
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To illustrate the basic religious tenets of Hinduism from the Vedic perspective
 - To introduce the Hindu scriptures and rituals prevalent among the people
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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is one of the oldest living religions with a history stretching from around the second millennium B.C to the present. It forms India's religious and cultural system, encompassing a broad spectrum of philosophies ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. Hinduism is not a homogeneous, organized system. It has no founder and no single code of beliefs. It has no central headquarters, and no particular organization to govern temporal power over its faithful. It does not have a single scripture, but has many sacred texts. It is diverse and no single set of beliefs can represent its numerous traditions. Infact the name Hinduism itself was first given by the Persians who called the people and the land beyond the river Sindh as 'Hindu.' Later, the Mughals and British endorsed its name. There is no direct reference from the ancient texts or any religious/political leaders calling themselves as 'Hindus' or their religion as '*hindu*.' There were '*Vedic*,' '*saiva*,' '*vaishna*,' '*sakta*,' and many other religious traditions, but not one single religion called Hinduism in the ancient and classical period. Great leaders like Adi Sankara himself identified six religious traditions in his time as '*shanmata*.' Even today, although Vedic tradition is 'projected' to be Hinduism, it would be scholarly to call Hinduism as 'plural religions of various traditions', a 'religion of religions.' Pluralism is the vein of Hindu tradition. '*Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti*' – 'Truth is one; people call it by many names' (Rig Veda I, 164.46), explains it all.

There are different belief systems found in Hinduism: Polytheism (belief in many Gods), Pantheism (God in all things), Theism (Personal God), and Monism (Everything is One). Vedantic tradition claims that Absolute Monism (Brahman alone is the One and only truth) is the highest of all beliefs. There are still many traditions where gods like Vishnu, Sakti, and Siva are considered to be Supreme Beings in various Theistic traditions. That is the beauty of Hinduism, where for every class of worshipper there is a provision. It is the great power of assimilation and absorption that makes Hinduism great.

Vedic Hindus call their tradition *sanatana-dharma*, an eternal tradition without any particular history of a founder or the text. It is an eternal and universal law containing the truth that is divinely revealed to the ancient sages. It is thus called *apauruseya*, not of human origin. Hinduism is a synthesis of religion and philosophy, it is not just a set of religious rituals and codes of conduct, but it is a way of life.

1.2 HINDU SCRIPTURES

Surti: Vedas

The Vedas and Upanishads, according to Hindus, constitute the fountain head of Indian philosophy, culture, and religion. They are taken as the result of divine inspiration and hence considered as primary revelation. The word 'Veda' means knowledge. The Veda is *apauruseya*, i.e. it does not owe its origin to any human agency. The Vedic truth is a non-personal truth. They are compiled by Vyasa. We have four Vedas or *Catur Vedas*: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, *Atharvana*. The *Rig* Veda contains only hymns; the *Yajur* Veda contains the invoking accompanying sacrifice; the *Sama* Veda is full of sacred *Bhajans* and songs; the *Atharvana* Veda has collections of sacred formulas. The Vedas are divided into four, namely, *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*.

1. **Samhitas:** They are *mantras*, or hymns with rhythmical tones. The *Samhitas* are a collection of sacred devotional mantras mostly addressed to Nature gods and goddesses. They form the basis for the *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*. These incantations praising the supreme and personifying the gods are sung to propitiate gods during the *yajnas*, to protect oneself from evil forces and for seeking assistance in performing one's duties. It is said there are 20389 mantras in the *Samhitas*. Of these, approximately 10552 *slokas* are found in the *Rg* Vedas, 1975 in the *Yajur*, 1875 in the *Sama*, and 5987 in the *Atharva Veda*. These mantras are said to have divine powers and the effectiveness of the mantras depends upon the chanter's mental discipline, correct recitation, and breathing.

2. **Brahmanas:** They date back to 900 – 500 BCE, and they are the theological treatise that got developed after the *Samhitas*. They were written in prose and explained the sacred significance of the different rituals mentioned in some *Samhitas*, to those who were not familiar with them. They explain the hymns and the way the sacrifices are to be performed. They deal with *Karma* and rituals, and are guides for the proper performance of the latter. They discuss the rituals performed for specific purposes with the objective of getting a specific effect, the minute details of objects of sacrifices, and duties of the priest and others. These manuals of worship provide not only knowledge of the mechanical performances of the rituals, but explain how a performer can control the processes of nature and the gods. The *Samhitas* in each *Veda* had the *Brahmanas* associated with them, numbering around 1180. But only a few (22) are available now.

3. **Aranyakas:** They are forest treatises dealing with meditation or *upasana*, and were composed around 700BCE. Out of the 1180 *Aryanakas* only a few (6) are available now. They were for hermits who retired into the forest in search of knowledge and the ultimate truth, and were thus unable to perform elaborate sacrifices requiring a multitude of accessories and articles which could not be procured in the forest. They give mystical, symbolic, and philosophical interpretations in metaphysical and cosmic terms, and the inner meanings of the *mantras* of the

Samhitas; and the rituals and sacrifices explained in the *Brahmanas* give the logical reasoning for following them. How to sit for prayer, which side to face, during what part of the day to offer the prayer, what mantra to be chanted, which ritual to be performed before and after prayer, and so on, are clearly explained here. They help in knowing the hidden meaning and significance of the rituals and sacrifice. It was the *Aranyakas* that paved the way for the *Upanisads*, which has become the source of all Vedic and Vedantic philosophy.

4. *Upanisads*: The term *Upanisads* comes from the terms *upa* and *ni* – under and near, and *sad* – to sit. It is the teaching the guru imparts when the disciples sit very near or very close to him. The *Upanisads* are referred to as *Surti prasthanas* or revealed scriptures, and as *Surti* or *siras* meaning the head or crown of the Vedas. They are known as *Vedanta*, meaning the last portion or essence of the Vedas. It is an ancient treatise which contains profound knowledge about God, man, and the universe. It is metaphysical and spiritual, with the firm belief in the reality of *Brahman*. It emphasizes the importance of ethical discipline as preparation for the realization of the supreme. According to the *Upanisads* one cannot realize the ultimate reality (*Brahman*) unless our conduct and actions are good. There are 108 *Upanisads*. The most important *Upanisads* are twelve in number. They are *Isa*(Yu), *Kena*(Sa), *Katha*(Yu), *Prasna* (Ath), *Mundaka*(Ath), *Mandukya* (Ath), *Aitareya*(Rg), *Taittiriya*(Yu), *Chandogya*(Sa), *Brhadaranyaka*(Yu), *Kausitaki*(Rg) and *Svetasvatara*(Yu). The *Upanisads* are also called *Vedanta* (not just the end of the Vedas, but the essence of the Vedas).

The subject matter of the entire Vedas is divided into three: 1. The *Karma Kanda* which deals with rituals. 2. The *Upasana Kanda* that deals with worship and meditation. 3. The *Jnana Kanda* that deals with the highest spiritual knowledge. A synopsis and classification of the contents of the *Upanisads* goes by the name of the *Brahma-sutras* or *Vedanta-sutras* whose author is Badarayana.

