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## UNIT 2 INDIAN SCRIPTURES

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, you are exposed to the sources of Indian culture. However, the study material excludes prominent texts like the *Vedas* (also called *Sruti*) sources of the *Buddhism* and the *Jainism* since there are other units reserved for these sources. This unit, therefore, includes only the following:

- *smriti*,
- mythology
- *vedangas* and
- epics

Since they only belong to the periphery of philosophy, mere cursory reference will suffice.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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The word '*smriti*' means 'that which is in memory.' The texts, which are called '*smriti*', appeared in written form at the initial stage itself because it was not regarded as blasphemy to put it in written form unlike *sruti*. The age of *smriti*, followed the age of *Vedas*. Since the *Vedic* period stretches to several centuries, it is also likely that *smriti* might have appeared during the closing period of the *Vedas*. Consequently, all *smritikaras* (the founders of *smriti*) claimed that their works drew support from the *Vedas* and also that their works are nothing more than clarifications of the *Vedas*. However, we can easily discern in *smritis* lot of variations from *Vedas*. Evidently, such deviations do not get any support from the *Vedas*.

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## 2.2 THE SUBJECT MATTER OF *SMRITI*

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*Smriti* is also known as *Dharma Shasthra*, which means code of conduct. The code of conduct has three divisions; rituals, discharge of social responsibility and atonement for sins which include crimes. It is important to note that there is

no mention of rights – fundamental or any other type. The emphasis is upon ‘prescription and proscription’ only. The code of conduct is identical with the ‘constitution’ and so it is the same as penal code formulated by the present-day governments. Hence, *smṛiti* emphasizes two aspects of life; ‘*Dharmic*’ and social. The former does not simply exist without the latter. The role of ritual is restricted to individual life; household work to be precise. All these dimensions together constitute ‘*Dharma Shastra*’. Though it is claimed that there were several *Smritis*, history has recorded only a few. Among them only three are well known; sometimes for wrong reasons. *Vidhi* and *Nishedha* were codified by three persons, *Manu*, *Yajnyavalkya* and *Parashara*, and consequently, the *smritis* were named after them. A cursory reference to these *Smritis* is enough.

An important aspect of *smṛiti* is its rigidity. Fixation of duties and emphasis upon duties resemble, to a great extent, the directive principles enshrined in the constitution. While four-fold division of society is one type, four fold division of individual life is another. *Smṛiti* is very clear about not only four classes, but also four stages (*brahmacharya*, *garhastya*, *vaanaprastha* and *samnyasa*) in the life of an individual. There is no scope for switching from one position to another in a random manner. The last division, viz., atonement for sins deals precisely with this sort of prohibited switching. The upshot of this discrimination is that liberty took back seat, but stability in society was prioritized. This will help us to infer the kind of political system which *smṛiti* supported. Surely, *smṛiti* did not support democratic system, though during *Vedic* age democratic system flourished.

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## 2.3 MYTHOLOGY

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Mythology and History in India, it is claimed, are indistinguishable. Mythology in Sanskrit means ‘*purana*’. This word has two slightly differing etymological meanings; *pura* (past), *ateetam* (Lost), *anaagatam* (about to happen) – is one meaning. *pura* (past), *bhavam* (happened) is another. In terms of structure *purana* consists of five components. They are listed as follows:

- 1) Description of nation or nations and their history
- 2) History of creation
- 3) History of re-creation
- 4) Description of dynasties
- 5) Story of each *Manu* (*Manvantara*)

First and fourth components do incorporate elements of history. However, there is a vital difference, history follows a certain method and therefore, at some point to time or the other, it is possible to dispute what a historian claims, because history tries to gather as many evidences (not facts) as possible. *Puranas*, however, are altogether different. The relevance of evidences is totally alien to *puranas*. It is, therefore, impossible to refute what *puranas* claim. Nor can we defend the same.

*Puranas* are eighteen in number. Since they are not relevant philosophically, it is not even necessary to list them. In addition to five components mentioned earlier, many *puranas* deal with cosmology. Perhaps this is the only topic common to philosophy and *puranas*. Interestingly, one *purana*, viz., *vayu-purana* attempts at geography, music, etc. Apart from the neglect of evidence, *puranas* suffer

from one more defect. All *puranas* combine legends related to gods and demons, life after death, etc. which disqualify mythology from becoming worthy of serious philosophical study.

