

MODULE - IV

Vedas and Upanishads & Puranas

1) The Vedas :

- The term **Veda** originates from a Sanskrit word **Vid** meaning to know, to gain, to exist, to discern.
- **Veda** primarily means knowledge, the Supreme knowledge.
- It also means the sacred lore of the Vedic literature and the Vedic texts containing that knowledge.
- According to the Indian Orthodox belief, **Vedic literature is not of human origin(Apauruseya)**
- These texts were revealed to the ancient **Seers(rsis)**. They were the people who discovered the truths, to whom the Vedas were revealed.
- The Vedic texts are traditionally regarded as eternal, and eternal truths are only revealed to the seers and not to everybody.

2) Shruti :

- Now the Vedic Mantras seen by the seers were imparted to their disciples who memorized them and were handed down through generations.
- The Vedic mantras were only heard by the disciples. As it was only heard, it was known as **shruti**.
- The art of writing was either not known or not used to preserve its holy character

3) Compilation of Vedas :

- Sage **Krsna Dvaipayana** felt the necessity of compiling the vast floating mass of Vedic texts which only existed as oral traditions.
- He compiled and divided the floating mass of Vedic Literature into four **Vedas—Rg Veda, Sama Veda, Atharva Veda and Yajur Veda**.
- He entrusted four of his disciples with propagation of the four Vedas.
- The **RgVeda** is the most ancient and presupposes none of the other Vedic texts while all other Vedic texts presuppose the **RgVeda**.

4) Four genres of Vedas :

Vedic literature consists of texts belonging to four literary genres: *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanisads*.

A Samhita is mostly a collection of Mantras, the sacred formulas or prayers or benedictions.

- **The RgVeda Samhita** contains only verses. It is a book of poems.
- **The SamaVeda Samhita** is a book of Melody, the verses on which the melodies are sung. So this is the Veda of music.
- **The YajurVeda Samhita** is a collection of ritual Mantras, it contains both prose and verse, but prose Mantras are predominant.
- **The AtharvaVeda Samhita** contains both prose and verse, but mostly verse.

5) The RgVeda Samhita :

- The **RgVeda Samhita** happens to be the most important, most ancient, most honored and most authoritative of the Vedic texts.
- In fact, it is the oldest literary monument in Indo-European languages.
- Though understanding the Vedic rituals is as a principle essential for understanding the Vedas, the **RgVeda Samhita** can be understood to a great extent even without reference to Vedic rituals.

6) Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanisads :

- A Brahmana is the ritual application of the Mantras that are present in the *Samhitas*.
- Each of the *Samhitas* is supposed to have a **Brahmana**.
- Though primarily relating to Vedic rituals, **Brahmana** texts contain many observations that form the basis of our understanding ritual, religion, history, social and political conditions of the Vedic period.
- The **Brahmanas** relate the ritual micro cosmos and the sacrificer's life and body with the macro cosmos. Thus the universe is reduced to strict ritually controlled order.

- The name 'Brahmana' is derived from the word Brahman which originally means a prayer. There is little philosophy in these, though some philosophical ideas flash here and there in course of some speculative digressions.
- **The Aranyakas** describe symbolical significance of the sacrifice and some ways of meditation connected therewith. They represent transition from pure ritual to the world of Supreme knowledge, that is, to say the Aranyakas mark the transition from the ritualistic to the philosophic thought.
- The concluding portions of the Aranyakas are called the upanisads. These are intensely philosophical and spiritual and may be rightly regarded as the cream of the Vedic philosophy. The central theme of **Upanisads** is the highest principle, the Supreme Consciousness, the **Brahman**. And the relationship of man and the universe with this **Brahman**.

7) Karmakanda & Jnanakanda :

Vedic literature is traditionally divided into two parts: Karmakanda and Jnanakanda.

The Mantras and the Brahmanas are called the Karmakanda or the portion dealing with the sacrificial actions, and the Aranyakas and the upanisads are called the Jnanakanda or the portion dealing with knowledge. Some people include the Aranyakas in the Karmakanda. Really speaking, they represent a transition from the Karmakanda to the Jnanakand. The upanisads are also known as 'Vedanta' or the 'end of the Veda', firstly because they are literally the concluding portion, the end of the Vedas, and secondly because they are the essence, the cream, the height, of the vedic philosophy.

8) Karmakanda :

- The Vedic gods are objects of worship and mode of worship is sacrifice. There is no image, no idols, no temples, only a fire was kindled and oblations meant for different deities were offered into the sacrificial fire in accompaniment of chanting of Mantras. **Agni**, the fire is believed to be the messenger between the world of humans and the world of gods.
- The Vedic sacrifices were also divided into three types depending upon the principal oblations
 1. Isti: cereals or milk products
 2. Animal sacrifice: some limbs of animals
 3. Soma sacrifice: juice of the Soma plant.

9) Jnanakanda :

- Jnanakanda deals with knowledge of the Supreme being ,**The Brahman**.
- Jnanakanda, specially represented by the Upanisads, lays stress on the realization of the ultimate unity of individual souls with the all pervading Supreme soul, **The Brahman**
- The realization that all things have the same essence removes the barriers that separate us from others. Thus the upanisadic idea of unity generates tolerance and love and dispels hatred.
- The expression of oneness is the basis of Hindu ethics and morality.

10) The essence of Vedic teachings:

- It is very interesting to note that:

in **Samhitas** and **Brahmanas**, prayers to various Gods-Indra, Varuna, Soma, Agni, Mitra, Visnu and others exist and ritual offerings are to be made to them,

while

Upanisads speak of the Supreme soul ,**The Brahman**.

- **So the essence of Vedic teachings:**
- Neither mere plurality nor mere unity, but a combination of these two:
- unity behind apparent plurality of Gods;
- similarly unity behind the apparent diversity in this world.

11) Karmakanda Versus Jnanakanda :

- Vedic ritual is a weak raft, in comparison with Supreme knowledge.
- Vedic rituals has results, it can lean one up to heaven-but that far and no further. Then one has to come to the cycle of birth and death, whereas Supreme knowledge will take one beyond this cycle of life and death.
- The realization of the Ultimate Truth is a very difficult thing and not everybody is prepared to receive instruction on the Supreme Being. And so Karmakanda is there, so that many can perform the rituals, get their results, achieve purification of mind which will gradually make them ready for understanding and realizing higher truths.

12) Three stages of attaining supreme knowledge :

There are three stages of attaining supreme knowledge-*savana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*.