Vedangas

In addition to the Vedas, the Vedic literature consists of auxiliary texts known as *Vedangas* (limbs of the Vedas). They are designed to help us in the correct pronunciation of the terms, right interpretation of texts, and employment of the proper mantras during the course of sacrifices, rituals, and ceremonies. The *Vedangas* are six in number. They are: 1) *Siksha*: the science of proper articulation and pronunciation of *varnas* (letters) and words; it lays down the rules for the correct chanting of Vedic hymns. 2) *Chandas*: the science of prosody; it deals with the cadence and numbers of hymns. 3) *Vyakarana*: grammar; it lays down the grammar of the Vedic language. 4) *Nirukta*: etymological explanation of difficult Vedic terms; it gives the interpretation of the Vedic syllables. 5) *Kalpa*: procedural codes of the performance of sacrifices. *Kalpas* are in the form of *sutras* (a *sutra* is a distinctive feature of spiritual and philosophical composition. It is a marvel of condensation- it is a cryptic form of expression). The *Kalpa Sutras* are three in number. They are *Srauta sutras*, *Grahya sutra*, and *Dharma sutras*. 6) *Jyotisa*: astrology or Vedic astronomy; it prescribes the appropriate times for performing Vedic rites and sacrifices;

***Upa-Vedas*:** *Ayur veda* – medicine, *Dhanur Veda* – military science, *Gandharva veda* –music, *silpa veda* – dance, architecture, iconography, etc. Each *upaveda* is attached to one *veda*.

Smṛti: *Smṛti* literally means recollection or memory. It is a secondary authority; it derives its authority from *Sūṛti*. Its object is to expand and exemplify the principles of *Sūṛti* or the Vedas. The *Smṛti* consists of the *Gīta*, *Brahma Sūtra*, *Itihasas* (epics), *Puranas* (chronicles and legends), *Sastras* (codes of law), *Agamas* and *Tantras* (manuals of worship).

Bhagavat Gīta: '*Bhagavad*' means Lord, *gīta* means song. So 'Song of the Lord.' This is the literature written in poetic form around 200BCE. In the battle of *kurusetra*, Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to do his duty, good or evil, without any attachment for the fruit of actions (*niskama karma*). The *Gīta* in short beautifully harmonizes the philosophy of action, devotion, and knowledge. Every person has three *gunas* - *sattva* (principle of light), *rajas* (source of activity), and *tamas* (responsible to resist the actions).

Brahma Sūtra: Badarayana or Vyasa wrote the *Brahma Sūtra*. It contained the Upanisadic teaching dealt in four chapters, covering 555 *sūtras*.

Sastras: These are codified laws regulating the society from time to time. The important law givers are *Manu*, *Yajñavalkya* and *Parasara*. Their codes of law are known as *Sastras*. The *Dharmasastra* constitutes another very important source of Indian ethics and philosophy in which detailed rules of conduct and practical moral instructions are given. *Manu Smṛti*: according to *Manu*, by following *dharma* one attains perfection. *Manu* prescribes duties for all the four stages of life and the four different categories of persons in the society. This book of *Manu* comprises the laws of *Manu*, which have become Aryan laws. *Manu* was considered to be the great law giver in the Vedic period.

The Itihasa: These are the epics. The two well-known epics are the *Ramayana* by Valmiki and the *Mahabharata* by Vyasa. The aim of the epics is to drive home to all, the laws of the *Smṛtis* and the principles of the *Sūṛti* by means of the exploits of their great national heroes – Rama and Krishna. The **Ramayana** is the account of the deeds of a divinely great hero who set an example for the entire human race. It deals with ideal conditions of humanness, a sense of brotherhood, obedience to moral law, firmness of character, honesty, sacrifice, and unbounded goodness. The **Mahabharata** has a more profound theme which involves history, mythology, ethics, and metaphysics. E.g. the history of the *Bharadas*, a royal family of North India which got divided into two parties, the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*, and so war breaks out between them. It is an encyclopedia of Hindu *dharma*.

Eighteen Puranas: These consist of chronicles and legends, and the genealogy of kings. They are the instruments of popular education. They are treatises of history and of cosmology, with various symbolical illustrations of philosophical principles and so forth. According to tradition there are eighteen *Puranas*. The doctrine of avatars (divine incarnation) is fully developed in the epics and the *Puranas*. The purpose of an avatar is for the protection of the virtuous, the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of *dharma* (moral order.) According to the *Puranas* there are ten *avatars* of Vishnu. *Matsya* –fish, *kurma* –tortoise, *varaha* – boar, *narasimha* – the man-lion, *vaman* – dwarf, *parasurama* –Rama with the axe, *ramacandra* – hero of the *Ramayana*, *kṛṣṇa* – the god of the *Bhagavad Gīta*, *Buddha* – the founder of Buddhism, and *kalki* – the hero on a white horse who is to come at the end of the *kali-yuga*.

Agamas: These are the scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God. They prescribe detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper. Each *agama* consists of four sections. They are philosophy, mental discipline, rules for the construction of temples and images, and religious practices. The *agamas* are divided into three, according to the deity that is worshipped: the *Vaisnava agamas* (also called the *pancaratra* and *vaikhanasa agamas*) for Vishnu, the *Saiva Agamas* for Siva, and the *sakta agamas (tantras)* for Sakti. Each glorifies its particular deity. The name of these *agamas* are *Kamigam, Yogajam, Sivithiam, Karanam, Ajitham, Deeptham, Sukshmam, Sahasram, Hamsumam, Suprabhedam, Vijayam, Niswasam, Swayambhuvam, Agneyam, Veeram, Rauravam, Makutam, Vishalam, Chandra Jnanam, Mukha Bimbam, Purotgeetham, Lalitam, Siddham, Santanam, Sarvoktam, Parameswaram, Karanam, Vathulam.*

1.3 VEDIC DEITIES

The religion of the Aryans was at first simple. They believed in many gods, and almost every phenomenon in nature which impressed their imagination was regarded as a deity. Thus, Indra was the god of storm, thunder, and rain. The brilliant sun above and fire below were worshipped as the gods Surya and Agni. The beauty of dawn led to the creation of the goddess Usha, and the vast expanse of heaven, to that of Dyaus. These gods were at first worshipped in a simple way. A fire was kindled, to which ordinary articles of food and drink like milk, ghee, rice, etc. were offered as oblations. This was accompanied by beautiful hymns addressed to the gods. Later, the rituals of worship became more elaborate and complicated, and priests were employed to perform it on behalf of the worshippers. In the *Rg Veda* many different deities are mentioned, but all are not equally important. Among them the main gods are Indra, Agni, Varuna, etc.

Indra: Indra's power is praised in more than three hundred hymns in the *Rg Veda*. He possesses all human virtues in the superlative degree. He is the Hero, the man-God of the Vedic times. He blesses men in all their enterprises. He organized the whole universe. He fixed the earth and the mountains in their places. He has measured the space, stretched out the sky, and created both the sun and sunrise. He established the universe and its functions. Indra is the chief of warriors, endowed with matchless power. As the protector of warriors, he is hailed as commander-in-chief in the struggle of the invading Aryans against the original inhabitants of the land. Indra is the drinker of *soma*, helping and encouraging those who sacrifice.

