restricted myself to the linguistic route, and tried to present a counter to Staal's assertions.

When we come to rituals, the issue becomes much more complex. Unlike mantras, there are innumerable kinds of rituals that pervade all aspects of an individual's life. Consequently, they have been studied, researched, and commented upon by many scholars in different parts of the world. In order to address the question 'Are rituals meaningless?' I have tried to discuss what rituals are, and whether they have any meaning i.e. do they serve any purpose? In the end, I have tried to explore how traditionalists approach this question.



Chart C-2

Vedic Literature - A Brief Description

Vedic texts

Śruti - *Śruti* or 'what is heard', as opposed to what is composed, are revealed scriptures, self-authoritative, not composed by any human being. Vedas are *Śruti* texts. Each Veda had its own separate - *Samhita*, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyaka and Upanisads.

Post Vedic texts

Smṛti - *Smṛti* or 'what is memorised' are the traditional works of human origin solely based on the *Śrutis*. Called *Sūtra* texts, their most important part is vedāṅgas or 'limb of Veda'. Vedāṅgas are prescribed as essential reading for anyone wanting to learn the Vedas. They help students in reading and understanding Vedas and performing sacrificial rites.

- i. *Kalpa* - ceremonial directory, including rules for Vedic rituals and sacrifices
- ii. *Śikṣā* - the science of pronunciation
- iii. *Chandas* - metre
- iv. *Nirukta* - etymology and meaning of words used in the Vedas
- v. *Vyākaraṇa* - grammar
- vi. *Jyotiṣa* - astronomy, including the study of arithmetic and mathematics

Kalpa - These are texts concerned with ritual and have three categories-

- *Śrauta Sūtras* - Deal with Vedic sacrifices given in the Vedas and described in the Brāhmaṇas
- *Grhya Sūtras* - Deal with domestic ceremonies such as upanayana, marriage etc, and various daily and seasonal sacrificial rites, and mantras applied to these rites
- *Dharma Sūtras* - These address some of the topics dealt within the grhya sūtras and also deal with the provisions on matters concerning economics, politics, government, civil and criminal law

Later day Dharma Sūtra texts stopped having a clear link to a particular Veda school (*Śakhā*), and came to be called *Smṛti* e.g. Devalā Smṛti.

Other texts - Additional texts composed to clarify or explain certain aspects of the Vedas include: Padapāthas - samhita texts had words in the conjoined form (*sandhis*), the padapātha separates each word so in a sense it makes the text read as it was before the words were joined by *sandhi*; and *Anukramanikās* - the index of

hymns, meters, deities and ṛṣis of each of the four Vedas.

The four Upa-Vedas (knowledge of Medical, Economic/Political, and Military Sciences and Music), the six *Darśanas* (branches of philosophy), the eighteen Puranas and Upa-Puranas each, *Itihāsa* (epics - Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata), later Upanisad and *Dharma Śāstras* (Sanskrit texts that deal with the customs, practices, ethical conduct and laws of Hindus).



Chart C-3

	Veda	Rg	Sāma	Yajur Kṛṣṇā	Yajur Śukla	Atharva	Remarks
Ś R U T I T E X T S	Brāhmaṇa	<i>Aitareya Kauṣītaki</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśa, Ṣaḍviṃśa, Jaiminiya- Upaniṣad- Brāhmaṇa, Chandogya- Upaniṣad- Brāhmaṇa</i>	<i>Taittirīya</i>	<i>Śatapatha</i>	<i>Gopatha</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśa is same as Tāṇḍya Br.</i>
	Āraṇyaka	<i>Aitareya, Kauṣītaki</i>	- -	<i>Taittirīya</i>	<i>Śatapatha</i>	- -	<i>Kauṣītaki is same as Śaṅkhāyana Ār.</i>
	Upaniṣad	<i>Aitareya, Kauṣītaki</i>	<i>Chandogya, Kena</i>	<i>Taittirīya, Maitrayāni, Kaṭha, Śvetāśvatara</i>	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Iśa</i>	<i>Munḍaka, Praśna, Maṇḍūkya</i>	
	Śakha	<i>Śaklā, Bāṣkala</i>	<i>Jaiminiya, Rāṇyāniya, Kauthuma</i>	<i>Taittirīya, Maitrayāni, Kaṭhaka, Kapiṣṭhala - Kaṭha</i>	<i>Vajasaneyi - Kāṇva, Mādyanandina</i>	<i>Śaunaka, Paippalāda</i>	<i>Different recensions of saṃhitas or theological schools</i>
S M R T I T E X T S	Śrauta Sūtras	<i>Aśvalāyana, Śaṅkhāyana</i>	<i>Laṭyāyana Drāhyāyana Jaiminiya</i>	<i>Mānava, Vārāha, Baudhāyana, Bhāradvāja, Vādihūla, Hiraṇyakeśin, Āpastamba, Vaikhānasa</i>	<i>Kātyāyana</i>	<i>Āgastya, Vaitana</i>	<i>Sūtra texts are concerned with rituals. Śrauta give details of solemn Vedic sacrifices in addition to Brāhmaṇa</i>
	Gryha Sūtras	<i>Aśvalāyana, Kauṣītaki, Śāmbavya</i>	<i>Gobhila, Kauthuma, Drāhyāyana, Khādīra, Jaiminiya</i>	<i>Mānava, Vārāha, Kaṭha, Laugākṣi, Baudhāyana, Vādihūla, Āpastamba, Bhāradvāja Hiraṇyakeśin, Vaikhānasa</i>	<i>Pāraskara</i>	<i>Kauśika, Paiṭhinasi</i>	<i>Gryha describe domestic ceremonies to be performed by Hindu every day and at important stages of life</i>
	Dharma Sūtras	<i>Vasiṣṭha</i>	<i>Gautama</i>	<i>Mānava, Kaṭha, Baudhāyana, Āpastamba, Vaikhānasa</i>	- -	<i>Sumantu</i>	<i>Earliest source of Hindu law, they deal with customs, rites, belief and ethics</i>
	Smṛti			<i>Manu, Viṣṇu, Vādihūla</i>	- -	<i>Yājñavalkya</i>	<i>Later day Dharma texts</i>

Indian Sages & Western Scholars

Some readers may want to know little more about the ancient ṛṣis, *Ācāryas* and gurus, and Indian and Western scholars who authored numerous texts on Hinduism, and whose names find frequent mention in this book. A brief introduction and timeline of some of these scholars is given below.