- One has to listen to the scripture-*savana*.
- He has to ascertain the meaning by applying logic-*manana*.
- Then he has to concentrate on it, not for intellectual understanding but for realizing this Truth in life-*nididhyasana*

13) Concepts in Vedas :

(i) Rta :

The word **Rta**, a heritage from Indo-Iranian tradition ,has a **threefold meaning**:

- **firstly-cosmic order,**
- **secondly –moral order and**
- **thirdly-ritual order.**
- From verses of RgVeda we find that Rta or the cosmic order was the first principle to emanate at the time of creation. This cosmic order reigns supreme over the whole universe, controls everything and everybody, animate and inanimate.
- The gods do not control this principle, on the contrary they are controlled by Rta. There are Gods like Mitra and Varuna, who enforce this cosmic order, and are called guardians of Rta, but they themselves are within the control of this principle.
- **It is because of this principle world is a cosmos and not a chaos.**
- **The second concept of the Rta, the moral order** is a strong binding over the Vedic Hindus.

The Gods, who are said to be the guardians of the cosmic order are also said to be the guardians of moral order .They ensure the strict maintenance of morality and any departure from moral order are subjected to severe punishment.

- **The third meaning, the ritual order** is also a strict binding during sacrifices. A definite order has to be followed in Vedic rituals and any transgression of the same may be disastrous.

(ii) Satya and Dharma :

- In the later Vedic literatures, like in Upanisads the moral order was signified by the terms **Satya** and **Dharma**. **Satya** means truth. **Dharma** means a sum total of social, ethical and religious values, that what is right, virtuous and accordingly ethical; it is one's duty, responsibility, imperative and therefore moral obligation.

(iii) Transmigration of soul :

- Existence in some form after our death is presupposed in the Vedas. If death means end of everything, one cannot enjoy the good results of the rituals performed and go to heaven, as promised by the Vedas.
- Upanisads make it clear that **Atman**, the individual soul survives death, and result of action follow us even beyond death.
- Since it is found that one does not enjoy in one life all the results of one's actions, good or bad, the results are believed to be stored, only to be enjoyed in a subsequent birth.
- **The theory of transmigration of soul is very deeply rooted in Indian belief.**

(iv) Doctrine of Karma :

- The Samhitas and Brahmanas imply this and Upanisads enunciate in clearer terms the doctrine of Karma.
- The law of Karma is the counter-part in the moral world of the physical law of uniformity. It is the law of the conservation of moral energy. According to the principle of Karma there is nothing uncertain or capricious in the moral world., We reap what we sow.
- He whose work is good becomes good; he whose works are evil becomes evil. One becomes holy by holy action, evil by evil action. As is a man's desires, so is his resolve; as is his resolve, so is the work he does; whatever work he does, so is his attainment.
- Upanisadic doctrine of Karma has exerted great influence on ancient Indian thought. Since man is the architect of his own fate, he should not commit any sin, but do virtuous deeds.
- One cannot change one's previous action, but one may influence the future life by means of good action in this life.

- Thus the ancient Indian tradition teaches patience, tolerance and importance of good action.

(v) Chaturvarna system :

- Ancient Chaturvarna system has later disintegrated to caste system, which is definitely a degradation and mockery of the original scheme.
- The ancient idea was that man falls by his nature into four types - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras - according to *guna* and *karma*-qualities and activities, what was ideal code of conduct for one was not the same for the other. This division of labour led to the origin of the caste system. But it must be mentioned here that in the Vedic period this system of caste was not so rigid and one could change his caste with the change of his occupation. For example, Parshuram, a Brahman, became a Kshatriya because of the change of his vocation.
- In the RgVeda, in the tenth Mandala (90.12), there are references to the four fold class division(Chaturvarna system)

(vi) Varnasrama Dharma :

Even for an individual, one and the same thing was not regarded as Dharma in all his stages of life(Ashrama).

Vedas divided human life into four stages: (i) Brahmacharin or student, when he is expected to study one or more Vedas; (ii) the Grhasta or the householder, when he has to fulfill the duties mentioned in the scriptures, social and sacrificial; (iii) the Vanaprastha or the hermit, when the devotee spends his time in fasting and penance; and (iv) the Sannyasin or the ascetic, who has no fixed abode. He is without any possessions or property and longs for union with God.

According to the Vedas what is a Dharma for a brahmacharin or a sannyasin (like begging)is prohibited for the householder. The code of conduct is a settled one. It is settled according to one's position in the society and one's position in a particular stage of life. (Varnasrama Dharma).

(vii) Virtues :

- The virtues that have been most praised in the Vedas are duty, truth, purity, harmony, hospitality, self-restraint, charity.
- These virtues mostly preached in Vedic literature.

- They were further exemplified in our great Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and Puranas and Upapuranas through myths and legends.

(viii) Five debts :

According to the Vedas we are born in debt to five different agencies and we must try to repay these debts to lead a successful human life.

(a) **we are indebted to the Gods** for they have created the things like air, water, sunshine etc, which are indispensable for life. We should repay the debts to Gods by performing sacrifices to the Gods.

(b) **we are indebted to the Ancient Seers(Rishis)** for the stock of knowledge that has been handed down from generations to generations. This should be repaid by propagating the knowledge, so that the knowledge is not lost.

(c) **One has debts to ones forefathers** for ones very existence which should be paid by begetting children so that the continuity of their family is not disturbed, and also by performing the ancestral rites in forms of *Sraddha*.

(d) **We are indebted to human beings in general**, because nobody can live in this world without the co operation of fellow human beings. This should be repaid by charity and hospitality.

(e) **Finally we are indebted to all other beings in general**, and this has to be repaid by self restraint as to not harm and disturb them.

He who discharges all his duties is the good man.

(ix) Purusarthas, The Goals of Human Life :

According to the Vedas, human goals of life should be four fold. They are

Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha

- **Dharma** which means a sum total of social, ethical and religious values, a proper code of conduct.
- **Artha** means any type of prosperity or possession.
- **Kama** means all sorts of pleasure that we seek.
- **Moksha** means spiritual liberation, liberation from the eternal cycle of life and death.

The ancient Indian tradition did accept desire and enjoyment, material, economic and aesthetic needs of man (**Artha** and **Kama**).

At the same time it noted the importance of **Dharma** as the controlling force to regulate the life of an individual and the society, as unbridled pursuit of Artha and Kama may bring disastrous results.

The highest goal of life is set as **Moksa**, the liberation. This can arise only from knowing one's self identical with the Supreme self. One who has achieved liberation is free from all shortcomings, passion, greed, hatred and the like.

(14) **Upanisadas :**

Upanisads form the fourth genre of the Vedas, whose central theme is the highest principle, the Supreme Consciousness, the **Brahman**. And the relationship of man and the universe with this **Brahman**.

It is also called the **Vedantas**, as it appears at the final part of the Vedas.

Like the **Vedas**, the authorship of the **Upanisads** are also not attributed to any mortal man. The word 'upanisad' is derived from the root 'sad' which means, (i) to sit down, (ii) to destroy and (iii) to Loosen. 'Upa' means 'nearby' and 'ni' means 'devotedly'. The word therefore means the sitting down of the disciple near his teacher in a devoted manner to receive instruction about the highest Reality which loosens all doubts and destroys all ignorance of the disciple. Gradually the word came to signify any secret teaching about Reality and it is used by the **upanisads** in this sense (**Rahasya** or **Guhya Vidya**). The teaching being the highest was imparted at private sittings only to the qualified disciples.