In defence of *puranas*, it can be said that though *puranas* are related to mainly theological issues, they include almost all activities of life and hence they ought to occupy an important position in the list of disciplines. But this all inclusiveness itself is a serious defect.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Discuss briefly the rigidity of *Smriti*

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2) Explain briefly the meaning of *Puranas*

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## 2.4 VEDANGAS

*Vedangas* are also known as *shadangas*, which means six organs. The function of these six organs is to explicate the intricate thoughts of the *Vedas*. Those organs are *shiksha* (phonetics), *vyakarana* (grammar; to be more specific, *Vedic* grammar), *chandasa* (prosody), *nirukta* (etymology and dictionary), *jyautisha* (astronomy) and *kalpa* (rituals).

It was believed that proper understanding of the *Vedic* texts is possible only when all these organs are strictly followed. Two extraordinary characteristics of the *Vedas* form the background of these organs. In the first place, the *Vedas* were held to be *apaurusheya* (independent of man). Therefore, no change in any form for any reason was admissible. Secondly, it was also believed that the *Vedas* should be taught and learnt only orally. Consequently, it took several centuries for Indians to put the *Vedas* in writing. Without going into the merits and demerits of this particular prescription, we should examine the role played by *Vedanga* in protecting the *Vedic* tradition.

## SHIKSHA

*Sayana*, in his *Rig-Veda Bhashya*, has defined *shiksha* as follows; ‘that which teaches pronunciation in accordance with *swara* (vowel) and *Varna* (letter) is called *shiksha*. Clarity in speech and ability to listen correctly are the pre-requisite to learn the *Vedas*. This is the reason why the *Vedas* are also called ‘*anushrava* (that which follows listening). The emphasis upon clear pronunciation is perfectly understandable because due to unique structure of the *Vedic* language, which is the most primitive form of Sanskrit language set by very different grammar, even the slightest variation in pronunciation could lead to total change of meaning.

## VYAKARANA, CHANDAS & NIRUKTA

The next three organs are not unique in the sense that the role, which they play with regard to the *Vedic* language, is very much similar to the role of grammar or dictionary in any other language. Since no language is possible without grammar, *Vedic* grammar must be as old as the *Vedas*. If the *Vedas* are *apaurusheya*, then the *Vedic* grammar also ought to have been *apaurusheya*. However, it is not the case. Among the extant works of grammar, *Panini*’s work ‘*ashtaadhyayi*’ is the oldest one. It is said that this is a fourth Century A.D. work. However, earlier *Vedic* dictionaries mention other *vaiyakaranas*. Since the dictionary is more ancient than *Panini*’s work, it is obvious that other *vaiyakaranas*’ works are more ancient. The mention of these aspects shows that grammar is *paurusheya*. Hence language should be *paurusheya*. However, one grammarian by name *Shakatayana* maintains that even grammar is *apaurusheya*. According to him, the oldest work on grammar is *aindra vyakarana*. It is named so since, according to the legend, men received it from *Indra*.

The source of prosody is ‘*chandassutra*’ by one *Pingalacharya*. Nothing is known about this author. This work includes both *Vedic* and non-*Vedic* prosody. Generally, the *Samhitas* are bound by definite prosody. Only *Krishna-Yajurveda* and *Atharva-Veda samhitas* are occasionally prosaic. Hence, prosody occupies a prominent role in the study of the *Vedas*. *Panini* says, ‘*chandah padau tu vedasya*’. Which means prosody is the very foundation of *Vedas*. In course of time, the *Vedic* language itself became prosody. The *Vedic* prosody has one unique feature, which is mentioned by *Katyayana*. He says, ‘*yat akshara parimanam tat chandah*’. It means, ‘the one which determines the number (or quantity) of letters, that is prosody. It should be noted that this is not the case with secular Sanskrit. It is said that the latter evolved from the former.

The *Vedic* prosody consists of what is called *paada* or quartet. Generally, a quartet is supposed to possess four letters. This, perhaps, became a characteristic at the later stage because there are eleven principal prosody, which differ not only in the number of quartets, but also in the number of letters in each quartets, whereas *trishtup chandas* consists of four quartets with eleven letters in each of them. A prosody may differ from another as regards the pattern of quartets. For example, *kakup chandas* has eight letters in the first and third quartets and twelve letters in the second. This difference shows that there is a little freedom here which is conspicuous by its absence elsewhere.

*Nirukta* provides the meaning of the *Vedic* terms. In the first step, terms were collected which constituted dictionary. Mere synonym or lexical meaning would defeat the very purpose of compiling terms. *Nirukta* does not provide just this

sort of meaning. What it indulges in is hermeneutic exercise. Hence it is more than any ordinary dictionary.