Indian Sages and *Ācāryas*

Oxford Dictionary tells us an *Ācārya*, a Sanskrit word, is 'a Hindu or Buddhist spiritual teacher or leader', and a Sage 'a profound wise man'. Authors of Vedic literature, other than the Vedic *Samhitas*, were Sages and *Ācāryas* in this sense. The extant *Śrauta* and *Gṛhya Sūtras* (texts which deal with Vedic, and domestic, sacrifices) as well as the *Dharma Sūtras* (texts which form the earliest source of Hindu law), the *Smṛti* (texts that generally include *Vedāngas* - the six limbs of Vedas, *Sūtras*, *Dharma Śāstras*, Purāṇas, Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata) composed by various Sages and *Ācāryas* are generally known by their author's name e.g. Gautama Dharma Sūtra was composed by Gautama. When we try to attach a timeline to these texts, we encounter several problems; the authors of these Vedic texts do not bother to give the year of composition, and since there were several *Ācāryas*/Sages by the same name in different periods - for example, Yājñavalkya, Manu - it is well nigh impossible to know which Yājñavalkya, or which Manu, is being referred to. The problem is compounded when we take in to account the fact that the members of the Sage's/*Ācārya*'s family often used the name of their forefathers while writing a given text: a descendent of Gautama did not hesitate using Gautama's name - while composing a text several generations down the line - himself! Given these limitations, the author of this book has compiled a list of important Sages and *Ācāryas* whose names the reader may come across frequently reading this book, along with their very brief background.

Names of important Western Scholars who made significant contribution to the Vedic study and study of Indology, with a very brief background, follows the list of Indian Sages and *Ācāryas*.

Briefly, according to PV Kane in his History of Hindu Dharmaśāstra, period of Vedic *Samhitas*, Brāhmaṇas and some of the Upaniṣads is 4000-1000 BC. Śrauta Sūtras of Āpstamba, Aśvalāyana, Baudhāyana, Kātyāyana, Śāṅkhayana, Latyāyana and some Gṛhya Sūtras like Āpstamba, Aśvalāyana etc belong to 800-400 BC. Dharma Sūtras of Gautama (600-400 BC), Āpstamba, Baudhāyana and Vasīṣṭha, and Gṛhya Sūtras of Pāraskara and some others belong to 500-300 BC.

Āpstamba - Founder of a *Śakha* (Vedic school) of Yajurveda, a teacher, and a mathematician. According to the Hindu tradition, he was the student of Baudhāyana, and had Hiranyakeśin as his student.

Aśvalāyana (400 BC?) - Author of the Aśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra, a Vedic manual of sacrificial ceremonies, belonged to the 'forest tradition' of hermits and wandering holy men. In Vedic texts he is mentioned as a teacher as well as a sage. He is said to have been a student of the great grammarian Śaunaka.

Baudhāyana (~800 BC) - A teacher and a sage, was a formidable mathematician. He authored earliest *Śulba sūtras* which contains calculation of value of pi, Pythagoras theorem, square root of 2 and circling the square.

Manu - In the mythology of India, Manu was the first man and is the legendary author of an important Sanskrit law code, the Manu Smṛti (Laws of Manu).

Scholars believe Manu Smṛti or Manava Dharma Śāstra was probably composed in the first few centuries of CE.

Yaska (800-500 BC) - Author of Nirukta - a Sanskrit text, is oldest known etymology or glossary of the Vedic *Samhitas*. He dates to before Paṇini.

Paṇini (~ 700-400 BC) - Sanskrit grammarian. Aṣṭādhyāyī, widely accepted as text on perfect grammar, is in *sūtras* (aphorism) which are explained by Patanjali and others.

Yājñavalkya - A sage and a teacher, he figures prominently in the earliest of the Hindu philosophical and metaphysical texts known as the Upaniṣads, the Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad.

In Mahābhārata he attended *rajsūya yajña* of Yudhiṣṭhira, and in Rāmāyana he was in court of Janaka.

Yājñavalkya is also the name of the author of one of the principal texts of dharma or religious duty, the Yājñavalkya smṛti. This is an entirely different figure, however, since the Yājñavalkya Smṛti was written more than five centuries later than the Upaniṣad.

Jaimini (500-200 BC) - He was a commentator (*sūtrakara*) on *Mīmāṃsā* philosophy. His monumental work, Pūrvamīmāṃsā sūtra, giving fundamental

theory of philosophy, contains 2644 *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, divided in to 16 sections.

Vātsyāyana (100-300 AD) - A philosopher, better known worldwide for his treatise on ‘the art of love making’ *Kāmasūtra*.

Śabara (~100 BC to 600 AD) - A philosopher of the *Mīmāṃsā* school of philosophy, composer of *Śabara Bhaṣya* (commentary).