Each of the four **Vedas** contain several number of the **Upanisads** totaling to 108.i.e.

- Rgveda:10
- Samveda:19
- SuklaYajurveda: 32
- Krshn Yajurveda:16
- Atharvaveda:31

The no 18 and 108 is noted as very auspicious and carries special significance for the Vedic Hindus

Of these 108 Upanisads ,only 10 are counted as the most ancient and the most Valuable. Sage Sankaracarya wrote commentaries on these 10 Upanisads. The ten Upanisads are :

- (i) Isha
- (ii) Kena
- (iii) Katha
- (iv) Prashna
- (v) Mundaka
- (vi) Mandukya
- (vii) Taittiriya
- (viii) Aitareya
- (ix) Chhandogya
- (x) Brhadaranyaka

(15) Vedic literature :

- Vedic literature is a collection which is not homogenous. They vary in date of origin and also in literary standard.
- Literary excellence is found mainly in some parts of the Rg veda and Atharva veda Samhitas.
- In form, poetry appears earlier than prose. The early prose is for the main part which is ritualistic in nature.
- In the post Vedic age, like in the epics, Puranas, Smriti Samhitas, verse retained its predominance in literature.
- Later Sanskrit Stotra literature, composed in honor of various Puranic and Tantric gods and goddess, also vary in literary merit.
- The practice of the Vedic seers of praising different gods as the highest, a tendency known as Henotheism, is also noticed in later devotional poetry.

- The Vedic hymns mainly centre around the Vedic Gods, who are praised or directly addressed.
- Some hymns deal with social customs. The wedding hymns of Rgveda(10.85) are still chanted in Hindu marriage.
- There are secular poetry, dealing with human beings and natural objects.
- Nature is viewed as not only a natural phenomenon, but as divinity manifested in nature.
- Several rivers are personified and praised as deities. The most important example is river Sarasvati.

(16) Vedangas And Upa-Vedas :

The word 'Vedanga' comes from the terms 'Veda' (Sacred Knowledge) and 'Anga' (Limb). The Vedangas are supposed to be preparations for a study of the Vedas. These Angas or limbs are six in number.

The **Vedanga** texts are not revealed texts, they are ascribed to human authors.

The six disciplines are :

- **Siksa(Phonetics)**:teaches the rules of correct pronunciation of the mantras
- **Chandas(Metric)**:deals with Vedic metres
- **Vyakarana(Grammar)**:deals with correctness of words
- **Nirukta(Etymology)**:deals with etymology of obscure words
- **Jyotisa(Astronomy)**:ascertains the exact time for the ritual

Kalpa(Ritual procedure):deals with actual ritual procedure

Beside, there are some other texts known as upa-Vedas or subsidiary Vedas. They treat secular subjects, namely, medicine, war, music, art and architecture. The important upa-Vedas are (i) Ayurveda, dealing with medicine (ii) Dhanurveda, dealing with the art of warfare, (iii) Ghandharvaveda dealing with the art of music, (iv) ~~Shilpaveda~~, dealing with art and architecture.

(17) Fundamental ideas of the Vedic texts :

The fundamental of the Veda and other Vedic texts are:

- There is supernatural existence beyond our worldly existence
- There are divine beings
- It is possible and beneficial to enter into communion with the supernatural world of the gods
- Our existence does not end in death
- There is result of every action done in this life
- The individual soul migrate from one body to another according to such results
- There is Ultimate Unity behind plurality and diversity
- The highest goal of human life is to have direct experience of the individual soul as identical with the Supreme soul

(18) Puranas :

- They are old books of the Hindus, as is clear from their very name 'Purana'.
- As a literary work, *Purana* is described as "Old narratives", dealing with history of some kings or divine being-gods or demigods.
- The *Puranas*, in a deeper sense, preach the Vedic ideals through stories. They preach the duties and rites to be observed by men in their respective *varna*(caste) and *ashrama*(station of life)-*varnasrama dharma*.
- *The Puranas* are looked upon as the Vedas, as they preach the dharma of the Vedas to those men and women, who are not entitled to study the Vedas.
- Indian life is guided mostly by the ideals preached in the *Puranas*.
- Puranas are moral and religious guides, sources of law and records of social and political history of India.
- Indian philosophical schools, like Samkhya and Yoga, are discussed in the Puranas.
- Image worship-concept of many images of different gods and goddess is the contribution of the Puranas.

- Art, architecture, music dance, literature,etc. are directly or indirectly influenced by the Puranas
- There are five topics which are found in all the known Puranas:
 - 1. Sarga**-Creation of the Universe
 - 2. Pratisarga**-The periodical destruction and renewal of the world
 - 3. Vamsha**-Geneology of gods and sages
 - 4. Manvantara**-The change of the rule of Manu
 - 5. Vamsanucharita**-The history of the dynasties belonging to the Sun and the Moon.

Number of Puranas :

- Eighteen Puranas and eighteen Upapuranas.
- Upapuranas might be imitation of the original and older Puranas-but the contents of these are in no way minor or less valuable
- Eighteen Puranas are classified according to three cosmic qualities-Satva, Rajas & Tamas. These qualities are manifested by three gods-Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva respectively
- Satvika Puranas are: Vishnu, Bhagavata, Naradiya, Garuda, Padma and Varaha.
- Rajas Puranas: are: Brahma, Brahmanda, Bhavishya, Brahmavaivarta, Markandeya and Vimana
- Tamasa Puranas are: Shiva, Linga, Skanda, Agni, Matsya and Kurma

Overview of Indian Art and Literature (Dance, Music, Natyashastra)

Indian art: Its objective

- Indian art is a vast conglomeration of expressive forms: dance, music, theatre, painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, etc.
- **Interesting Feature of Indian art.** All the artistic creations are mere offerings, created in appreciation of the God's handiwork.

Philosophy of Indian aesthetic theories :

- For all traditional Indian artists, irrespective of the artistic vocation, art is a combination of skill, culture, discipline and meditation (*dhyana*).
- The *dhyana* in case of an *artist* is slightly different from that of *yogi*;
- the *yogi* shuts out the world and looks inside, while the *artist's* voyage begins with indulging in visual and auditory opulence all round him.
- The *artists* voyage leads to perception, cognition, assimilation, vision, imagination and finally recreation of natures' bliss.
- Each artistic creation thus is an expression of appreciation of God's creation.
- The artist attains the state of immense pleasure.
- He transmute the joyous sensation to whoever comes in contact with him .
- Thus both the artist and the viewer is transcended to a state of bliss.

Rasa :

- **Rasa :** the essential sap that is transported from the creator to the connoisseur, both experiencing a momentary taste of joyful bliss.
- In all creative art form, the artist establishes a relation to his viewer/listener/reader with all inputs of accumulated knowledge, experience and imagination where his perception of essential truth is transmitted.