Let us start with the structure of dictionary. A lexicographer, by name *Yaska* collected these terms and provided the most authentic interpretation. The dictionary consists of in all 1770 terms spread over three *kaandas*. First *kaanda* consists of three chapters, which is called '*naighantuka*', second and third consisting of one chapter each are called '*naigama* and *daivata*'. *Nirukta* is an interpretation of these terms mainly and to some extent he has quoted some *mantras* and interpreted the same. *Nirukta* itself consists of fourteen chapters of which first six chapters deal with *naighantuka kaanda* and *Naigama Kanda* and the next six chapters deal with *Daivata Kanda*. Last two are somewhat like appendices.

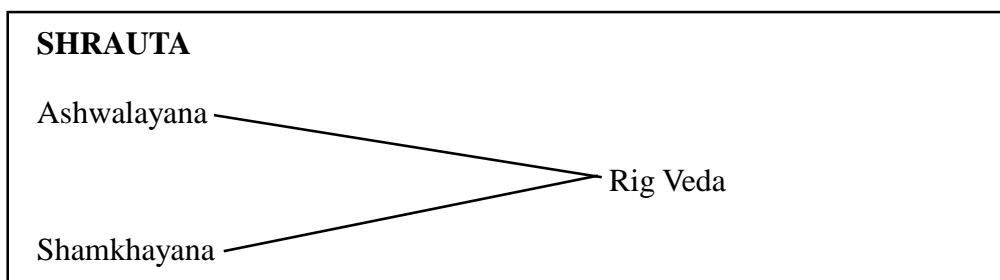
### JYAUTISHA

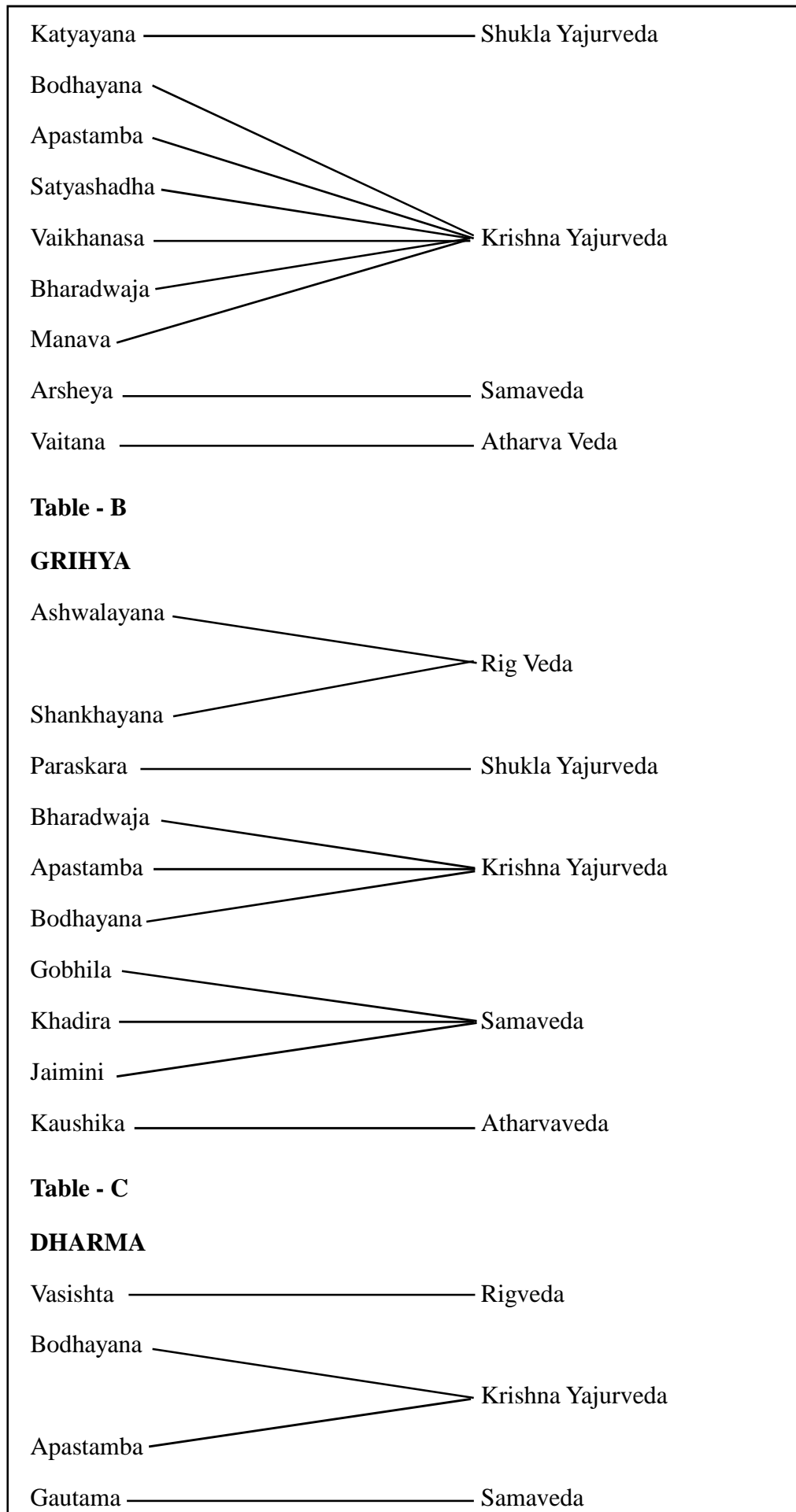
Astronomy evolved in ancient India out of necessity. *Yajnas* and *yagas* could not be performed at the discretion of any one. In the strict sense of the term, it was seasonal. Every *varna* (except *shudra*) had a fixed season to perform *yajnas*. *Taittiriya Brahmana* spoke so, '*vasante brahmanaha*, (Brahman during spring), *agnimaadadheeta* (ignite holy fire), *greeshme rajanyaha* (*Kshatriya* during summer), *aadadheeta*, *sharadi vaishyaha* (*Vaishya* during post-monsoon) *aadadheeta*'. Igniting holy fire is very important because only it ought to set any programme in motion. Not only was season important, but also exact time of starting *yajnas* was important for which it was necessary to track the movement of not only the sun but also all celestial bodies. Most important among them are twenty-seven stars. This could be done only with adequate knowledge of astronomy.