Kumārila Bhatt (650-750 AD) - He was a philosopher and *Mīmāṃsā* scholar from medieval India. He is famous for many of his various theses on *Mīmāṃsā*, such as *Mīmāṃsā Ślokaṅkavārtika*, *Tantra Vārtika*.

Śankara (788-820 AD) - One of the greatest philosophers of India, an exponent of *Advaita* school of *Vedānta*. He set up 4 *maṭhas*, centres of religious authority and learning, *Jyotir maṭha* at Badrinath in north, *Sharda maṭha* at Shringeri in south, *Kalika maṭha* at Dvarka in west, and *Jagannatha Govardhana maṭha* at Puri in east. Died at the age of 32 at Kedarnath in Himalayas.

Medhatithi (820-900 AD) - Known for his extensive commentary on *Manu*.

Vijñāneśvara (1100-1120 AD) - Profound student of *Pūrvamīmāṃsā*, famous for his work *Mitakshara*.

Aparārkā (1125 AD) - A prince from North Konkan, authored voluminous commentary on *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*.

Swāmi Dayānand Sarasvatī (1824-83) - Founder of *Ārya Samāj* and a great scholar of Vedas. He took *saṃnyasa* at 21. In 1875 inaugurated *Ārya Samāj* in Bombay to teach people to follow Vedas and lead a life of nobility (*ārya* = noble).

Western Scholars (In Chronicle Order)

Sir William Jones (1746-94 AD) - British scholar, a polyglot who knew 21 languages, Supreme Court Judge in British-India, founder of Asiatic Society - an institution involved in Indological studies, he propositioned Sanskrit is an Indo-European language, stressed its affinity to Greek and Latin. He translated the *Śakuntalā* in English, the *Manu Smṛti* in English and German, and edited the *Ritusamhara*.

Charles Wilkins (1750-1836) - A British scholar, his translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* (London 1785), was first Sanskrit book to be directly translated into a European language. His other works include - book on ‘Sanskrit Grammar’ (1808) and *The Śakuntalā* episode of the *Mahābhārata* (1793).

H.T. Colebrooke (1765-1837) - A British Scholar, described as “the first great Sanskrit scholar in Europe”, he was first employed by East India Company at Calcutta in 1782. He edited and/or translated - *The Śakuntalā* (1830), the

Amaruśataka (1831), the Hitopadeśa (1804), the Amarakośa (1808), the Śatakatraya of Bhartrihari (1804), Śāmkhyakarika of Ishvarakrishna (1837). During his residence at Calcutta he wrote his ‘Sanskrit Grammar’ (1805), papers on the religious ceremonies of the Hindus, and ‘Essay on the Vedas’ (1805), for a long time considered the standard work in English on the subject, and two treatises on Hindu law of inheritance Mitākshara (1810) and the Dayābhāga, under the title Law of Inheritance. His work on algebra with arithmetic and mensuration based on Sanskrit works of Brahmagupta and Bhāskara preceded by a dissertation on the state of science as known to Hindus was published in 1917 in London.

A.W.V. Schlegel (1767-1845) - A German scholar who founded a periodical ‘Indische Bibliothek’ (1823). His works include the first critical edition of the Bhagavadgītā with Latin translations (1823), and the Rāmayaṇa and the Hitopadeśa.

S.A. Longlois (1788-1854) - A French Sanskritist, he translated the whole text of the Ṛgveda into French, which was published in Paris, during 1848-51.

Harace Hymen Wilson (1786-1860) - An English orientalist, Dr. Wilson was the first occupant of the newly founded Boden chair of Sanskrit (1832) in Oxford University. He studied medicine at St Thomas’s Hospital, and came to India in 1808 as assistant-surgeon on the Bengal establishment of the British East India Company and lived in India for a long time. Wilson prepared the first Sanskrit-English Dictionary (1819) from materials compiled by native scholars, supplemented by his own researches. He edited and translated the text of the Ṛgveda with the Sayana Bhashya into English and published the Sanskrit text with a free translation in English rhymed verse of Kālidāsa’s poem, the Meghadūtam.

Hermann Grassman (1809-77) - He was a German Scholar, who made a poetic translation of the Ṛgveda and a Lexicon of the Ṛgveda in German titled, Worterbruchzum Rgveda.

Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819-89) - British scholar, borne in Bombay, educated at Kings College, Oxford, was the second Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University. Wrote many books on Hinduism and translated and edited the Śakuntalā (1856), the Vikramorvaṣyam, the Nalopakhyānam (1879). His biggest contribution is Sanskrit-English and English-Sanskrit Dictionaries.

William Dwight Whitney (1827-94) - An American scholar, known for his work on the Atharvaveda (1856). He wrote the Sanskrit Grammar (1879) and The Roots, Verb-forms and Primary Derivations of Sanskrit language (1885), edited the Atharvaveda Pratiśākhya (1862) and the Taittiriya Pratiśākhya, with commentary and translation, and the Sūrya Siddhānta, a treatise on Astronomy and Astrology.

Max Muller (1823-1900) - A German-born philologist and Orientalist, who lived and studied in Britain for most of his life, Müller became Oxford's first Professor of Comparative Philology. He was one of the founders of the western academic field of Indian studies and the discipline of comparative religion. Müller wrote both scholarly and popular works on the subject of Indology. He translated Upaniṣads and Āpastamba-Sūtras in English, edited the Ṛgveda with Commentary of Sayana (6 Vols.), and edited the Hitopadeṣa, the Meghadūta (1847), the Ṛgveda Pratiśākhya (1859-69) with German translations. He wrote many books on Philosophy, Grammar, and History related to Sanskrit. The Sacred Books of the East, a 50-volume set of English translations, was prepared under his direction and editorship.