Rasas : Its classifications

- In Indian aesthetic theories there are nine **rasas**, the essential emotions that exists in Indian art forms. They are:
sringara(erotic),

hasya(comic),
karuna(pathetic),
rudra(furious),
vira(heroic),
bibhatsa(odious),
bhyanaka(terrible),
adbhuta(marvellous).

- The ninth rasa is the *santa rasa*, which only one can experience after going through all the other eight *rasas*
- in addition to the nine Rasas, two more appeared later (esp. in literature):
Additional rasas:
 - *Vātsalya* parental Love
 - *Bhakti* Spiritual Devotion
- The most significant aspect of this concept of rasa is that it encompasses the entire gamut of emotional experience that a human life can undergo but in a way holds the key to the doorway of *moksha* or complete release from the life cycle.
- Human body is conceived as the abode of God, so in sculpture and painting, human form is envisioned as a vehicle of artistic appreciation. In the dance form of creative art, the figure of the dancer itself turns into an emblematic offering to the innate rhythm at the core of creation.

Holistic approach of Indian artistic expressions :

- there is a holistic approach in the design of *rasas*.
- In the classical plays and *Kavyas*, people from all strata of the society are well represented; there are thieves and beggars, prostitutes and jesters, singers and artists.
- The sculptor abounds with figures of dancers to mendicants, cultivators to kings.
- The flora and fauna of nature is aptly depicted in paintings and sculptures and also in literary works.

- The basic notes of Indian music owe their origin to sounds of different birds and animals.
- Different hand movements of the dance form refer to the natural world.

Nātya Śāstra

- The **Nātya Śāstra** is a Sanskrit text on the performing arts.
- The text is attributed to sage Bharata,
- its first complete compilation is dated to between 200 BCE and 200 CE but estimates vary between 500 BCE and 500 CE
- The text consists of 36 chapters with a cumulative total of 6000 poetic verses describing performance arts

Chhanda of Natya Sastra and later texts

- Predominant number of its verses are in Anustubh meter (4x8, or exactly 32 syllables in every shloka)
- some verses are in Arya meter (a morae-based Sanskrit meter),
- some texts are in prose particularly in chapters 6, 7 and 28.

The text has inspired secondary literature such as Sanskrit bhasya (reviews and commentaries) by Abhinavagupta (10th century)

The subjects covered by *Natya Sastra* :

- The subjects covered by **Natya Sastra** include
 - i. dramatic composition,
 - ii. structure of a play and the construction of a stage to host it,
 - iii. genres of acting, body movements, make up and costumes,
 - iv. role and goals of an art director,
 - v. the musical scales, musical instruments and the integration of music with art performance

The *Nātya Śāstra* is notable as an ancient encyclopedic treatise on the arts, one which has influenced dance, music and literary traditions in India, from ancient times till today.

It is also notable for its aesthetic *Rasa* theory, which asserts that entertainment is a desired effect of performance arts but not the primary goal, and that the primary goal is to transport the individual in the audience into another parallel reality, full of wonder, where he experiences the essence of his own consciousness, and reflects on spiritual and moral questions

Rasas in Natya Sastra

Bharata Muni enunciated the eight Rasas in the *Nātyasāstra*, an ancient work of dramatic theory. Each rasa, according to Nātyasāstra, has a presiding deity and a specific colour.

- **Śrungāram** (Erotic)Love, attractiveness. Presiding deity: Vishnu. Colour: light green
- **Hāsyam** Laughter, mirth, comedy. Presiding deity: Pramata. Colour: white
- **Raudram** Fury. Presiding deity: Rudra. Colour: red
- **Kārunyam** Compassion, mercy. Presiding deity: Yama. Colour: grey
- **Bibhatsam** Disgust, aversion. Presiding deity: Shiva. Colour: blue
- **Bhayānakam** Horror, terror. Presiding deity: Kala Ratri. Colour: black
- **Veeram** Heroic mood. Presiding deity: Indra. Colour: Saffron
- **Adbhutam** Wonder, amazement. Presiding deity: Brahma. Colour: yellow
- **Śāntam** Peace or tranquility. deity: Vishnu. Colour: perpetual white

Contents of Early chapters of Natya Sastra :

- The text opens with the mythical genesis and history of drama,
- mentions the role of different Hindu deities in various aspects of the arts,
- recommended Puja (consecration ceremony) of a stage for performance arts.
- describes the theory of Tāṇḍava dance of Shiva,

- the theory of rasa, of bhāva, expression, gestures, acting techniques, basic steps, standing postures.

Chapters 6 to 17 of Natya Sastra :

- Chapters 6 and 7** present the *Rasa* theory on aesthetics in performance arts,
- chapters 8 to 13** are dedicated to the art of acting.
- Chapters 10 to 13** deals with stage instruments such as methods for holding accessories, weapons, relative movement of actors and actresses, scene formulation, stage zones, conventions and customs.
- The **chapters 14 to 20** are dedicated to plot and structure of underlying text behind the performance art. This sections include the theory of Sanskrit prosody, musical meters and the language of expression.
- Chapter 17** presents the attributes of poetry and figures of speech

Chapters 18 to 35 of Natya Sastra :

- chapter 18** presents the art of speech and delivery in the performance arts. The text lists ten kinds of play, presents its theory of plot, costumes, and make-up.
- The text dedicates several chapters exclusively to women in performance arts, with chapter 24 on female theater.
- The training of actors** is presented in chapters 26 and 35 of the text.

Chapter 28 to 36 of Natya Sastra :

- The theory of music, techniques for singing, and music instruments are discussed over chapters 28 to 34.
- The text in its final chapters describes the various types of dramatic characters, their roles and need for team work, what constitutes an ideal troupe, closing out the text with its comments of the importance of performance arts on culture.

The contents of the *Natyashastra*, are thus :

- in part theatrical manual,
- part philosophy of aesthetics,
- part mythological history,
- part theology.

THE INDO-ARYANS

4. The Puranas – They are old books of the Hindus, as is clear from their very name ‘Purana’. They are eighteen in number, and each has five sections. As has already been mentioned (in Chapter I) the fifth and the last section dealing with the history of old dynasties of kings (*Vansa-Charita*) is important for the purpose of history. Though we cannot believe in all that is given in the Puranas, yet with patience the historians have been able to get important information from them and fill many left-out gaps.

5. The Epics – The two great Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, throw a good deal of light on some great heroes of the Aryans. It is from their study that we are able to know a good deal about the social, religious, economic and political life of the later Vedic Aryans.