Agni: Agni is the god most frequently mentioned over two hundred hymns. He represents, in fact, one of the cornerstones of the Vedic world structure. He is one of the most comprehensive symbols of the reality. Agni, like life-giving warmth, is spread everywhere. Agni is the leader of the gods, an envoy among the gods, and between gods and humans. He is the priest of the gods, their tongue, and the spokesman to them on behalf of humans. Secondly, Agni has a clearly terrestrial character. He is a cosmic power. He is the fire, he is earthly, 'the navel of the earth, and the 'fruit of the womb' of the world. He is the sun, the seed of all, the leader and lord of the earth. Agni is the one who presents the sacrifice, renders it acceptable and pleasing, transforms and divinizes the gifts offered, and brings together the whole cosmos. His burning flame of sacrifice may also consume sins and wickedness, and demons and foes. Nothing can withstand him; everything must be burned and transmuted into light.

Varuna: Varuna the mighty Lord establishes control and surveys both the operation of cosmic law, and the deeds and activities of men. He is the god of justice. In him resides power to inflict punishment or to free men from their sins, to produce in them a sense of fear and humility, and

the admission of guilt and regret. Varuna is a water-god. As lord of the waters and rivers, he is the dispenser of rain.

1.4 YAJNA: VEDIC SACRIFICE

Sacrifices form the central theme of the Vedic religion and philosophy. The sacrifices not only please gods but also feed them. Through them sins are also atoned for. The important *Vedic* sacrifices are the *Srauta* sacrifices and the *Grihya* rituals. The *Srauta* sacrifices are divided into the *nitya* (regular) sacrifices and *naimitika* (occasional) sacrifices. The *Nitya* sacrifices are 1) *Agnihotra* (fire offering) 2) *Darsa Purnamasesi* (new and full moon sacrifices) 3) three four-month sacrifices: i) *Vaisvadeva* ii) *Varuna Praghasa* iii) *Sakamedha*. The *Naimitika* sacrifices are 1) *Pasubandha* and 2) *Soma*. The *Grihya* rituals, refer to five daily sacrifices (*Panchamaha-Yajnas*) to be performed daily: 1) the sacrifice to the gods (*Deva-Yajnas*) 2) the sacrifice to the beings (*Bhuta Yajnas*) 3) *Pitr-Yajna*- sacrifice to the departed souls, 4) *Brahma Yajna*- recitation of Vedic texts, and 5) *Manusha Yajna* (Sacrifice to men).

The larger Vedic rituals were primarily dedicated to Agni and Soma. Agni was a divine messenger and intermediary. The offerings of ghee were poured into sacrificial fires installed on altars, and Agni transmitted them to the gods. Special libations were made of juice extracted from the stalks of the soma plant. Remnants of the offerings were consumed by the celebrants. The ceremonies were accompanied by recitations from the Rg Veda and chants from the Sama Veda. According to the Rg veda (7.26.1), pressed juices unaccompanied by sacred hymns have no effect. The celebrations required the execution of multifarious activities, from the different Vedas, distributed among priests who officiated on behalf of, and for the benefit of, a ritual patron, the *yajamana*. Rituals, along with meters and chants, are depicted as instruments used by gods and demons to fight and conquer each other, and sometimes to create.

The recitations that accompany the rites often express specific desires — for health, strength, sons, victory, heaven, and immortality. The list of wishes and desires is not so different from that of modern man. It is not exclusively spiritual nor is it wholly materialistic. The reason for performing a specific ritual is stated to be the desire for a particular fruit or effect. ‘He who desires heaven shall sacrifice with the *agnistoma* ritual – *agnistomena svargakamo yajeta*’. Yet, the *Srauta sutras* of the late Vedic period offer several definitions of ritual. It comprises of three things: *dravya* – the substance used in the oblations, *devata* – the deity to which oblations are offered, and *tyaga* – renunciation of the fruits of the ritual acts. The *tyaga* is a formula pronounced by the *yajamana*, or patron, at the culmination of each act of oblation, when the officiating priest, on behalf the *yajamana*, makes the oblation into the fire for one of the gods; for example, ‘this is for Agni, not for me’ – *agnaye idam na mama*. Recitations are more important than acts. The unintelligibility is an inherent feature of the *mantras*. *Mantras* are significant not as meaningful expressions, but as units recited on specific ritual occasions. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of rituals for the civilization and religions of India. Ritual activity is physical activity and is therefore primarily related to the body, unlike thinking or believing.

The quintessence of the Vedic Revelation is Yajna or sacrifice. Sacrifice is in fact an ancient, far-reaching, and pervasive intuition of the *Surti*. The conception of the sacrifice, varied through the ages. The basic characteristic of *yajna* seems to be that of an action that reaches where it intends to reach, that really and truly offers something, and that stretches out and extends itself. Sacrifice

effectively ‘creates’ that is, it acts, is efficient, and produces what it intends. To perform the sacrifice is not to participate in a good act or to do good to the gods, to humankind, or to oneself; it is to live and to safeguard the existence of the whole universe. It is the act by which the universe itself continues in existence. Worship does not consist solely in prayer or feeling or knowledge; it is action, an action by which duality is transcended and dissimilarity is banished. This act contains within itself, essentially, a sacrificial aspect; a death and a becoming; a doing or *karman*. This word, which in the course of time will take on numerous other meanings, has here the significance of ‘action’, understood as the act of worship and sacrifice. Action that does not include an element of making and remaking — creation and redemption — does not deserve the name. Salvation is rendered attainable by worship and worship must need entail sacrifice, for only sacrifice can produce the essential conversion. There is no other way to salvation except through sacrifice, for salvation is not attainable except by means of a break, a leap onto the other shore, or some sort of transference into a supra-natural order. Man can be saved only by the performance of sacrificial worship; apart from such worship he is powerless and at the mercy of blind forces. But the genuine idea of sacrifice was soon degenerated into mere ritualism and magic. Sacrifices came to be regarded as the magical means, having the automatic power to bring about any wish of the sacrificer. They were even used to make evil fortune fall on gods as well as one’s own enemies.

1.5 *PURUSA SUKTA: THE COSMIC SACRIFICE*

The idea of a cosmic sacrifice, in which a primeval person creates the world through his own sacrifice and dismemberment, is the basic theory of rituals adopted in the *Brahmanas*. Here *prajapati* takes the place of *purusa*. *Purusa Sukta* (Rg Veda 10: 90) refers to a primordial world-creating *yajna*. All of existence comes into being through this power. It affirms the underlying unity of the human, cosmic, and divine realities; for all are seen as emerging from the same original reality of the cosmic person. In this hymn, reality is conceived of as a gigantic person; everything that exists is part of this cosmic person. The greatness of this person is emphasized by noting that he has a thousand heads, eyes, and feet; an extraordinary person indeed. Infact, the next line says that although he envelops the whole world, he is greater than this earth, going beyond it in all possible ways. In seeing the universe as a person, one saw that they were concerned primarily with human becoming and with the relationship between cosmic and human becoming, and they regarded human existence as the most basic and profound mode of existence. Verses 11-14 of the Rg Veda 10:90 present us with a number of instances of correspondence between the cosmic person and human society, and between the person and the natural world. These correspondences establish the inter-connectedness of the social classes, features of the natural world, and even the gods. Both the order and relationships within these spheres are seen as established in the originating source of all existence — the primordial person. These verses emphasis the unity of all existence.