A. Weber (1805-1901) - A French Missionary, he was very famous among those who contributed to Vedic literature. He translated the Śukla Yajurveda Saṃhita's ninth and tenth chapters into Latin and its 16th chapter into German. He also translated the Atharvaveda into German, published under the title Indische Studien.

R.T.H. Griffith (1828-1906) - He was the first and the last after H. H. Wilson, who translated the whole text of the Ṛgveda into English. He also published his poetic translation of the Yajurveda, the Sāmaveda, and the Atharvaveda. Elected Boden Professor of Sanskrit, he later held the position of Principal at the Benares College in India and later lived in Kotagiri, Nilgiri translating vedic works in English.

Alfred Ludwig (1832-1911) - A German, he was a Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Prague. He prepared the German translation of the Ṛgveda, titled Der Ṛgveda with 230 important Sūktas of the Atharvaveda translated into German.

AA Macdonnel (1854-1930) - A PhD from the University of Leipzig, Deputy Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford in 1888, and a Boden Professor of Sanskrit in 1899, Macdonnel was born in Muzaffarpur in India. He edited various Sanskrit texts, wrote a grammar, compiled a dictionary, and published a Vedic grammar, a Vedic Reader, and a work on Vedic mythology; he also wrote a history of Sanskrit.

A.B. Keith (1879-1944) - Prof Arthur Berriedale Keith was a Scottish constitutional lawyer, and a scholar of Sanskrit and Indology. He was student of Macdonell and translated Taittiriya Saṃhita into English, that was published under the Harvard Oriental Series in America, The Aitareya Āraṇyaka and Aitareya and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇas of the Ṛgveda.

Theodar Benfey (1909-81) - He translated 130 Suktas of Ist Mandala of the Ṛgveda into German and the whole text of the Kauthuma Śakha.

PART I

धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः

Dharma protected, protects.

(Manu Smṛity 8.15)

Prologue

Are we Āryans?

The beginning: From Mehrgarh to Surkotada Horse

If you ask Hindus about the origin of their religion, chances are nine out of ten times answer will be: from Vedas. They are left nonplussed at the suggestion that their religion could have originated many centuries earlier in the older Indus Valley period or deep in south, among South Asian hunter-gatherers, described as Ancient Ancestral South Indians or AASI, the oldest people of the subcontinent. Indians consider the Vedas' period as the beginning of Hinduism. Interestingly, even those familiar with the Indus Valley civilisation and its antiquity think of that civilisation only in terms of its advanced town planning, covered drainage system and the mysterious terracotta seals. They are likely to have no views or information about the religious practices and beliefs of their forebears. We have compartmentalised the Indus Valley civilisation and the subsequent Vedic civilization, as if there was a vacuum in the interregnum. In our minds, our civilizational and cultural inheritance begins with the Vedic period. Though there is no sensible possibility that every member of the Indus Valley civilization was annihilated, either by a natural disaster or meticulous military operations of the advancing Āryans - if indeed that was the case - yet, we like to believe that the slate of India's civilizational history was wiped clean before the history of Vedic civilisation was written on it!

Though people did reside in this part of the world - lands or the mountains and piedmonts bordering Iran - even before the Indus Valley civilization (Mature Harappan) flourished, very little is known about their religious thoughts and practices. It makes sense to start our journey of familiarisation with the origins of religious practices from the period of Indus Valley civilisation, because sufficient evidence exists to prove that more than 4500 years ago, an advanced urban civilisation flourished in India and parts of today's Pakistan.

Scholars believe that the Indus Valley civilization, which flourished between 2500-1900 BC, mysteriously disappeared when the Vedic civilization began to blossom. The Vedas, according to most scholars were composed between 1700-1400 BC. Thus, in addition to the religious thoughts and beliefs of the Indus people, we also need to look at the practices of people who lived in this region during those 800 years, i.e. between 2500 BC and 1700 BC. Using the latest scientific dating techniques, scholars at Indian Institute of Technology, IIT Kharagpur, are pushing back the origins of the Indus Valley civilisation to 5000 BC and beyond¹. If that holds true, we are faced with a civilization of 3000 years or more, a long period that nearly or totally disappeared before Vedic civilisation began to take root in the Indian subcontinent.



It may appear farfetched to many of us that 5000 years ago our ancestors built double storied houses, covered drainage system, and large public baths, using baked bricks of uniform shape and size - not unlike the bricks we use today. But it is true. In 1920, John Marshall discovered a Harrappan archaeological site buried under a seven-meter mound. The site was damaged by British engineers and contractors who used bricks from the ruins as a source for track ballast during construction of the Lahore-Multan railway line, as part of the Sindh and Punjab railway network in 1857. John Brunton, one of the two British engineers deputed on the job, when informed about the ruins of an ancient city called Brahmaṇabad, narrated: “I was much exercised in my mind how we were to get ballast for the line of the railway.” To their delight, the ruins were full of hard and well-burnt bricks, and John was “convinced that there was a grand quarry for the ballast” he wanted. John's brother William Brunton's “section of the line ran near another ruined city further north, bricks from which had already been used by villagers in the nearby village of Harappa at the same site. These bricks now provided ballast along 93 miles of the railroad track running from Karachi to Lahore.”²

The discovery of Harappan seals by J Fleet (1912) near the site prompted an excavation campaign under Sir John Hubert Marshall, who was Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India at that time. As a result, the remnants of an unknown civilization - later called Indus Valley Civilisation - were discovered at Harappa by Marshall, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni and Madho Sarup Vats. Marshall, along with Rakhhal Das Banerjee and E J H Mackay, also found remains at another ancient city, Mohenjo-daro, roughly 370 nautical miles to Harappa's west. Several important archaeological treasures were retrieved from both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, but it is the objects that relate to religious practices of those people that are of special interest to us here.