6. Dharma Shastras – The Dharma Shastras like Manu Smriti, Vishnu Smriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, and Narada Smriti, etc., have proved very useful to us in forming an idea of the laws and judicial procedure of the Aryans. Of all the Dharma Shastras the *Manu Smriti* is the most important. In it the four main castes (*Varnas*) and their particular duties and special privileges have been explained fully. Not only this, a man’s life has been divided into four stages (*Ashramas*) and the duties that he has to perform in each stage are vividly described. A good deal of light is also thrown on the laws of inheritance, duties of kings and subjects, laws and punishments, partnership and loans, and various other subjects dealing with general law and judicial procedure of the people in ancient India.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

(A) **Early Vedic Literature.** The Vedas (Rigvedas, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Artharvaveda), the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads.

(B) **Later Vedic Literature.** The Sutras (Srauta-Sutras, Griha-Sutras and Dharma Sutras); Vedangas and Upavedas; Six Schools of Indian Philosophy (Sankhya Shastra of Kapila, Yoga-Shastra of Patanjali, Nayaya Shastra of Gautama, Vaisheshik Shastra of Kanad, Purva Mimansa of Jaimini and Uttar Mimansa of Vyasa); the Puranas; the Epics and Dharma Shastras including Manu Smriti.

SECTION 4

The Epics : The Ramayana and The Mahabharata

The period that lies between the Rigvedic period and the rise of Buddhism in India, i.e. 2000 to 700 B.C. – has been designated by some as the “Later Vedic Period” and by some as the “Epic Age”. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two Epics, occupy an important place in the literature of the Later Vedic period. In these Epics the exploits of the great heroes of the Aryans have been fully described.

(A) The Ramayana

Age – It is a general belief that Ramayana was originally composed by

Rishi Valmiki in Sanskrit. In this book the great deeds of Ramchandra of Ayodhya have been vividly described. The Ramayana in its present form contains about 24,000 verses (*Slokas*) and has seven cantos. It is very difficult to say when this great Epic was written and what particular period of history is mentioned in it. The Indians believe that this book was composed about 3000 B.C. but most of the European critics do not agree with this view. According to Winternitz¹ this voluminous work is not the result of one age and was most probably written between 400 B.C. to 200 A.D. But one thing is quite certain that though this book may have been composed much later (i.e. 400 B.C. to 200 A.D.) the subject matter mentioned in it refers to much earlier times. The story mentioned in the Ramayana became so popular that it was translated into many foreign as well as Indian languages. Perhaps the most important of all such works is "Ramcharit Manas" of Goswami Tulsi Das, the immortal poet of the Hindi literature.

~~✓ Story of the Ramayana~~ – The story of the Ramayana is too well-known to be recounted here, but still its main threads are given here for the sake of its better understanding.

Once in Ayodhya there ruled a king named Dashratha of the Ikshvaku clan. In his old age, the king expressed his desire to install Rama, his eldest son by queen Kaushalaya, as his apparent (or *Yuvaraja*), after the young prince was married to Sita, the daughter of King Janaka of Videha. But soon the Palace intrigues set in. The jealousy of Kaikeyi, another queen of Dashratha and step-mother of Rama, drove Rama into exile for a period of fourteen years and secured the throne for her son Bharata. Rama went to the forest along with Sita, his beloved wife, and his third brother Lakshmana, who voluntarily shared the exile of his brother.

During his wandering Rama came into conflict with Rakshasas. Some of them were closely associated with Ravana, the mighty king of Lanka. As Rama killed a large number of Rakshasas, Ravana got enraged and in order to avenge his relatives he carried away Sita to Lanka (Ceylon). With the aid of Sugriva, Hanumana and other Vanara chiefs, Rama invaded Lanka, defeated the Rakshasas, killed Ravana and recovered Sita. As the period of fourteen years of exile was now over, Rama returned to Ayodhya and cordially received by Bharata. Rama was then crowned king and he reigned prosperously for many years.

The Ramayana thus gives us an excellent picture of the struggle of the Aryans with the Non-Aryans and their extension towards the eastward and southward directions. "But it is not appreciated for its supposed history," remarks Dr. R. K. Mookerji "but as a picture of perfect characters like the ideal father, son, brother, husband, friend or devotee, appealing to millions upto this day."

1. Winternitz : *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I.

Is the Ramayana Historical? - To an orthodox Hindu all that is given in the Ramayana is historically true which actually happened thousands of years ago. But the western scholars do not agree to this view. Macdonell and Jacobi, for instance, regard the Ramayana as a poetical and fanciful creation based on mythology. Similarly, Dr. V. A. Smith¹ remarks, "The poem seems to me to be essentially a work of imagination, probably founded on vague traditions of kingdom of Kosala and its capital Ayodhya." But such views of the European scholars are difficult to accept. "There is no doubt" remarks Dr. Tripathi, "that the Ramayana is thickly interwoven with mythological fiction, but to discredit the historicity of Rama altogether appears to be a wide assumption." Similarly, the kings like Janaka and Dashratha and places like Kosala, Ayodhya, Videha, etc., are real persons and places, whose authenticity has been corroborated from other sources including Buddhists and Jain literature.

(B) The Mahabharata

Age - The Mahabharata at present contains 100,000 'slokas' or verses and is divided into eighteen books with the 'Harivansha' attached to it at the end as supplement. The orthodox people believe that his great work was compiled by one author Rishi Vyasa. The difference in language, style and contents would, however, suggest that the Mahabharata cannot be the production of one man and one age. It appears that in the beginning it was not such a voluminous work and many new things might have been added in it later on. Like the Ramayana nothing definite can be said about the age and period of history of the Mahabharata. After a great deal of investigation Winternitz came to the conclusion that the Mahabharata cannot have received its present form earlier than the 4th century B.C. and later than 4th century A.D. But the events mentioned in it took place many centuries before its compilation in the book-form. According to Dr. R.K. Mookerji the Mahabharata war took place near about 1400 B.C. This view is now accepted by most of the scholars.

Story of the Mahabharata - Long long ago there ruled in Hastinapur a Kuru King by the name of Vichitravira. He had two sons Dhritarashtra and Pandu. As Dhritarashtra was blind so the younger brother Pandu succeeded to the throne. But he soon died leaving behind his five sons, Yudhishthira, Bhimsena, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Dhritarashtra, did every possible thing for the betterment of his nephews and gave them high education. He even nominated Yudhishthira, a man of rare abilities as his heir-apparent. This naturally roused the jealousy of his hundred sons and particularly Duryodhana, the eldest, could not tolerate the rising popularity of his cousins. He set afoot various plots one after the other in order to destroy them, but the Pandavas escaped unhurt.