Hiranyagarbha: *Hiranyagarbha* is the cosmos, the golden egg, with the sun in it. He is the great *deva*, the source of light and heat and life, movement, and time. Heaven is peopled with the *devas*. They perform a continuous sacrifice in the heavenly fire. *Indra* drinks soma, and when soma is poured into the fire, clouds are formed. *Maruti* the wind helps. It rains. Lightning and thunder accompany. *Vayu* is a *devata*. A similar sacrifice is performed for the *yajamana* by the priests. The *yajamana* becomes *Vishnu*; his body is the seat of another sacrifice by the gods within. There is warmth and light, and sight. There is soma – the body-fluids. There is air-breath, speech, *mantra*, and the *indriyas* – *Indra*. At the centre of the macrocosm there is fire, the sun,

and Vishnu. Also at the centre of the *vedi* there is *yajamana*, the microcosm, Vishnu, in whom there is life and consciousness. At the center of the universe too there is life and consciousness.

1.6 HINDU SACRAMENTS (SAMSKARAS)

Rites pertaining to the stages of life are called *samskaras*. These *samskaras* are religious acts of purification and they are the ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind, and intellect of the individual, so that the person may become a full-pledged member of the community. The most important *samskaras* are

- 1) **Garbhadhanam** or conception: seeking the help of the gods to secure a child. Here the husband prays that a child may be conceived. Thus the first dawning of the new life is through the vibration of *mantra*. R.V X. 1xxxv. 21, 22).
- 2) **Pumsavanam**: (Ensuring a male offspring) In the third month of pregnancy it is performed with mantras, R.V 1. i. 3; III V.XXXVII.2 for the forming of male child.
- 3) **Simanthonnayanam** (Parting of the hair) During the pregnancy period, the husband parts the hair of the wife from the front backwards. This is intended to ensure fertility for the wife and exuberance and heroism for the child. It is performed during the seventh month of the pregnancy, with the *Rig Veda mantras* XC xxxi. 10. cl xxx iv.I, II xxx ii . 4-8. These three *samskaras* protect both mother and child in order to shape the developing body.
- 4) **Jata-karmam** (Birth-Ceremony) This is performed immediately after birth. The father breathes three times on the child and then draws in his breath. Here the father welcomes the new born child, praying for its new life, intelligence, wisdom, and well being, and feeds it with gold, honey, and butter.
- 5) **Nama-karanam** or the naming ceremony takes place on the tenth day. Here the name is given to the child according to his own caste.
- 6) **Nishkramanam**: Taking the child out of the house so that it may see the sun.
- 7) **Annaprasnam**: The first feeding of the child with solid food (rice) in the sixth month.
- 8) **Chudakaranam**: The rite of the tonsure ceremony.
- 9) **Karnavedham**: Piercing of earlobes. By all these ceremonies the young body is constantly guided and guarded.
- 10) **Vidhyarambam**: It is done at the beginning of the sacred thread ceremony.
- 11) **Upanayanam** (Initiation by a teacher): With this sacrament, the stage of youth is said to begin with the life of study. The *Upanayanam* is the ceremony of the investiture with the sacred thread. It is the initiation ceremony, which is the second birth given by the *Acharya*. It constitutes the boy a twice-born. The *Acharya* teaches him the *gayatri mantra* and gives him a staff. He is a *brahmachari* who is bound to lead a life of chastity or celibacy.

12) Samavarthanam: It is done at the return of the student to his parental home which was preceded by many rites and offerings. Before this sacrament, the student offers the teacher a gift and he receives permission to take a formal bath, which marks the close of his pupilage. He then returns home and performs this *Samavartanam*. After this ceremony he is called a *Snaktaka*, one who is ready to marry and enter into the household state.

13) Vivaha (Marriage): The priests of the families of the bride and bridegroom make the *ajya* oblation into the domestic fire. The bridegroom grasps the hand of the bride (*Pani-Grahanam*). The bridegroom then leads the bride thrice around the fire and then makes her step on a stone, which is symbolic of steadfastness. Then many offerings to the fire are made. The most vital ceremony is the *Sapta-Padi* (seven steps), which the couple take together in the northern direction. This is symbolic of their friendly co-operation in life. After the wedding, the couple pass three nights taking part in special sacrifices, and following abstinence and charity. With certain rites on the fourth day they are allowed to have marital relations (*Garbhadhana*).

14) Antyesti or Funeral Rights Cremation is the *Vedic* rule. Burial is allowed in the case of children less than two years of age. The main features of the cremation ceremony are the following: the dead body is taken to the *smasana* and placed on the funeral pyre. The wife of the deceased is then made to lie down on the pyre by the side of the dead. Some close relative of the husband then makes her rise from the pyre with the *Rig Vedic* stanza x. 18.8. According to the *Rig Veda*, a goat and a cow are sacrificed and burned together with the dead body. When the dead body is being burned, the dead man is addressed with the *Rig Vedic* verses, X.147, 8. 10-14, 17. 3-6, 18. 10-13, exhorting him to go forth by those ancient paths where the fathers of old have gone, to meet the two kings *Yama* and *Varuna*, and to gather himself to the fathers, to leave all blemish behind, to run past the four-eyed brindled dogs – the two sons of *Sarama*, etc. Then on the tenth day the bones are gathered in an urn and deposited in a pit. The deceased is addressed with the verse: approach the mother earth R.V. X.I xxxv. 21,22. Thus the whole life of the *Aryan* is thus guarded from conception to cremation.

1.7 IMPORTANT HINDU VIRTUES

Ahimsa (non-violence), *samyam* (control of mind and senses), tolerance of different beliefs, opinions, religious traditions and persons, hospitality, compassion, protection, respect for all living beings and for the sanctity of life, wisdom to sort out right and wrong, austerity, celibacy, honesty, cleanliness, and charity.

Manu Smriti (*Manu*, VI, 92) prescribes the tenfold system of virtuous duties: Contentment; abstention from injury to others; resistance to sensual appetites; abstinence from theft and illicit gain; purity, chastity and cleanliness; coercion of passions; acquisition of knowledge; acquisition of divine wisdom; veracity, honest and fidelity; and freedom from wrath and hatred.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

Hinduism, one of the most ancient religions in the world, has the dynamics of being traditional yet allowing itself to be innovative, largely accommodative, and inclusive of many religious traditions. The scope and range of Hinduism as a religious tradition are too vast to be confined in strict structures of formulated creed, a specific code, fixed sacred texts, or regulated ritual practices. As a peculiar amalgamation of various sectarian faith traditions with their own specificities, it exhibits an inner dynamism of being largely accommodative in many aspects, and

significantly unyielding in the fundamental elements. In the absence of any centralised body of authority and power to decide upon crucial matters, Hinduism has the inner dynamism of being a uniting force. Vedic tradition has rendered itself as offering a main thread, connecting all diverse religious cultures and traditions in India.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Yajna - Vedic idea of sacrifice where the god Agni takes a central stage.