### KALPA SUTRAS

*Kalpa sutras* are so called because whatever material is provided by them is all in the form of formulas. The explanation *Kalpa sutras* is the same as that of *Brahma Sutra*; *alpaksharam* (brief), *asandigdham* (unambiguous or incontrovertible), *saaravat* (complete in essence), *vishwato mukham* (all inclusive). *Kalpa sutra* literally means action – indicating formula. Action is of four types, *shrauta*, *grihya*, *dharma* and *shulba*. The last one differs, more or less, in type from the rest. Hence, let us consider it at the end. The first three are common to *Rig*, *Yajur* and *Sama*. But all three *Kalpa Sutras* differ from one *Veda* to another as regards prescriptions and scope. For example, *Ashwalayana* and *Shamkhayana sutras* of *Rig Veda* cover all three *Kalpa sutras*. Since every class of *sutra* has distinct commands, they constitute rituals. Let us consider each *Kalpa* separately and represent membership using tables.

Table – A





*Dharma sutras pertaining to Shukla Yajurveda and Atharvaveda are not extant.*

Let us examine what these *sutras* are about. *Ashwalayana sutra* was founded by *Ashwalayana*, a student of *Shaunaka*. Likewise, many *sutras* are known after the names of the founders just as many laws and theories in science are named after scientists like Newton's Laws of Motion, etc. All *shrouta sutras* specify the manner in which *yajnas* and *yagas* have to be performed. They are essentially prescriptive which do not allow any room for deviation. The very fact that there are several *shrouta sutras*, which subscribe to different *Vedas*, indicates that there were several ways in which *yajnas* were performed.

Two aspects deserve mention. *Yagas* were performed solely with the motive of reaping worldly benefits. Second, man was ineligible to perform *Yaga* in the absence of wife, which means she enjoyed equal status if not more.

*Grihya sutras* prescribe household duties. The point to be noted is that all *Grihya sutras* agree on one particular count, i.e., what ought to be done. But they differ on another count, i.e., how it ought to be done. No *Grihya sutra* disagrees, for example, with the relevance of, say, marriage. But they disagree with the manner in which it is to be performed. Secondly, all four *sutras* are complementary to each other. So there is neither choice nor contradiction. To fulfill his obligation one has to perform all rituals in the manner prescribed.

The rituals pertaining to *Grihya sutras* are of two types. One type of rituals has to be performed only once in life (in some cases, there are exceptions). Second type of rituals has to be performed everyday or once in a year. There are sixteen such obligations which are called '*shodasha samskaras*'. There are four classes of such *samskaras*; *samskaras* to be performed before birth, after birth, to begin the learning of the *Vedas* and to prepare man for marriage, etc. It should be noted that there are separate *samskaras* for men and women.