At last the Pandavas, finding their lives quite insecure, left the capital in the guise of Brahmacharis. During their wandering they reached the Panchala

1. V. A. Smith : *Oxford History of India*

territory and won the hand of the king's daughter, Draupadi, in a "Swayamvara" where Arjuna won the archery contest. With the help of the Panchala king the Pandavas were able to get a share of their paternal kingdom, they founded a new capital Indraprastha near modern Delhi and began to increase their power with a rapid spread. But Duryodhana was ever busy in planning the downfall of the Pandavas. He arranged a gambling match and invited Yudhishtira to play a game of dice where the latter staked and lost everything – kingdom, his wife Draupadi, wealth – with the result the Pandavas were forced to go into exile for thirteen years. After the expiry of the period, the Pandavas demanded back their kingdom but Duryodhana gave a blank reply and refused to part with even a particle of earth. This stubbornness on the part of Duryodhana led to the Great War which lasted for eighteen days on the historic field of Kurukshetra. Arjuna, in the beginning refused to fight against his own kith and kin. It is at this stage Lord Krishna gave the divine message to Arjuna, which is now contained in 'Bhagavad Gita' (song of the Lord). The war ended with the complete destruction of the Kauravas and their allies though the Pandavas also suffered heavy losses. Thus the victory though complete was won at a very high cost. The Pandavas then performed the horse-sacrifice to celebrate their success. Yudhishtira then became the king but soon he along with his brothers left the kingdom in the hands of Parikshit, Arjuna's grandson, and retired to the Himalayas.

Is the Mahabharata Historical ? – European scholars hold that even though the Mahabharata is based on genuine tradition of a Great War and some of the actors mentioned therein are historic figures, the various poets and editors have transformed the whole thing to such an extent that nothing truly historic is left in it. As for example, in the Mahabharata the Pandavas are mentioned close relatives or cousins of the Kauravas, but whereas the mention of the Kauravas is made again and again, that of the Pandavas is to be found nowhere. Again, it has been mentioned in the Mahabharata that chiefs from almost all parts of India, like the distant Pandavas and the king of Assam came to take part in the Mahabharata War, but such a thing appears completely incredible. Why should the distant and independent powers be interested in local quarrel of two parties. But the Indian authors do not fully agree to the above view. They hold that though it cannot be denied that this Epic, in its present shape contains a good deal which is untrustworthy, "it is absurd to suppose that fiction completely ousted (expelled) the truth". Though there can be some deviations here and there from historical accuracy, but the main actors of the story are historical figures and are by no means imaginary.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

(A) **The Ramayana. Age** (400 B.C. to 200 A.D., referring to very ancient times); **History of the Ramayana : Is the Ramayana Historical** (Interwoven with mythological fiction but dealing with historical personalities and authentic places).

(B) **The Mahabharata. Age** (Written between 400 B.C. to 400 A.D., but referring

The appeal of the great religion of India is not merely to the intellect or reason, or even to an empirical need, but to man as such. The longings of human nature are not Eastern or Western, but of the world. The awe-inspiring Brahman or Purusha had to be made accessible to the warrior and the businessman, the servant and the farmer in the fields, in a way intelligible to them all, and practicable to their endowments and temperaments. While the Upanishads called for special qualifications, the Epics and Puranas came to the help of the general man.

Relevance of Ramayana and Mahabharata

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the towering Epics of India. While the Mahabharata is constructed out of a complicated theme of tradition, mythology, history, philosophy and mysticism, the Ramayana is a straight and running chronicle depicting the deeds of a divinely great hero who came to set an example to mankind as a whole. The Mahabharata soars into the realms of the supernatural and the marvellous, giving at the same time an easier exposition of the nature of the goal of human life. The Ramayana written in the ideal ornate style of Valmiki, mildly shaking the heart of the reader from beginning to end, and giving a silent touch of transformation to the feelings, brings about, without its being known or announced loudly, the requisite regeneration of the human mind into an ideal condition of humaneness, a sense of brotherhood, filial affection, fraternity of feeling, obedience to rule, servicefulness, honesty, firmness in resolution, and an unbounded goodness coupled with

an adamantine adherence to truth. The Mahabharata, which is the *magnum opus* of the brilliant insight of Vyasa, on the other hand, raises a tumult of emotion and feeling and throws the mind to giddy heights, scattering it into the empyrean of a wondrous perfection of the ethical and spiritual ideal, and the student of the Mahabharata finds himself dashed by the waves of the powerful thoughts of Vyasa, now sinking down and now rising up in that ocean of Epic literature.) Valmiki and Vyasa are the real builders of Indian culture, and their names will be remembered as long as Hinduism lasts. The great heroes and heroines of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata,—Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Sita, Hanuman, Krishna, Yudhishtira, Bhishma, Arjuna, Draupadi,—are bywords even to a schoolboy in India, and it is impossible to think of these noble personages without a sense of the supernormal creeping into one's veins. It is the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that have driven into the minds of people in India the idea of a compassionate and powerful God ruling the destinies of man and yet ready to help anyone who really craves for His grace. It is the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that have built India through the ages and saturated the Indian mind in religious thought and hammered down the ideal of God-realisation as the goal of human life and the possibility of receiving help in this endeavour from the Rishis and the Avatars of God. It is these sublime Epics that have cemented the hearts of the Hindus into a single whole, and if today India stands as a powerful Nation ready to face undaunted

any force that may threaten it from outside, it is because of the moral toughness and courage that has been instilled into the blood of the Nation by the superminds of Valmiki and Vyasa. It is impossible for us here to adequately estimate the indelible impact which the thoughts of Valmiki and Vyasa have produced on the minds of the people of India. They brought into being an effect which cannot be erased out of history, for they touched the *being* of man.

The great works of Valmiki and Vyasa became the reservoirs for the streams of several inspiring works by the immortal poets of India,—Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bharavi, Magha, Sriharsha, Tulasidas, Kamban, and many other writers in poetry and prose, who drew inspiration from the inexhaustible founts of the authors of the two great Epics. The famous saying, 'whatever is of worth in the literature of the world is what has been already spoken by Vyasa (*Vyasochchishtam Jagat Sarvam*)', gives an idea as to the nature of the contents of the work of Vyasa. In the very words of the Mahabharata, 'whatever is here (in this Epic), whether concerning ethics, politics, human well-being or spiritual salvation, is elsewhere; what is not found here will not be found anywhere else'. The religion that the common Hindu knows and practises is the religion of the Epics and Puranas. It is this prolific literature that has made India spiritual in character. When the religious man of India, in general, prays to God or even contemplates on God, his idea is really that of the God of the Epics and Puranas. This

is the popular religion of India, the religion of the masses and of the orthodox religious elite even to-day. The great religious festivals and ceremonies, rituals, vows and observances practised throughout the country are the result of the untiring proclamations made in this body of literature, ascribed to Valmiki and Vyasa. Under these circumstances, it is surprising that historians of philosophy, even of Indian origin, should have proffered a step-motherly treatment to these works of great literary merit, and in most cases ignored their very existence, as if they are the chaff of religious literature, while in fact it is to these alone that the religious man has clung for centuries down to this day for inspiration and solace in times of emotional depression or dispiritedness in life.