Chapter 1

Arrival of Āryans and Vedas

There is evidence that all ancient religions started with nature worship - the rain gave them food to eat and water to drink without which life was impossible, but an excess resulted in floods that washed away their houses, their cattle and food, and often, their near and dear ones. The clouds that gave them life-supporting rainwater were also associated with life-taking thunderbolts. The life-giving air could show its fury when it blew strong, sucking away men, animals and dwellings in its whirlwind. Even fire that gave them warmth in cold weather, and helped them cook their food, could destroy everything they possessed and the forests on which they depended. Similarly, the sun was good only in the right measure; in excess, it resulted in loss of life and vegetation. It was natural for people to look at the elements and forces of nature as the handiwork of supernatural forces. In fact, this is true of all religions in all civilisations and cultures.

Empedocles, the fifth century BC Greek philosopher, scientist, and healer, in his work *Tetrasomia*, talks of the four elements not only as material substances but also as spiritual essence. He associates these elements with Greek gods and goddesses - air with *Zeus*, earth with *Hera*, fire with *Hades* and water with *Nestis*. This is not very different from the ancient Persians who had *Anahita* (the immaculate one), water goddess, fertility goddess, patroness of women as well as a goddess of war portrayed as a virgin dressed in a golden cloak wearing a diamond tiara (the dove and peacock as her sacred animals); *Asman*, the god of sky; and *Atar*, the Persian god of fires and purity, son of *Ahura Mazda*.

People venerated fire all over the world, particularly in the Celtic lands and other cold areas of Europe. They considered fire the terrestrial counterpart of the sun in the heavens and held fire festivals to acknowledge the power of the sun and replicate its heat and light on earth. *Agni* was the prime deity in Vedic rituals, and like the Iranian *Atar*, the object of a prominent fire cult. In Norse mythology, its

destructive power manifests itself as the fire demon *Surt*: reducing the nine worlds to flame, then smoke, and then nothing but ashes.

Feng Po was the Chinese wind god, called the Wind Earl. He was perceived as the breath or soul of life, so they equipped *Feng Po* with tremendous powers.

The Greek mother earth, *Gaia*, the most ancient divinity born out of chaos, was the female creative principle and personification of the physical earth. As mother earth, *Gaia* is compared with similar personages in different cultures - *Prthvī* in India, *Papa* in Polynesia, and *Ki* in Mesopotamia.

Hephaestus forged the lightning boards in his smithy under Mount Aetna and was believed to return to his smithy each spring, when lightning storms were imminent, to craft a new supply. Then he gave the weapons to *Zeus*, who hurled them from the sky. *Aerun* hurled them in Russia, as *Adad* did in Mesopotamia and *Índra* used his thunder bolt *vajra* in India. These were storm gods, and the lightning bolts were their symbols.

AA Macdonell, an Indian born Sanskrit scholar and a Deputy Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University in the late seventeenth century, observed, "Religion in its widest sense includes on the one hand the conception which men entertain of the divine or supernatural powers and, on the other, that sense of the dependence of human welfare on those powers which finds its expression in various forms of worship."¹



The Indian branch of Āryans who settled in the Sapta Sindhu region (*Hepta Hindu* in Avestan) or the land of seven rivers (present day Punjab in west India and eastern part of Pakistan) around 1500-1400 BC were no different. And because the worshippers did not understand how and why the forces of nature manifested in a way that affected their lives, many times benevolently and other times harshly, they began treating these forces with awe and respect. But the unpredictability of the behaviour of nature causing hardship and damage remained an issue, something beyond their understanding and control. Sometimes they faced excessive or untimely rainfall that caused floods and destruction, and at other times good weather made plentiful food available for men and animals. They had to find a way to influence these forces. It is not surprising therefore that these people, like their brethren across continents, accepted these natural forces to be caused and controlled by superior beings. Since these superior forces could not be tamed by any known means, they had to be cajoled, flattered and pleased, just as a king, or any other dispenser of favours. So people supplicated to be blessed with sufficient rainfall and sunshine, and to be spared the fury of thunder storms, floods and draughts, and forest fires. Even though these efforts were laced with adoration,

Chapter 2

Hinduism - Dharma, not A Religion

The religion of these Indo-Āryan speaking immigrants was not Hindu religion - it was Vedism, variously called *Brahmannism* or *Vedic Brahmannism*; the three terms referring to the religious ideas and practices among Indo-Āryan speaking peoples of Ancient India. These religious ideas and practices of Āryans were based on the Vedas, and their gods were Vedic gods - very different, with a very few exceptions - from the Hindu gods as we know them now. The Vedism itself was not purely an Indo-Āryan affair, it had emerged 'as a syncretic mixture of old Central Asian and new Indo-European elements'¹ and one of the ingredients of this 'mixture' was 'Harappan heritage, incorporating some of its ritual customs (the construction of the fire altars, indoor rituals, the use of the stellar mantle [in the rajsua], ritual bathing, the fixing of festival days [of the goddess] on the equinoxes...) into their own religion.'²

The immigrant (Vedic) Āryans and the non-Āryans etc followed by their progeny and the non-Āryans, the older inhabitants of India (called *dāsas/dasu* by the Āryans), collectively came to be known as Hindus much later.