It is not necessary to consider all these *samskaras*. What is important is to know the manner in which they were followed and qualifications which were held as necessary. The characteristic of these *samskaras* is that they were (or are) not regarded as common to all *Varnas*. Two types of discrimination are well known. One discrimination is *Varna* based; i.e., Brahmana, Kshatriya, etc. Second discrimination is gender based. The first category of discrimination must have eventually led to the caste system. It, also, might have resulted in hierarchy. Secondly, gender based discrimination did not affect men. In a way, it was inconsequential as far as man was considered. But it was not so in the case of women. One argument is that women, like *shudras*, were denied of education because they were not entitled to some crucial *samskaras*. It is insignificant that men were not entitled to some *samskaras* to which women were entitled because this limitation did not really affect men. But it was not so in the case of women. One particular *samskara* deserve special mention. *Brahmopadesha*, for example, is not permissible for *shudras* and *women*, even to this day. It is this particular *samskara* which makes *Brahmin* caste, in particular, a distinct caste. It also explains why *brahmin* is called '*DWIJA*' (twice born) after the completion of this *samskara*. It is said that before this *samskara* is performed, *brahmin* is not a *brahmin* at all and so this *samskara* is supposed to give second birth to him.

Surely, even within the framework of *chaturvarnya* (Four-fold *Varnas*) system this particular argument is not endorsed by all. The fact that the argument, being referred to, is at variance with some established or accepted norms set by *smritis* was totally ignored while speaking about *brahmins*. Our purpose, surely, is not go into the merits and demerits or *chaturvarnya* or caste system, but to demonstrate structural changes which took place in belief-systems, perspective in which age old customs came to be understood, and consequently rapid changes which affected the society because this is what precisely happened over centuries in Indian society.

If we consider the literal meaning of the word '*samskara*', then it becomes evident that it is meant to uplift man (or woman) spiritually. It is argued that they also produce other class of positive results; physical well being is one. If so, why was a certain class (or classes) denied of this benefit? It is not possible to discover any answer to this question within the framework of philosophy. A psychologist or sociologist may throw some light on such questions.

In spite of the fact that *samskaras* were spiritual in nature, the ulterior motive behind adherence to them is mundane. It is very easy to discover in the *samskaras* some spiritual support, if not any foundation, for all aspects of earthly life. For different reasons the *samskaras* did not receive support from the *Upanishads* and heterodox systems. The *Upanishads* disapproved the *samskaras* because the goal was this-worldly. The heterodox systems strongly reacted to the *samskaras* because they claimed affinity to the *Vedas*. Despite difference in their philosophy, both the *Upanishads* and the heterodox systems adhered to life in monastery. Their apathy to anything connected with earthly life is behind their antagonism to the *samskaras*. This discussion also brings to the surface an important fact that philosophy and religion do not coincide always if religion is understood as *Dharma*. While *samskaras* stand for *Dharma*, the *Upanishads* stand for philosophy.

*Kaushika Sutra* of *Atharvaveda* is unique because this *sutra* does not deal with any type of spiritual matter unlike previously mentioned *sutras*. It throws some light on herbal plant and thereby it helps in understanding ancient system of Indian medicine.

There is a sharp distinction between *Grihya sutras* and *Dharma sutras*. While *Grihya sutras* regulate man's actions which are restricted to family, *Dharma sutras* have societal leaning. *Gautama's Dharma sutras* appears to be the earliest one. These *sutras* specify not only the obligations within the frame-work of *chaturvarnya*, but also '*Raja Dharma*' – the duties of ruler. In Indian context morality is essentially based upon what the *Dharma sutra* specifies. Hence the limits and defects of *Dharma sutras* have distinct bearing on the acceptability of moral principles.

Last one to be considered in this section is *Shulba sutra*. Though this *Sutra* also is relevant in the context of performing *yagnas*, it is restricted to geometrical aspects only because in the absence of adequate knowledge of geometry it was impossible to construct the *Vedic* atlas. *Shulba sutra* is an example of primitive technology developed by ancient Indians to meet the demands of ecclesiastical dimension of life.



**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What do you understand by *Shiksha*?

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2) Write a short note on *Grihiya Sutras*

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## 2.5 EPICS

Though the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are two epics which have influenced literature for several centuries in all parts of India, the *Ramayana* is not significant philosophically, unlike the *Mahabharata* and we are not concerned with the literary value of these two epics. So it is sufficient if we notice that the *Ramayana* accepts the principles of *Sanatana Dharma* and duties of ruler in particular. Since there is nothing philosophically new in this work, we need not consider it. It will serve our purpose if we concentrate on philosophical component of the *Mahabharata*.