This appraisal of the genius of Valmiki and Vyasa is indeed much less than the regard and attention that these masters and makers of human culture really deserve.) We hope that students of the history of philosophy and religion will find time and patience enough to dive again into the depths of this ocean of Epic literature, for (No one can be said to have truly grasped the spirit of Indian culture without having mastered the import of these Epics. As it is said in the Mahabharata, 'the Veda is afraid of him who has not studied the Epics and Puranas, for he would indeed kill it with his ignorance of its truth propounded in them.'

X HISTORY AND SYMBOLISM AS MODES OF TEACHING

The method of the Epics is different from that

Chapter Two

BHAGAVADGITA

I

INTRODUCTION

BHAGAVADGITA literally means 'The Lord's Song', i.e., the philosophical discourse of Lord Krsna to persuade the reluctant Arjuna to fight. It is the most popular and sacred book of the Hindus and is contained in the Bhisma-Parva of the Mahābhārata, the greatest Sanskrit epic.

Various are the praises showered on this work both by Indian and European scholars. Lokamanya Tilak calls it 'a most luminous and priceless gem which gives peace to afflicted souls and makes us masters of spiritual wisdom'. Mahāmanā Mālaviyaji sees a unique synthesis of 'the highest knowledge, the purest love and the most luminous action' in it. Mahātmā Gāndhi calls it 'the universal mother whose door is wide open to anyone who knocks,' and further says that 'a true votary of the Gītā does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding'. The Gītā deals with metaphysics, religion and ethics, and has been rightly called the 'Gospel of Humanity'.

The central teaching of the Gītā can be beautifully summarized in this sentence of Annie Besant: 'It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead, and where the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life.' The Gītā tries to build up a philosophy of Karma based on Jñāna and supported by Bhakti in a beautiful manner.

In the beginning we find Arjuna horrified at the thought that he has to fight with his relatives and friends and he says to Krsna that he can foresee no advantage in killing relatives and he flatly refuses to fight—'I would not like to kill these, even though I may be killed by them'.¹ Krsna, then, proceeds to instruct him that it is his duty as a prince, as a warrior, as a righteous man to fight against evil and restore peace and

¹ I, 35.

order. Some people have tried to read in the Gītā a 'cult of murder'. But this simply shows to what extent a noble work can be misinterpreted. To fight against evil is the duty of man. To make the situation poignant relatives and beloved friends and revered elders stand on both sides and Arjuna has to vindicate his claim, he has to follow his Svabhāva and Svadharma. It is a significant fact that though Lord Kṛṣṇa in the beginning repeatedly asks Arjuna to fight, in the end when the teaching has been imparted to him, the Lord simply says—'Do as you please.'

II BEING | SOUL

THE fundamental metaphysical teaching of the Gītā is that 'of the unreal there is no being, and of the real there is no non-being'.¹ The soul is indestructible (avināshi), eternal (nitya), unborn (aja), undiminishing (avyaya), all-pervasive (sarva-gata), immovable (achala), ancient (sanātana), unmanifest (avyakta), unthinkable (achintya) and immutable (avikārya). Only bodies are destroyed, not the soul. It is neither born nor does it die. It is immortal and everlasting. Not being subject to birth and death, it cannot perish along with the body. Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on the new ones, so does the soul cast off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new.² The infinite underlies and animates all finite existences, and the soul being essentially one with it, is not affected by birth and death, by growth and decay, by finitude or change, 'even though our body be "dust returning unto dust"'. He who sees the Ultimate Reality seated equally in all beings and unperishing within the perishing, sees truly.³

III YOGA

THE Gītā represents a unique synthesis of Action, Devotion and Knowledge. Man is a complex of intellect, will and emotion; he is a being who thinks, wills and feels. Intellect has given rise to the philosophy of Knowledge; will to the philosophy of Action; and emotion to the philosophy of Devotion. Modern Psychology teaches us that these three aspects of mind are distinguishable only in thought and not divisible in reality. There is no watertight division separating one from the rest. The teaching of the Gītā is in keeping with this view. To quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan: 'The Absolute reveals itself to those seeking for knowledge as the Eternal Light, clear and radiant as the sun at noon-day';

¹ II, 16. nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ. ² II, 22. ³ VI, 29.

to those struggling for virtue as the Eternal Righteousness, steadfast and impartial; and to those emotionally inclined as Eternal Love and Beauty of Holiness.' Different people attain the same goal of salvation by these three different paths of knowledge, action and devotion.

All these three ultimately stand synthesised. This synthesis is called 'Yoga'. The literal meaning of the word is union, i.e., of the individual with the Absolute. It means equanimity or balance of mind (samatva). It means the higher perspective of action which comes through detachment (karmasu kaushalam). The Yogi is the ideal ascetic who curbs his passions and maintains calmness in cold and heat, in joy and sorrow, in honour and dishonour.¹ 'As a lamp flickers not in a windless place, that is the simile for the Yogi who curbs his thoughts and yields himself entirely to absorption.'² We find the following beautiful description of Yoga: 'Where seeing the self by the self, one is satisfied in oneself; where one experiences the absolute bliss, known only to higher reason, but ever beyond the senses, and standing where one swerves not from the truth; where no other gain is considered greater, and where one is not moved by the greatest pain—that state free from misery is Yoga.'³ A Yogi is a Sthita-prajña—one firmly rooted in higher reason and unmoved by the pairs of opposites. He attains to the highest state of Brahman (Brāhmī-sthiti), where he is never bewildered (nainām prāpya vimuhyati) and from which he never falls down (yad gatvā na nivartante).

IV

JÑANA

THIS Yoga is essentially and predominantly the path of knowledge. The Yogi's ideal is self-realization which cannot be attained without knowledge. Even the devotees are granted knowledge by the Lord so that they may realize the goal.⁴ Yoga, bereft of knowledge, is an impossibility. We may weaken the power of the senses by fasting and abstaining from necessities, but unless we rise above the relish and the desire, the psychological attachment to the sense-objects, we are not true Yogis. And this relish can go away only with the rise of true knowledge.⁵ How high the Gītā places knowledge can be seen from the following: 'Even the most sinful man can cross over the ocean of Samsāra by means of the boat of knowledge alone. As a fire well-kindled reduces fuel to ashes, so the fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes. The culmination of action is in knowledge. Having obtained knowledge, one soon embraces peace. There is nothing purer than knowledge'.⁶ The knower is identified by the Lord with His own self.⁷

¹ VI, 7, 8; XIV, 24, 25. ² VI, 19. ³ VI, 20, 23. ⁴ dadāmi buddhiyogam tam yena māmupayānti te. X, 10. ⁵ II, 59. ⁶ nahi jñānenā sadṛsham pavitramiha vidyate, IV, 38. ⁷ jñānitvātmaiva me matam, VII, 18.

V

KARMA

KARMAYOGA is not opposed to Jñānayoga. In fact, the former is possible only when the latter is attained. No embodied being can completely renounce actions.¹ The constituent Guṇas of Prakṛti, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, necessarily give rise to actions. As Wordsworth says:

'The eye cannot choose but see,
We cannot bid the ear be still,
Our bodies feel where'er they be
Against with our will.'