The word 'Hindu' was first used by Arabs after the eighth century AD for people living east of the river Sindhu (Persian - Hindu هندو, English - Indus), but it is the British writers of 1830 who first introduced and standardized the use of Hindu and Hinduism. The word 'Hinduism' refers specifically to the culture of the Indian civilisation of the last 2000 years, which evolved from Vedism, the religion of Indo-European people who settled in India during the last centuries of the second millennium BC. As a religion, Hinduism is a composite of diverse doctrines and refers to the faith of the Hindus.³

But this Hinduism, the Hinduism we know today, has completely transformed itself from the Vedic religion of the immigrant Āryans, the 'syncretic mixture' or 'composite of the Indo-Āryan and Harappan cultures and civilization', prompting

many scholars to call Vedic religion - ‘ancient’ Hinduism, and the Hinduism that we practice now, as ‘recent’ Hinduism. But it will be incorrect to think that these two are really different. The ideas and practices found in the Vedic texts had major influences that shaped contemporary Hinduism - indeed most of the important Hindu ceremonies have mantras from the Vedas. The Ārya Samāj movement, a reformist movement (1875) was founded with the express purpose of bringing Vedas centre stage to the Hindu way of life.

How the Vedic religion, passing through various stages, transformed itself into the Hinduism of today, is the subject matter of this book.



From magic rites, animal and tree worship, worship of rivers and personal gods, to the belief in one supreme god, mysticism and intangibility, many divergent and different concepts co-exist in Hinduism. The contemplation of the abstract in *Advaita* and the worship of *kula-devatā*, *grām-devatā* (family and village deity) and one or more of the 33-crore *devī-devtā*, all find a place, often together under the same roof, in a Hindu home. It is not unusual, for what could appear to an outsider as great dichotomy, to find many of these beliefs and practices coexisting even in a single mind.

This has been made possible, among other reasons, due to Hinduism’s belief that god transcends definition. It is repeatedly emphasised that god is beyond description, definition and comprehension. He is beyond all (sensory) perceptions and yet, present and manifests in all forms - animate and inanimate. He is omnipresent.

From this, it follows naturally to accept form, shape, and belief of countless ‘products of imaginations’ as manifestations of god.

Belief in one god does not clash with a simultaneous belief in other forms of gods. *Kuldev* and *grāmdev* (family and village deity) indeed share space with pan Indian gods and goddesses. Likewise, there is no clash in the mind of a Hindu if he or she also believes in non-Hindu god/s. In fact, the core idea of Hinduism does not lie in the belief that god exists!

Since there is no single founder of this religion, nor a central authority or a ‘book’ of teachings laying down a doctrine, when seen in conjunction with the flexibility it offers to believe or not to believe in the existence of god, it becomes evident why attempts to define Hinduism within the confines of a religion have been unsuccessful.

Any belief, once acquired in the realm of Hinduism, constantly undergoes moderation and revision, and keeps evolving; rarely is it ever completely rejected or jettisoned. For a Hindu, there are countless ways of looking at the truth - god may be present (and seen) in endless forms, in animate or inanimate objects, and even

Chapter 3

Dharma - What is it if not 'religion'?

Manu, the famous law-maker, attributed a single factor behind every action of human beings - *kāma* (desire).

“Not a single act here (below) appears ever to be done by a man free from desire; for whatever (man) does, it is (the result of) the impulse of desire.”¹

The natural desires of all human beings are sexual and emotional pleasures, and *artha*. While we all are familiar with sensual and emotional pleasures, *artha* - according to the great sage Vātsyāyana, better known worldwide for his treatise on 'the art of love making' *Kāmasūtra* - is

“The acquisition of arts, land, gold, cattle, wealth, equipages and friends.

It is, further, the protection of what is acquired, and the increase of what is protected.”²

According to this ancient text, all humans are driven by six basic impulses - desire (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), passion (*moha*), greed (*lobha*), infatuation (*mada*) and enmity (*matsarya*). If not controlled, these natural impulses called the *arishadvarga* (the six enemies) lead to evil thoughts, evil actions and evil speech. They are believed to be the root cause of conflict between human beings.

Expounding, sage Manu says -

“Action which springs from the mind, from a speech, and from the body, produces either good or evil results;

Coveting the property of others, thinking in one's heart of what is undesirable, and adherence to false (doctrines) are the three kinds of (sinful) mental actions.

Abusing others, speaking untruths, detracting from the merits of all men, and talking idly, shall be the four kinds of (evil) verbal action.

Taking what has not been given, injuring (creatures) without the sanction of the law, and holding criminal intercourse with another man's wife are declared to be the three kinds of (wicked) bodily action.

That man is called a (true) *triḍanḍin* whose mind has controlled these three, the control over the speech (*vagḍanḍa*) the control over his thoughts (*manoḍanḍa*) and the control over his body (*kayaḍanḍa*) are firmly fixed.

That man who keeps this threefold control (over himself) with respect to all created beings and wholly subjugates desire and wrath thereby assuredly gains complete success.” (MS 12.3 - 11)

But there were very few *triḍanḍin* who could voluntarily control ‘these three’; most succumbed readily - and this led to inevitable clashes in the society.

The ṛṣis and wise men were quick to realize that for the society to function justly and in an orderly fashion, this matter of exercising control over the impulses and ‘doing the right thing the right way’ - which they called the way of Dharma - could not be left to individual’s discretion. It required an external regulating mechanism which clearly lay down -

1. Righteous path, i.e. what are the right things and the right way of doing them; and

2. Consequences for the individuals who deviated from the Righteous path

These two aspects were codified as the *dharma sūtras*.

The enormous task of authoring the *dharma sūtras* was initially (600-400 BC) undertaken by sages like Āpastamba and Baudhāyana, detailing comprehensive rules that different members of society had to follow, and the expiation and punishment for their violation. A few centuries later, the *smṛtis* took this further. While Manu compiled the Manusmṛti, which later became a reference book for scholars and authors of Hindu texts in all ages, Yājñavalkya made his own very valuable contribution through Yājñavalkya Smṛti.