Logic and epistemology which constitute any philosophical tradition have nothing to do with us when we study culture literature, etc. The *Mahabharata* is not an exception. We can trace however, two philosophical issues in this work; one is expounded in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, rather in a very unsatisfactory manner, because it is mainly a work in theistic tradition. Second one is morality and polity expounded by two prominent characters; *Vidura* and *Bheeshma*. But these philosophical issues in this work suffer from a serious drawback – draw back from philosophical point of view. Nowhere in this work do we find discussion, or criticism which is the hallmark of philosophy. More than anything else, what we find is only a sermon. Therefore brief reference to these elements is enough.

### THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF VIDURA

From the point of view of ethics, it is desirable to regard some characters as personification of virtue. *Vidura* and *Bheeshma* belong to this category. In contrast to these characters in the *Mahabharata*, we have other characters which are regarded as personification of evil. Why should any epic portray evil characters? This is one question. Are they in a broader perspective, really evil forces? This is

another question. The second question is much deeper philosophically and cannot be answered easily. First one is slightly easier to handle. An epic must be vast. Hence it ought to include all facts of world and all aspects of life. So evil characters ought to find place in any epic worth the name.

*Vidura's* exposition of moral principles begins with a clear distinction between *shreyas* (desirable) and *preyas* (pleasing). He compares *shreyas* with medicine which is not palatable. It is immediately followed by a second analogy to demonstrate the status of pleasure which is invariably accompanied by evil. To make this concomitant relation explicit, *Vidura* compares pleasure with honey, pleasure seeker with one who collects honey and evil with abyss and says that the pleasure hunter is busy only in seeking honey unmindful of impending danger of falling into the abyss.

In the *Mahabharata*, *Vidura* plays his role on three occasions. On second occasion, *Vidura* plays the role of a counselor. His counseling has moral base. He makes an explicit distinction between two states of mind; those of wise man and ignorant. While Plato speaks of four cardinal virtues, *Vidura* speaks of six cardinal vices. Greed is one among them. He makes out a case for wise man by listing the remaining vices - lust, anger, irrational attachment, arrogance and jealousy – which he does not possess. There is no need to describe the personality of one who is free from these vices. It is very interesting to note that *Vidura* concurs with Plato, when he describes ignorant person. He is the one who neglects his duty, but tries to perform what is not his job. Secondly, he cannot distinguish between a true friend and enemy. All qualities attributed to an ignorant person can be found in Thrasymachus who indulges in violent attack on the ideas of Socrates. In the end of this particular session *Vidura* makes a list of Ten Commandments in which one Commandment is identical with Plato's classification of men into three classes; guardians (philosopher kings), soldiers and artisans. Both of them argue that these three classes ought to perform duties assigned to them only. It means that justice, according to Plato and *Dharma* according to *Vidura* consists in everyman doing his own duty and this is the cardinal principle of welfare state. This is the essence of *Vidura's* moral philosophy

In the last session, *Vidura* talks of death and the need to accept the same. Death and fear are nearly inseparable if man does not accept that death is inevitable. In this context *Vidura* accepts reality, i.e., human nature and maintains that man hardly follows wisdom. There is striking correspondence with what the Buddha says: *trishna* (desire) is the cause of misery, and remedy consists in the realisation of truth and that is knowledge of philosophy. In this respect, *Vidura*, the Buddha and Plato held an identical view. It is precisely in this sense that in Indian tradition philosophy always was regarded as a way of life.

### **BHEESHMA'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

There is a sharp difference between western model of political philosophy as understood and practised today and ancient Indian concept of polity. The difference essentially consists in shift from one end to the other, i.e., from rights to duty, with duty as the focuss of serman. Even democracy, the most liberal form of government prioritizes duties of citizen in spite of the fact that every citizen is entitled to fundamental rights. There is absolutely no gainsaying in holding the view that directive principles form the backbone of any democratic set-up. *Bhisma's* advice to *Dharmaraya* , on the other hand, provides a very

different picture. He specifies only the duties and responsibilities of ruler with no mention of the duties of citizen. Against this backdrop, it becomes obvious that in real sense, citizen is the king and ruler is his guardian. Several centuries before Plato visualized the role of guardians, the *Mahabharata* portrayed king in a similar fashion. *Bheeshma*'s lecture not only explicitly mentions king's qualities and duties but also it is first ever treatise on public administration. Let us consider these aspects briefly.

King should be proactive, truthful and straightforward. According to *Bheeshma*, these are the most important qualities of king. He should be compassionate but not too soft. It is interesting to note that Plato starts from the other end, but arrives at the same result. According to him, guardians should be given moderate physical training coupled with music lest they will transform to beasts. The essence of '*rajadharma*' is safe-guarding the interests of citizen. In fact, *Bheeshma* lists thirty-six qualities in an ideal king which are necessary to follow *Rajadharma* without which the citizens do not receive protection from the king.