The universe itself depends on actions.² Inertia is not liberty, but death. Work keeps up the cycle of the universe and it is the duty of every individual to help it. He who does not do so and finds pleasure in the senses is sinful and lives in vain.³ The ideal of the Gītā is not negativism, asceticism or escapism. It is not negation of actions, but performance of actions in a detached spirit. It is not Naiṣkarmya, but Niṣkāma Karma. The giving up is not of action itself, but of interest, desire, fruit, attachment regarding action. Desire binds a man; he should therefore act in such a way when action does not bind. The Gītā synthesises both Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti. As Prof. M. Hiriyanna says: 'The Gītā-teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action.' It is emphatically stated that Saṁnyāsa does not mean the renunciation of action, but of interest, desire and attachment; it means the giving up of the fruit of all work.⁴ Actions are our sphere; fruits are not our concern. We should never be attached to the fruits of actions and at the same time we should never be inactive.⁵ And without knowledge, renunciation of desire and attachment is not possible. So only a true jñāni can perform niṣkāma karma. Therefore the Gītā says: Only fools and not wise people speak of jñāna and karma as different and opposed; really they are one.⁶

Here arises an apparent contradiction in the Gītā where it is also remarked that for him who has realized the self, who is enjoying the bliss of the self, and who remains ever satisfied in the supreme peace of the self, for him there remains nothing to be done.⁷ This verse emphasises the word 'tasya' ('for him'). The perfect man has no axe of his own to grind. He simply acts for the good of the people. The Lord Himself,

¹ nahi dehabṛṭā shayam tyaktum karmāṇyasheṣataḥ, XVIII, 11. ² loko yam karmabhandhanah, III, 9. ³ III, 16. ⁴ kāmyānām karmaṇām nyāsam sannyāsam kavayo viduh, XVIII, 2. ⁵ II, 47. ⁶ sāṅkhayogau pṛthag bālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ, V, 4. ⁷ tasya kāryam na vidyate, III, 17.

though He has nothing to accomplish for Himself, acts for the benefit of humanity. The perfect man also has to work for the benefit of humanity (*loka-sangraha*) in the spirit of perfect detachment, disinterest, selflessness, with no desire to reap the fruit. He alone is capable of doing so. The liberated 'cave-dweller' in Plato goes again into the cave to free others. He who performs actions in a detached manner, thinking himself to be a mere instrument of God, is not contaminated by sin like the lotus-leaf, though living in water, yet not being contaminated by it.¹ But the Gita definitely recognizes a supra-social state for the liberated sage. He cannot be forced to work. He may not be living in society, yet his very presence in the world confers benefits upon humanity, like the presence of the sun.

An objection is raised here that absolutely disinterested action is a psychological impossibility. But it is not valid. Firstly, the liberated sage has risen much above the psychological plane. He is on the transcendental mystic plane and empirical injunctions and prohibitions, ordinary rules of practice, and psychological rules do not apply to him. Intellect cannot grasp this state; it can only point towards it. Secondly, for the aspirant, we may say that the Gita recommends, not the annihilation of all desires, but the merging of all desires in one supreme desire—the desire for the development of spiritual life. All actions, therefore, should be inspired by this supreme desire. The betterment of our spiritual life is the single motive and the only end prescribed for all our actions

VI

BHAKTI

BHAKTI or devotion is defined as disinterested service to God. So it is a form of Karma. And disinterested action, as we have seen, is not possible without knowledge. Hence Bhakti too, like Niṣkāma Karma, can be performed only by a true jñāni. Only he can completely resign himself to the Lord. The devotee is confident of the guarantee given by the Lord—'Never does My devotee perish'² and 'The doer of good never comes to grief'.³ The Lord says: 'Even if a very ill-conducted man worships me, not worshipping any one else, he must certainly be deemed to be good, for he has well resolved. He soon becomes devout of heart and obtains lasting tranquillity. O Arjuna, know firmly that My devotee is never ruined. He who does My work, who yields himself upto Me, who is devoted to Me, void of attachment, without hatred to anyone, O Arjuna, comes to Me.'⁴

¹ Iipyate na sa pāpena padmapatram ivāmbhasā, V, 10. ² na me bhaktaḥ pranashyati, IX, 31. ³ VI, 40. ⁴ IX, 30, 31, 34.

The object of devotion is the personal God, the Puruṣottama on Whose mercy the devotee has to throw himself utterly. Absolute dependence and utter faith are very necessary. The Lord says: 'Merge thy mind in Me, be My devotee, prostrate thyself before Me, thou shalt come upto Me. I pledge thee My Word; thou art dear to Me. Abandoning all *dharma*s come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins'.¹ The Lord Himself lifts up His devotees from the ocean of birth-and-death.² The love of God is the supreme Love and every other form of it is an imperfect manifestation of this supreme Love. Out of the four kinds of devotees—the suffering (ārta), the seeker for truth (jijñāsu), the self-interested (arthārthī), and the wise (jñānī), the last one is the best. He alone knows that the Lord pervades the entire universe (vāsudevah sarvam). He sees the Lord in everything and everything in the Lord.³ He knows that all is strung on God, like pearls on a string,⁴ that God is the immanent inner controller of all. 'When devotion is perfect, then the individual and his God become suffused into one spiritual ecstasy, and reveal themselves as aspects of one life. Absolute monism is therefore the completion of the dualism with which the devotional consciousness starts.'

VII

GĪTA AND UPANIṢADS

THUS we see that Jñāna is the most important thing, being the very essence of Reality. Karma and Bhakti, understood in their proper senses, are only manifestations of jñāna. Without jñāna, liberation is impossible and so is detachment or renunciation in action and so is disinterested devotion to God. The Lord has to give knowledge to his devotees so that they may reach Him. There is nothing purer than knowledge.

There is undoubtedly a great influence of the Upaniṣads on the Gītā. Tradition also supports this view when it makes Shri Kṛṣṇa a cow-herd milking the celestial milk of Gītā from the Upaniṣads pictured as cows, Arjuna acting as a calf, for the sake of the wise.⁵ In the Gītā the absolutism of the Upaniṣads is tinged with theism. Lord Kṛṣṇa is a personal God; He is the Creator, eternal and imperishable, and yet He takes birth in the world to preserve Dharma when it is going down.⁶ But ultimately, theism culminates in absolutism which is the highest note. Reality is transcendent as well as immanent.

¹ XVIII, 65, 66. ² teṣāmaham samuddhartā mṛtyusai..sārasāgarat, XII, 7. ³ VII, 16, 17, 19. ⁴ mayi sarvamidam protam sūtre manīgaṇā īva, VII, 7. ⁵ sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā Gopālanandanaḥ. Pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhokta dugdham Gītāmṛtam mahat. ⁶ IV, 7, 8.