In this set up, every individual had the freedom to fulfil *kāma* and pursue his materialistic desires, i.e. acquire *artha*, so long as it was done adhering to the Righteous path in conformity with Dharma.

Sages warned that unacceptable or evil desire brought an individual in conflict with other individuals or the society. And the resulting disorder could disturb the peace, and cause unhappiness all around. Hence, such actions were proscribed by dharma. It was also understood that unhindered, unchecked and wholly selfish desires, if not regulated and controlled, could give the strong and the powerful a free hand to exploit the weaker members of society. Such conduct had to be controlled by a superior power, an authority that could enforce Dharma, and, if necessary, adequately punish those who transgressed.

The king was designated as the sovereign, enforcing the authority of Dharma.

The Oxford dictionary defines sovereign as ‘possessing supreme or ultimate power’, i.e. above the law, with the power to legislate, adjudicate and award punishment.

Giving unbridled power and making a king 'sovereign' - supreme, i.e. above

Appendix 1

Agniṣṭoma: Soma Yajña (Deatil Description)

Day 1 - The main events of the day are -

1. Selection of the priests - *ṛtvija-varṇa*
2. Construction of the *prācīnaavamsha vedi - shālā nirmāṇa*
3. Consecration - taking of the *dikṣā* by *yajamāna* - the *dikṣāniya iṣṭi*

The ceremony starts with *yajamāna* taking *saṃkalpa* for the *yajña*, a resolve to perform the sacrifice. The priests are ceremonially welcomed and honoured, and the sacrificer carries out a ritualistic selection of the officiating priests with the accompaniment of *varṇamantra*. Next, is *devayāchnā* rite in which the sacrificer approaches king for a piece of land suitable for *deva yajña* (sacrificial arena) with the words ‘*Dev yajñam me dehi*’. The ground must be free from salinity and holes, inclined towards the north-east, east or north, and “which lies highest, and above which no other part of the ground rises” (SB. 3.1.1). On this ground, a hall or a shed is built with the top beams running from west to east, enclosed on every side ‘lest it should rain upon’, and because the one who is consecrated “truly draws nigh (near) to the gods and becomes one of the deities. Now the gods are secreted from men and secret also is what is enclosed on every side: this is why they enclose it on every side” (SB. 3.1.8). Only a *rājan* or *vaiśya*, other than a *brahmaṇa*, are allowed to enter the hall. During this period the *yajamāna* is prohibited from speaking to a *śūdra*.

On this day, the *pragvanshālā* (a shed admeasuring 30 feet long and 22 feet wide is erected using east-oriented upper beams, also called *prācīnavamsha*, where *vedi* shaped like a woman is located and the three fires are kept), the *patnī-shālā* (a hut for the wife within *prācīnavamsha*), and the *vratasrapangār* (place where milk is warmed) are erected (ref diagram D-1).

At his home, the *yajamāna* warms on the *gārhapatya* fire the two pieces of wood (*araṇīs*) for producing the *āhavanīya* fires by friction. After extinguishing

the fires, the *yajamāna* and his wife go back to the sacrificial arena, *devayājan*, and enter the *pragvanshālā* through the eastern door. Various articles of the *yajña* are also taken to the sacrificial arena where the fire is then produced through the *araṇīs* by the *adhvaru* to ceremonially light the *gārhapatya* and *āhavanīya* fires.

The rite of consecration (*dīkṣā*) - In the afternoon, *dīkṣā* is performed. Śatapatha Brahmaṇa gives a detailed account of the *dīkṣā* ceremony. The *yajamāna* eats what he likes and then to the north of the hall in an inner enclosed place a barber shaves his hair and beard, and cuts his nails. Thereafter the *yajamāna* bathes with accompaniment of Ṛgveda mantras - “may the waters, the mothers, cleanse us!” (X.1 7.10), wears a new piece of garment that has been beaten by *pratiprasthatṛ* priest so that “whatsoever part of it an unclean woman has spun or woven will become clean” (3.1.19).

The wife, guided by the *pratiprasthatṛ* priest, also goes through these rites except cutting of the hair.

Next, everyone is seated in the *pragvanshālā* to perform *dīkṣāniyeshṭi*, the ceremony of imparting *dīkṣā*. *Agnaviṣṇu* is the deity of the ceremony; and cakes (shaped like tortoise and as large as a horse’s hoof), made of pounded rice or barley flour based on eleven potsherds of *gārhapatya*, are offered as *havis*. The *yajmanā* is then anointed with butter (*navnīta*) in a purificatory ceremony. After purifying the *yajamāna* with the *pavitṛis*, the *adhvaryu* makes him perform *audgrahana homa* - a name of the six elevatory *ājya* (*ghī*) oblations, also called *dīkṣāhuti*, in which twelve ladling oblations take place

The *adhvaryu* spreads two black deer skin (*kriṣṇamṛga-charma*) in north of *āhavanīya* with the neck parts of the skin facing east and *yajamāna* and his wife sit on these and pronounce beginning of the benediction⁴ from the white Yajurveda, “We approach you, O Gods, for a desirable good, at the opening of sacrifice; we call on you, O Gods, for holy blessings”. In a significant symbolic gesture, the sacrificer bends his fingers inwards clinching his fists, pretending to hold the ether, sky and the earth as a representation of the sacrifice. After a series of sacrificial rites, the *pratiprasthatṛ*, or another priest, announces completion of consecration by calling out “consecrated is this *Brahmaṇa*, consecrated is this *Brahmaṇa*.”