Foreign policy is another aspect of public administration. Foreign policy involves two forces, enemies and friends. The role of friends is not much highlighted. But he emphasizes that king should know how to deal with enemy. Prudence is always the guiding force. *Bheeshma* makes it very clear that war is not the solution. Nor did he mean that enemy can be spared. Constant vigil, concealing one's own weakness and proper judgment only can ensure safety and security. All these descriptions apply under normal circumstances, whereas in distress even enemy should enjoy compassion because a humanitarian treatment may destroy enmity. Ultimately, humane outlook scores over other considerations.

### THE BHAGAVADGITA

The Bhagavad Gita is a sacred Indian scripture. It comprises roughly 700 verses, and is a part of the *Mahabharata*. The teacher of the Bhagavad Gita is Krishna, and is referred to within the text as Bhagavan, the Divine One. The content is the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna taking place on the battlefield before the start of the Kurukshetra war. Responding to Arjuna's confusion and moral dilemma about fighting his own cousins, Krishna explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and prince and elaborates on different Yogic and Vedantic philosophies. Thus, it is often being described as a concise guide to Hindu theology and also as a practical, self-contained guide to life. It is also called *Gitopanishad*, implying its having the status of an Upanishad, i.e. a Vedantic scripture. Since the Gita is drawn from the Mahabharata, it is classified as a *Smṛiti* text. However, those branches of Hinduism that give it the status of an Upanishad also consider it a *śruti* or revealed text. As it is taken to represent a summary of the Upanishadic teachings, it is also called "the Upanishad of the Upanishads."

Three features are prominent in the Gita; knowledge, social obligation and devotion. The confluence of these principal features constitute what is popularly known as *YOGA*. There is no need to consider its role in life which the Gita has explained. What is important is its position in philosophy. But there is no reference to its philosophical foundation anywhere in the Gita. For example, consider 'devotion' (*bhakti*). Devotion is sensible only when '*Bhakta*' is distinct from *Paramatma*; not otherwise. In other words the refutation of the *Advaita* is a prerequisite to accept the relevance of *bhakti*. But nowhere do we find any

reference to *Dvaita* or *Advaita* in the work. On the contrary, the Gita concludes by merging obligation or *karma* and knowledge in *Bhakti*.

One point becomes clear from the Gita; no one can attain *moksha* if he or she renounces this world. Renouncing the world is tantamount to renouncing obligations. Hence in defence of the Gita one assertion can be unhesitatingly made, that the Gita does not prioritize spirituality at the expense of worldly life. However, neither the charge that it does so nor the countercharge that it does not, is philosophically insignificant. But this point is mentioned because attainment of *moksha* in relation to *karma* has primary importance in the Gita.

Let us drop '*bhakti*' and concentrate only on *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga*. While *Jnana* stands for realization at highest level, *Karma* assumes a very different meaning. During the *Vedic* age, *Karma* meant only performing *Yajna*. But in the Gita it has come to mean social obligation. *Yoga* came to be understood as dedication. Hence, *Karma Yoga* may be understood as discharging duty with a sense of commitment.

The most important element in the Gita is the doctrine of *nishkama karma* which consists in discharging obligations in an impersonal manner. This attitude literally debars *yagas* because one performs it with selfish motive. The Gita however, never advocated that *karma* should be renounced. What it clearly asserts is that '*Karma Phala*' should be renounced. It only sidelines personal interest and upholds societal interest. Thus individual becomes the means and society the end. An impersonal approach to duty does not affect the performer in any manner, i.e., neither success nor failure affects him or her. This attitude is '*SAMATVA MANOBHAVA*' – equanimity of mind.

It is necessary to clarify the relation between the meaning of *karma* and *varna*. At this stage, *chaturvarnya* (four-fold classification) becomes relevant. Translated into ordinary language, it means commitment to profession. '*chaturvarnyam mayasrishtva gunakarma vibhagshcha*'. It means *guna* (quality) and *karma* (profession) determine *Varna*. To this statement we can add another, quality determines profession. Commitment to profession is what *Dharma* is.

The Gita makes a clear distinction between commitment and interest. Commitment is impersonal, whereas interest is personal. Vested interest is well-known. But there is nothing like vested commitment. When vested interest affects an individual, one may resort to prohibited means. But impersonal commitment does not result in this sort of selection. The maxim 'ends do not justify the means' is implicit in the Gita.