Purusa sukta – Famous Vedic idea of a cosmic sacrifice where a primeval person creates the world through his own sacrifice and dismemberment.

Upanayanam – It is an initiation ceremony for the students by a teacher.

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UNIT 2 PHILOSOPHY OF HINDUISM

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

An ancient saying depicts a person, unaware of the golden treasure lying underground, walking up and down the floor several times, and brooding over his wretched state of living. Being Indians, much more as students of philosophy, we are to be aware of this treasure of our land. The present unit on the philosophy of Hinduism initiates the students to the precious nature of this treasure, and motivates them to unearth the hidden riches of the religious, spiritual, and philosophical heritage of Hinduism.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

India is the birth place of many religions and religious sects. The word 'Hindu' is not of Hindu origin. It is not found in any standard Sanskrit dictionary. The Persians used to refer to the people who lived on the other side of the Indus (Sindu) river, as Hindu. Hinduism is more of an umbrella, sheltering many different religious traditions which originated in very ancient times and in various parts of the subcontinent. Some Hindu thinkers suggest that the Vedas provide the bond that holds the Hindus together.

2.2 SOURCES OF HINDU PHILOSOPHY

Scriptures are the codified expressions of religious, mystical experiences of great souls. Scriptures 'make the unknown known.' The Hindu Scriptures are divided into two distinct categories *Surti* and *Smrti* (Revealed Texts - *Surti* – *what is heard*, and Remembered Texts *Smrti*– *what is remembered*). The four Vedas and 108 Upanisads come under the *Surti* category. The *Bhagavat Gita*, 18 *Puranas*, *Manu Smrti*, *Dharma sastras*, *artha sastra*, *kama sutra*, *tantras*, and many others, come under the *Smrti* Category. The distinction between *Surti* and *Smrti* is important for the two following reasons: 1. In case of conflicting views, *Surti*'s views will hold good. 2. Without requiring any change in the *Surti*, the *Smrtis* preserve the authority admitting changes in it.

2.3 VEDIC HINDU METAPHYSICS

Vedic Hindu Concept of God

The Vedas are pantheistic. The names '*isvara*' and '*isa*' are not found in the Rg veda, although the verb form is frequently used to express the power of the gods. Though the noun form, '*isvara*' is found in the Atharvana Veda, it certainly does not have the connotations of later times. Certain Upanisads begin to put the concept of the Lord in the foreground and the *Svetasvatara* Upanisad gives it still greater prominence. The Personal Lord is finally and fully disclosed in the Gita. In the Vedas, the concept of the Lord is not fully expressed in generic terms such as *pati*, *prabhu*, *adhipathi*, etc. The term 'lord' does not refer to one particular God, but each time refers to the different Vedic gods, Indra, Varuna, Agni, Soma, etc.

Concept of Atman-Brahman

Behind all the temporal flux of the world of experience of the senses is a subtle, pervasive, timeless, and unchanging reality. It is identical to the essence of the human being as well. The early Vedic Upanisads call this unified and imperishable world-soul as Brahman or Atman, the former as Godhead and the latter as the 'self' residing at the deepest level of one's person. The theistic Upanisads teach that this Brahman is a single deity, *Isvara* or *isa* – lord. This could be identified with that of Siva or Vishnu of sectarian communities. The ultimate reality is unmanifested yet vital. Brahman is described as life-giving breath, pure consciousness, bliss, and eternal. It is the infinite subject by whom all objects are known, the 'inner guide' of all that is. There are difficulties in comprehending this hidden reality that either transcends or simply cannot be known through the structures of time, space, and causation. The Upanisads hold that through disciplined practices of meditation and the cultivation of extraordinary knowledge, it can in fact be discerned. Such discernment releases one from the apparent cycles of life and death caused by one's ignorance of the fact that the essential self does not die.

Nirguna and Saguna Brahman

The ultimate reality is acknowledged in the Upanisads as both immanent and transcendent in nature. Brahman is both cosmic (*saguna* – 'with characteristics') and acosmic (*nirguna* – 'without characteristics'). *Saguna* Brahman is understood to be the finest essence of all things in the world. Brahman is the substance of the universe. This does not mean that Brahman is the material stuff of the world which can be perceived sensually. Rather it is that hidden and subtle reality which allows all things to exist in the first place. *Nirguna* Brahman cannot be described through definitive or positive statements, since Brahman transcends the limitations of language. It is not subject to categorization, and therefore, can neither be perceived nor conceived. Thus, one seeking knowledge of *saguna* Brahman was to comprehend the unity of all things in the world constructed on the essence of Brahman. And the one seeking for an understanding of *nirguna* Brahman was to 'deconstruct' the phenomenal world as it were, in order to comprehend the imperishable self that lies behind the world of life and death. The process of knowing this aspect of Brahman is negative theology, via negative, '*neti-neti*' 'not this' 'not this'. Brahman can be best described only as 'this is not Brahman,' 'that is not Brahman.' A positive description of Brahman would not fully comprehend the ultimate reality.

Mahavakya – Great pronouncements

The essential oneness of the individual self and the absolute self is called *jiva-isvara aikyam*. The scriptures say that *jiva*, the consciousness in the microcosm, and *isvara*, the consciousness in the macrocosm, are one and the same. The differences we perceive belong to the reflecting medium. There is no difference in the essential consciousness at all. In the scriptures there are many statements which reveal this oneness and these statements are called *Mahavakyas*. *Mahavakya* is a Vedic statement which reveals the essential oneness of *jiva* and *isvara*. There are many *Mahavakyas* occurring in the Vedas, but generally one *Mahavakya* is chosen from each Veda as a sample: 1. *Prajnanam brahma* – Aitareya Upanisad. 2. *Aham Brahmasmi* – Bhadaranyaka Upanisad. 3. *Tat tvam asi* – Chandogya Upanisad. 4. *Ayam Atma brahma* – Mandukya Upanisad.

2.4. HINDU RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Transmigration of soul:

The doctrine of *Karma* and transmigration of soul are closely bound together. The soul is not born with a body, nor does it perish therewith. It is unformed, constant, eternal, and primeval. What happens at death is only the decay of the body. The soul migrates from life to life, being conditioned by the cause of ignorance. 'Verily one becomes good by good works and evil by evil works.' At death, the soul shuffles off its present body and enters a new one, like a caterpillar which having come and reached the end of a blade of grass draws itself together and takes a leap to another blade. The process is comparable to a goldsmith who makes new and more beautiful forms like that of *Brahman*. The kind of form the soul takes depends on its previous *karma*. 'As is his resolve, such is the action he performs. What action he performs that he procures for himself' (*Brha. Upan 3 :4*). Transmigration of the soul into a sub-human species is also held possible. When one dies he may even go to another region before he takes another birth in this world. After the death of the body the life of the individual is continued in another body and so on in indefinite series. According to this theory, the soul though pure and blessed in itself, gets entangled in the *Samsara* (cycle of birth and rebirth). It is because of the *karma* that it passes through innumerable births (transmigration) before it regains its original state. The purpose and mechanism of rebirth is elaborated in the *Chandogya Upanishad*. According to the *Chandogya Upanishad*, a man after his death reaches the moon with the merit he has acquired during his life. He remains there as long as there is a residue of his good works. Then he returns again to space, and from space he goes to mist and cloud, etc. After having become cloud, he rains down. Then he is born as rice, trees, beans, etc. If someone eats him as food, he develops further and finally those who are of pleasant conduct enter either the womb of a *Brahmin*, or a *Kshatriya*, or a *Vaisya* and those who are of stinking conduct, enter either the womb of a dog or of swine, or of an outcaste (*Chandala*).