It is believed that through the consecration (*dīkṣā*) of the *agniṣṭoma*, the sacrificer simulates an embryo (*garbha*) to be reborn as one of the gods. This is based on the assumption that prior to the *dīkṣā*, he meets with ceremonial ‘death’. The clenching of the fist is in imitation of the embryo.

Thereafter the priests, as per rules, cook prescribed food for them on *gārhapatya* fires. *Yajamāna* is served in an iron pot and his wife in a copper pot. After the meal the *yajamāna* and his wife remain silent until the first star shines. The *yajamāna* fasts during the day and drinks only milk in the night before going to sleep.⁵

T-1 : Puranas



Chart showing Time period in which Hindu practices/ customs evolved (Found first mention in different Puranas).

X-axis is year in AD; Y-axis gives description of practice/ custom.

T-2 : Saṃskāra

	Gautama	Vaikh	Angiras	Apṣtam-ba	Ashva-hayan	Baud-hayan	Gobhila	Hiren.	Katyaya-na	Khadra	Manu	Yaj	Veda Vyasa	Parasar	Sank	Present Day
Description of Saṃskara														13		16
Ritu-samagama	***	***		***	***	***					***	***		***	***	***
Garbhadhama /Chaturhikarma/Niseka/ Homa	***	***		***	***	***					***	***		***	***	***
Puṃsvana	***	MOST														***
Garbhakshana	***	ALL		***	***	***								***	***	***
Simantonayana	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***								***
Vishubali																
Sosyanti-karma or homa																
Jatakarma	***	ALL														***
Uthana	***	***														***
Namakarma	***	ALL														***
Nishkrantana/ Adityadarshan/Nir-nayana											***	***		***	***	***
Karṇavedha									***				***			***
Annaprasana	***	MOST														***
Varshavardhana/Abdāpurti																***
Chaula/Chudakarma/Chudakarma	***	ALL														***
Vidyarambha																***
Upanayana	***	ALL														***
Vratas(4)/ Vedarambha		MOST														***
Keshanta/Godina		ALL														***
Samavartana/ Shana	***			***	***	***	***	***						***	***	***
Vvaha		ALL			***											***
Mahayajnas(5)		MOST				Angiras,	Gautama	& OTH-ERS								***
Utsava		***														***
Upakarma		***														***
Antyshi						***					***	***				***

A chart displaying list of Saṃskāra, and Smṛity texts (by various sages) in which Saṃskāra finds a place.

***- Indicates presence in the Smṛity

ALL – Indicates presence in all Smṛitys

MOST – Indicates presence in most of the Smṛitys

T-3 : Pūjā

Year 1918	Year 1930	Year 1985	Year 2014	Upacharas	1918	1930	1985	2018
Achmana	Achmana	Achmana	Achmana	Avahana		X	**	**
Snana	Pranayama	Pranayama	Dhyana	Asana		X	**	**
Offering Tulsi	Ganapati & other deity Adoration	Devatavandana	Asana shuddhi	Padya	scv	X	**	*
Samanya Arghya	"Hymns of praise to Ganesha, Gauri, Vishnu"	Prarthana	Manasa puja	Arghya	scv	X	**	*
Asana Shuddhi	Co-ordinates etc	Deshkaloccharana - Samkalpa	Ganaesha Smarana	Achmana	scv	X	**	*
Pushpa shuddhi	Samkalpa	Ganapati Smarana	Samkalpa	Panchamrata snana		X	**	*
Driving away elements	Coordinates etc	Asanavidhi	Shanta Pujan	Gandhdaka snana			**	*
Bhuta shuddhi	Contemplation on Ganapati	Nyasa	Shankha Pujan	Shudhdoka snana			**	*
Pranayama	Asanavidhi	Kalasha Puja	Kalasha Puja	Achmana			**	*
Panch Deva Puja	Nyasa	Shankha Puja	Panch Deva Smaran	Vastra- Upavasrea		X	**	*
All Deva Puja	"Invocation of Rivers to jar & Chandana, flower etc offerings"	Ghanta Puja	Upacharas	Abhushana or yajnopavita		X	**	*
Nyasa	Invocation Conch shell, Bell etc	Dipa Puja	Arati	Achmana				
Gurupranama	Sprinkling of self & material	Prokshana	Shankha bhramana	Chandana	scv	X	**	*
Dhyana-Narayana	Dhyana of Panch Devas	Dhyana	Pradakshina	Pushpamala	scv	X	**	*
Second Dhyana	Upacharas	Upacharas	Mantra Pushpanjali	Tulsidala Manjari				
Special Arghya	Final benediction	Prarthana	Namaskar	Dhoop		X	**	*
Upacharas		Samkalpapurti	Charamrat paan	Deep	scv	X	**	*
Japa		Tirthagrahana	Atonement	Naivaitya	scv	X	**	*
Nivedana			Prasad grahana	Achmana	scv	X	**	*
Pranama				Tarpana	scv	X	**	*
				Karpoor Arati-Sta vapatha		X		*
				Rituphala				
				Tambula	scv	X	**	*
				Namaskara/Dakshina		X	**	*
				Pradkshina		X	**	*
				Visarjana/ mantra-push-panjali			**	**

Chart showing how Actions in Puja changed in last 100 years - from year 1918 thru 2014. Upachara column indicates how upacharas changed in corresponding years.

Year 1918 - Vasu Srisa C(2008). The Daily Practice of Hindus. New Delhi. Cosmo Publications. p128ff.
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Upachars : scv indicates upacharas in 1918, x indicates upacharas in 1930, ** indicates upacharas in 1985, and * indicates upacharas in 2014.

References and Notes

Prologue

Are we Āryans?

The Beginning: From Mehrgarh to Surkotada Horse

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Chapter 2

Hinduism – Dharma, not A Religion

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