One more aspect remains to be mentioned. There is a mistaken notion that there is hierarchy in profession. It is not the case as far as the Gita is concerned. But there is a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' or 'constructive' and 'destructive'. It is good to discharge duty which is in conformity with one's own nature. Otherwise, it is bad. Clearly, there is division of labour, and it is in the interest of society that such division is made mandatory. Therefore qualitative distinction in profession is strongly disapproved.

**Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How do you understand Bheeshma's foreign policy?

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2) What is meant by *Nishkamakarma*?

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

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Indian Scriptures mainly have determined the life-style of Hindus, who belong to the first three *varnas*. There are four sources which prescribe the way of life. Among these sources, the *smritis*, whether consciously or inadvertently, institutionalized caste system and women were downgraded *Smritis* correspond to modern day constitution. What demarcates history from mythology is blurred. The *vedangas* explicate the intricate thoughts of the *Vedas*. They specify intonation, grammar, structure, etc. According to the *vedangas* chanting *mantras* after knowing the meaning is very important. *Kalpa sutras* are four in number. They mainly deal with what rituals are to be observed, how they are to be observed, etc. The *Mahabharata* possesses not only literary value, but also it is the first ever treatise on polity. The Gita has minor importance as a philosophical work. It gives priority to society at the expense of individual.

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## 2.7 KEY WORDS

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**Sutra** : Sūtra literally means a rope or thread that holds things together, and more metaphorically refers to an aphorism (or line, rule, formula), or a collection of such aphorisms in the form of a manual.

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## 2.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## 2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) An important aspect of *smriti* is its rigidity. Fixation of duties and emphasis upon duties resemble, to a great extent, the directive principles enshrined in the constitution. While four-fold division of society is one type, four fold division of individual life is another. *Smriti* is very clear about not only four classes, but also four stages (*brahmacharya*, *garhastya*, *vaanaprastha* and *samnyasa*) in the life of an individual. There is no scope for switching from one position to another in a random manner. The last division, viz., atonement for sins deals precisely with this sort of prohibited switching. The upshot of this discrimination is that liberty took back seat, but stability in society was prioritized. This will help us to infer the kind of political system which *smriti* supported. Surely, *smriti* did not support democratic system, though during *Vedic* age democratic system flourished.
- 2) *Puranas* are eighteen in number. Since they are not relevant philosophically, it is not even necessary to list them. In addition to five components mentioned earlier, many *puranas* deal with cosmology. Perhaps this is the only topic common to philosophy and *puranas*. Interestingly, one *purana*, viz., *vayu-purana* attempts at geography, music, etc. Apart from the neglect of evidence, *puranas* suffer from one more defect. All *puranas* combine legends related to gods and demons, life after death, etc. which disqualify mythology from becoming worthy of serious philosophical study.

### Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) *Sayana*, in his *Rig-Veda Bhashya*, has defined *shiksha* as follows; ‘that which teaches pronunciation in accordance with *swara* (vowel) and *Varna* (letter) is called *shiksha*. Clarity in speech and ability to listen correctly are the pre-requisite to learn the *Vedas*. This is the reason why the *Vedas* are also called ‘*anushrava* (that which follows listening).
- 2) *Grihya sutras* prescribe household duties. The point to be noted is that all *Grihya sutras* agree on one particular count, i.e., what ought to be done. But they differ on another count, i.e., how it ought to be done. No *Grihya*

*sutra* disagrees, for example, with the relevance of, say, marriage. But they disagree with the manner in which it is to be performed. Secondly, all four *sutras* are complementary to each other. So there is neither choice nor contradiction. To fulfill his obligation one has to perform all rituals in the manner prescribed.

### Answers to Check Your Progress III

- 1) Foreign policy is another aspect of public administration. Foreign policy involves two forces, enemies and friends. The role of friends is not much highlighted. But he emphasizes that king should know how to deal with enemy. Prudence is always the guiding force. *Bheeshma* makes it very clear that war is not the solution. Nor did he mean that enemy can be spared. Constant vigil, concealing one's own weakness and proper judgment only can ensure safety and security. All these descriptions apply under normal circumstances, whereas in distress even enemy should enjoy compassion because a humanitarian treatment may destroy enmity. Ultimately, humane outlook scores over other considerations.
- 2) The most important element in the Gita is the doctrine of *nishkama karma* which consists in discharging obligations in an impersonal manner. This attitude literally debars *yagas* because one performs it with selfish motive. The Gita however, never advocated that *karma* should be renounced. What it clearly asserts is that '*Karma Phala*' should be renounced.