Sin and forgiveness

The seers of the Vedic period possessed a peculiar awareness of sin and guilt. There are three basic insights, like three seeds, which later may be developed into complete theories. Firstly, there is a series of words indicating an external cause for all sorts of violence, harming, hurting, and afflicting. Here the cause of evil comes from the outside; it encroaches upon us and hinders the happy and smooth development of our being. The evil is transcendent. Secondly, another set of words seem to denote an internal source; these words speak of anxiety, narrowness, lack of expansion, and a feeling of imprisonment within oneself. Here the cause is within and seems to be inherent in our own nature. We cannot blame others but only ourselves. We would like to be

different and yet we are not. Evil here is immanent. Thirdly, a set of words, most of them compounds, seems to suggest that evil springs from maladjustment and malfunctioning of a system that otherwise is far from being bad. These words postulate a kind of factual ambivalence in almost any human value, which can turn out to be either negative and mischievous, or positive and beneficial. Evil here depends on the direction that events and values take, and on the use we or others make of the data. The Vedas employ a term for grace, which implies pure and simple forgiveness. The gods are requested to forgive man's real sins and also his constitutional shortcomings. Man is never worthy of grace from the divine. *Mrdika*, though occurring only nine times in the Rg veda, denotes the grace that elevates man and wipes away all his stains. We have here a forgiveness that comes, unpredictably and undeservedly, from the divine.

2.5. VEDIC HINDU ETHICS

Stages of Life (*Asrama Dharma*) *Asrama dharma* stands for individual development in society, and economic aspect of society. The term '*Asrama*' means '*a*' – all around or intensive and '*srama*' – means to exert oneself. It stands for labour. *Asrama* thus means an all-round training and development of the individual. It also means a stage, a way in the journey of life. According to Vedic thought, life is divided into four stages or *Ashramas*. The four stages are *brahmacarya*: studenthood, *grahastha* – householder, *vanaprastha* – stage of detachment, and *sannyasa* – stage of renunciation.

Brahmacarya is a life of willing abstention, based on self control and austerity or *tapas*. *Brahmacari* means student. The first stage of a student begins with the *Upanayana* ceremony, and then the boy is entrusted to the care of his teacher with whom he lives, and his student life continues with the teacher. The life of the student afterwards becomes simple and hardy. This simple and hardy life is intended to make him strong and healthy, and independent of all soft and luxurious living. His life is based on self-control, self-restraint, and austerity. During this stage the individual develops a deep insight into the realities of life. His abode is with that of the teacher in *asrams* or *gurukulas*. A *gurukula* is an institution of education. It has two distinct purposes: 1. To transmit the heritage to the next generation, and 2. To train the individual to lead a life of discipline. Great stress is laid on chastity and purity during youth, in order to have vigour, strength of manhood, freedom from disease, healthy children, and a long life. Thus the very name of the student, the *Brahmacari*, becomes synonymous with one who is under a vow of celibacy. After completing the days in study and strict chastity during the student period, the student has to present his teacher with a gift, according to his ability. Then he returns home to enter the household life.

Grihasta is the second stage of life, the married life of a householder, where a person strives towards the first three *purusarthas*: *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama*. In this stage he has to take a wife and carry out the responsibilities of a man. After marriage, great temperance in sexual relations is enjoined. Marital relation is only permissible on any one of ten nights in a month. Women were to be honored and loved by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law. When the husband and wife are content with each other, their happiness is certain. As all creatures live supported by air, so too the other stages of life exist supported by the householder. Hence the householder is the best of the orders. The general virtues of a householder are hospitality,

industry, truth, honesty, liberality, charity, and purity of food and life. He may enjoy wealth and luxury, provided he gives alms. Any householder must duly offer five great sacrifices daily.

Vanaprastha: The householder at this stage of life quits the household life by way of overcoming the bodily needs and emotional attachments to the members of his family. It is a stage of detaching oneself from the responsibilities of family life, and handing them over to the next generation. It is a voluntary withdrawal, or voluntary retirement. The generation gap between father and son is solved by this stage. This stage solves the problem of unemployment and also the problem of social disorganization. A man who has entered this stage, instead of living for his family, should live for the betterment of society and must undertake the work of educating the people of the neighbourhood. The rule of his life is to do sacrifice, study and practice austerity, and show kindness to all. Here he engages in *Veda* study and remains always a giver and not a receiver, and he becomes compassionate to all beings. This simple ascetic life leads a forest-dweller to the last stage — *Sannyasa*

Sannyasa or complete renunciation: The achievement of the fourth purusartha i.e. *moksa*, is attained at this stage. It is characterized by renunciation and service. Every narrow relationship is renounced. The person has no *Varna*, and he changes his name and residence. He is called *vairagi*, a man with no colour and no denominations. A *sanyasin* serves humanity as a whole. The *sannyasi* is the one who renounces everything. He gives away all his property and he no longer offers sacrifices. He lives alone, with a tree for shelter, and spends his life in deep contemplation and meditation. The life of the *sannyasi* who freed himself from all human ties, and stripped himself of all that ministers to physical comfort and well-being, has always seemed to be the highest. A true *sannyasi* should not wish for life or death. He must rejoice in the Supreme Self, sitting indifferent, and refraining from sensual delights. He must wander the earth, aiming at liberation. He must meditate constantly on transmigration and suffering, and on the Supreme Self, in order to trace the *Jivatma* through its many births and to rest in *Brahman* alone. Thus by doing this he reaches *Brahman*.

In these modern days these four *ashramas* cannot be completely revived in their letter, but they can be revived in their spirit, to the great improvement of modern life. Today the *bramacari* life or period is passed or spent in school or college, instead of the *ashrama* of the *guru*. The *grihasta* ideal is commenced at marriage. It is very largely followed in its sense of duty and responsibility, in its discharge of religious obligations, in its balanced ordering of life, and in its recognition of all claims and debts. Today the third *ashrama* cannot be lived in the forest by many, and the fourth *ashrama* is beyond the reach of most. Yet, the idea of gradual withdrawal from worldly life, the idea of meditation, study and worship, and the main duties of life can be carried out well.

Finally, a life, which is well ordered from the beginning to the end, is very much implied in the phrase 'the four *ashramas*'.

2.6. SUPREME GOALS OF LIFE (PURUSARTHAS)

The ancient seers laid down four supreme ends of life or *Purusarthas*, which give meaning to human life. *Purusartha* means 'what is sought by human beings.' They are *dharma* (righteousness/ religious, moral merit), *artha* (pursuit of wealth), *kama* (pursuit of pleasure), and *moksa* (liberation)

Dharma (justice, righteousness): The term '*dharma*' gathered more and more meaning down the ages, and became a term of complex and varied meanings. For *dharma*, the dictionary suggests terms like virtue, righteousness, duty, right, morality, justice, the good, the characteristics, tradition, ordinance, law, etc. But *dharma* is essentially a human value, operating in the universe of human ideals. The *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad* identifies '*dharma*' with truth. That which is justice is truth. And justice and truth are the same (1.4.14). Sankara in his own way interrelates the three concepts *rta*, *satya*, and *dharma*. He says '*rta*' is the mental perception of truth, *Satya* is the expression of truth in words as perceived by the mind, and *dharma* is the observance of truth in the conduct of life. And thus, *dharma* is the way of life embodying the truth perceived. This is the supreme end in this world. It brings material property (*artha*) and fulfillment of desires (*kama*), and liberation (moksha). The essence of *dharma* is that one should do to others what one would like others to do to oneself. *Dharma* controls instincts, impulses, desires, and emotions with the help of reason. *Dharma* is usually distinguished into *sadharana dharma* and *varnashrama dharma*. *Sadharana dharma* refers to the duties of universal scope and validity. There are ten cardinal virtues known as *sadharana dharma* according to Manu: endurance, patience, self-control, integrity, purity, restraint of senses, wisdom, learning, truth, and absence of anger or non-violence. The *varnasrama dharma* refers to the duties of persons according to the castes and the stages of life. Thus '*dharma*' is considered to be a means for attaining personality integration in the spiritual level or liberation.

Artha (Wealth): The term '*artha*' generally indicates the attainment of riches and worldly prosperity, advantage, profit, and wealth. It means the whole range of tangible objects that can be possessed, enjoyed, or lost and which we require in our daily life for the upkeep of a household, raising of a family, and discharge of religious duties. It helps in the satisfaction of material, biological, and economic desires, for according to the sages, lack of wealth weakens the person and leads him to adopting illegal and immoral ways to obtain satisfaction. By the term '*artha*', Kautilya in his book *Artha Sastra* IV 9 means both the economic and political aspects of man's life in the society. The materialistic aspects of life have great significance, because the absence of the economic well-being of man is a great hindrance to the pursuit of personality integration and a good life. Absence of economic well-being may also lead a man to adopt or to do immoral deeds to satisfy himself. The *Mahabharata* stresses the great importance of wealth, saying that poverty is a state of sinfulness. All kinds of meritorious acts flow from the possession of great wealth. From wealth springs all religious acts, pleasures, and heaven itself. From wealth one's merit increases, but the man who has no wealth has neither this world nor the next. The man who has no wealth does not succeed in performing religious acts. Kautilya in the *Artha Sastra* recommends that the state should punish those who renounce the world without having first satisfied the claims of society and family. Kautilya would not even allow ascetics to enter into the villages of the kingdom, for fear that they may cause disturbance in the economic activities of the villagers. They say virtues themselves are impractical without wealth. Without wealth neither virtue nor desire can be won.

Kama (Satisfaction of desires): *Kama* is a comprehensive term, which includes all desires: desires ranging from the cravings of the flesh and the yearnings of the spirit. Every man has got certain physical and emotional desires and their fulfillment gives happiness. Man should only gradually overcome the insistent cravings of the flesh. In the process of fulfilling the desires, *dharma* has to be maintained and there should be proper means for the satisfaction of the desires. There is always a clear emphasis on the enjoyment of secular pleasures along with the emphasis

on the realization of spiritual values. Vatsyayana in his book *Kama Sutra*, gives a great treatise on erotic enjoyment. It deals with the various aspects of sex life and the natural strivings of the human heart. However, Vatsyayana suggests that the satisfactions of sexual desires are to be followed with moderation and caution. The uniqueness of the concept of *kama* and enjoyment is that all of them were to be related to the spiritual goal of human existence, and so the Indian ethics insisted on a regulated enjoyment.

Moksha (Liberation): In every school of philosophy in India the first three *purusharthas* are treated as the instrumental values, which directly or indirectly promote the *parama purushartha* — the highest values of human life, namely, *moksha*. *Moksha* is also known by other names such as *mukti*, *apavarya*, *kaivalya*, and *nirvana*. The concept *moksha* has a negative as well as a positive side. In its negative aspect it signifies complete freedom from sorrow and in its positive aspect it stands for plenary happiness or bliss. In the *Vedic* age the idea of *mukti* was not in evidence. What the *Vedic* man sought was length of days on earth, and life in heaven in the company of the gods. But it was in the *Upanishads* for the first time, that we find the full-fledged doctrine of *mukti* or liberation. This liberation is intimately bound with the *karma samsara*, the doctrine of transmigration. Almost all Indian schools of thought accepted the theory of *karma* and rebirth, and the ideal of *moksha* is conceived as liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

As an ideal, *moksha* is pursued by an individual as a personal value. It is a spiritual perfection understood by the intellect, loved by the will, and actualized in daily life. It is understood as *jivanmukti* in the *Advaita Vedanta*. The man who has attained liberation in this life is called *jivanmukta*. Different schools propose different ways to attain *moksha*. The *Advaita Vedanta* of Sankara holds that knowledge or *jnana* is the means of attaining *moksha*. Here *moksha* refers not to a new state to be attained, but is the realization of what has always been, namely, the realization of the Universal Self (*Brahman*), in one's own self (*Atman*). For this, no morality is needed. The dualistic and pluralistic systems insist that the bondage of the individual can be removed by the *bhakti marga* or path of devotion to God. There is another way promoted by the *Gita* to attain the ultimate realization in life and liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, which is known as *Karma Yoga* (Path of activity). The *Gita* has described this way as the method of disinterested action (*nishkama karma*). To attain *moksha* one has to be freed from the bondage of one's own actions. So the *Gita* suggests the golden rule that actions should be done with the spirit of non-attachment to their fruits.

2.7 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION (VARNASHRAMA DHARMA)

The Vedic scheme of life is known as *varnasrama vyavasha*. *Varna-dharma* stands for social stratification. It is meant for the maintenance of social order, social progress, and social harmony, along with personal harmony and personal progress. The *Rg Veda* uses the term '*varna*' to mean skin colour. Here the division of human beings is made into Aryans and *Dasas*. Those who are fair in colour are Aryans and those dark skinned are *dasas*. The term *Varna* is derived from the root *vr* which means to choose or select. *Varna* indicates a particular group or class in a society, classified as *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaisya*, and *sudra*. In *purusa-sukta* (*Rg X.90*) the term *vana* is used to indicate the four functions in human society, in general. In *purusa-sukta* we come across the terms *brahmin*, *rajanya*, *vaisya*, and *sudra*. But these terms are used only to indicate the four functions of society in general and not as the four *varnas*. According to *purusa-sukta*, the whole universe is the manifestation of the universal self called

purusa. The *brahmin* is the mouth; the *rajanya* is made of the arms; the *vaisya* is the thighs; and the *sudra* is the feet. The mouth being the seat of speech stands for learning; arms for strength; thighs for productive work; feet for other works of labour. So the four terms stand for the four functions rather than the four *varnas*.

Caturvarnyam is mentioned in the Gita (*catvarah varnah caturvarnyam*). The classification is made from three standpoints, namely, birth, character, and profession.

Category	Brahmanas	Ksatriyas	Vaisyas	Sudras
By Birth	Born of <i>brahmanas</i>	Born of <i>ksatriyas</i>	Born of <i>vaisyas</i>	Born of <i>sudras</i>
By character	Contemplative	Selflessly active	Selfishly active	Idle, dull
By occupation	Scriptural education and priesthood	Administration and defence	Commerce and agriculture	Unskilled labour

Varna based on *jati* or birth has become oppressive and exploitative today as the caste system. *Varna* is based on one's character, *svabhava* or *guna* as Vedic psychology is at the root of Vedic sociology. According to Vedic psychology the human mind has three qualities, or propensities, or temperaments. They indicate the innate nature of the individual. They are: *sattva* — non-active, quality of purity, goodness, wisdom, and knowledge; *rajas* — active; *tamas* — inactive. So *varna* is the process of selection by the individual for the development of his mind. It stands for the psychological frame, bent, and direction of the human mind. The four *varnas* are the four basic natures of the human being. It refers to the four orders of the society. It is an all embracing classification of the human beings on the basis of propensities (*pravrittis* — enjoyment for life). It does not stand for the professions of life (*vruttis*). One can change one's profession but not one's innate nature. When *varna* is interpreted as a profession and not as a propensity, the *jati* or caste system comes in. Vedic sociology speaks of a *varna* system and not a *jati* system. Social stratification by ability or talent is *varna*. No *varna* is superior or inferior as it depends on one's qualities. Hence it stands for the spirit of egalitarianism.

The duties of each *varna* are as follows: *Brahmins* — teaching and studying the Vedas, sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, and giving and accepting alms; *ksatriyas* — to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, and to study the Vedas but not to teach; *vaisyas* — to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to engage in different professions, to trade, to lend money, to cultivate land, and to study the Vedas; *sudras* — to serve the above three *varnas*. The first three

varnas are ordained to study the Vedas. So they have *upanayana*, i.e. the rite to study the Vedas. They are called *dvijas* or twice born, who are trained in Vedic learning. Since they are not mentally equipped, the *sudras* are prohibited from studying the Vedas. Therefore they are denied *upanayana*. Yet they are not deprived of the fruits of Vedic knowledge. A *sudra* is eligible for Vedic knowledge through secondary sources like the *Puranas* and the *itihasas*. Though the first three *varnas* can study the Vedas, only *brahmins* are ordained to teach the Vedas. The other two may study, but cannot teach the Vedas. A *sudra*'s son in whom the propensities of a *brahmin* are found is a *brahmin* and not a *sudra*. A *brahmin*'s son in whom the propensities of a *sudra* are found is a *sudra* and not a *brahmin*. That is, anyone can attain *brahminhood*. Some examples are: *Valmiki*, *Vyasa*, *Vasistha*, and *Narada*. All were children of *sudras*. Similarly, *Visvamitra*, though born a prince, became a *brahmin rishi*.

2.8 CONCEPT OF RTA

Rta is generally translated as 'Cosmic Order.' This cosmic order is to be understood not as a fixed physical or mathematical law, but as a 'sacrificial order. Cosmic order is maintained by sacrificial order. It is through *Rta* that Varuna governs the universe. *Rta* is the ultimate foundation of everything; it is the 'supreme'. *Rta* is the 'law' or universal order embodied in sacrifice. It is the expression of the primordial dynamism that is inherent in everything and also possesses its own internal coherence, a unifying force that could be said to be the very soul of sacrifice. *Rta* is the actual functioning, or rather, the proper rhythm of the sacrifice. By sacrifice, gods and humans collaborate, not only among themselves but also for the maintenance and very existence of the universe. Reality subsists, thanks to sacrifice.

2.9 DOCTRINE OF KARMA

The doctrine of *karma* may be stated as — whatever a man suffers or enjoys is the fruit of his own deed, a harvest sprung from his own actions, or good or bad committed in his previous life. Every deed leads to double result (*phala*) – pain or pleasure, according to the nature of one's deed. Moral progress therefore depends on how we direct and regulate our tendencies to actions. Everything that happens in the moral realm is pre-ordained. It gives the idea of Moral Retribution. 'Whatever we knowingly do, will sooner or later bring us the result we merit. There is no escape, 'what we sow, we must reap.' The events of life are determined by an antecedent cause. The Law of *Karma* is not mechanical, but is essentially ethical. Moral education is to choose the order, order of *karma*. The Mahabharata says, consequences of what a man does will seek him, later, surely as a calf does its mother in a herd of cows. *Karma* is of four categories: 1) *Sanchita Karma* or the accumulated past actions 2) *Prarabdha Karma* which is a part of *Sanchita Karma*, and this results in the present birth itself. This is also called pre-destination 3) *Kriyamana Karma* or present willful actions or free will 4) *Agami Karma* or the immediate results caused by our present actions. The theory of transmigration is a necessary corollary of *karma*.

2.10 WAYS TO LIBERATIVE KNOWLEDGE

Vedic scriptural study can give us the direct knowledge involving oneself in three stages: *sravanam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyasanam*.

Sravanam: It means enquiry into the scriptures with the help of a guru. *Sravanam* is not passive hearing. It requires the full participation of the student and he has to travel along with the teacher. The teacher is trying to communicate something which is not an object, but which is one's own true nature. In other words, consistent and systematic study of the scriptures for a length of time under the guidance of a competent guru is *sravanam*. In other words, looking into the scriptural mirror which the teacher shows me is *sravanam*. Initially when I start doing *sravanam* I have lots of doubts but I should never ask questions. I will have to be patient. Whatever question comes up should be kept in mind or written in a book with the hope that all the questions will be answered as I understand more and more; as the teaching opens up new vistas; as the unfolding starts revealing new information. The student should have faith in the scriptures and the teacher for this. Therefore, no questions are allowed. Just receive the whole vision comprehensively. Let all the questions be there. Then having done comprehensive listening for a length of time and having got all the aspects of the teaching, look back at your questions. A painter cannot paint the whole picture in one stroke. The painting unfolds gradually. Until the painting is over, don't disturb the painter. Similarly *sravanam* should be done for a length of time, setting aside all our doubts. Thereafter the teacher say, 'now come on, see if you accept the teaching; see if you are convinced'

Mananam: After *sravanam*, the student can come out with any number of questions. All the doubts are let loose and all of them are attacked. This is called *mananam*. This continues until I am convinced. There should not be any doubt or question. Once I have done *sravanam* and *mananam* satisfactorily, I feel convinced that I can be independent. But as I have been addicted to dependence for so long, I find it difficult to be independent. I have to try to give up all dependencies just as a person addicted to smoking tries to give it up. I can help him by telling him that he can live without smoking. Similarly, we have to learn to come out of all dependences.

Nididhyasanam: The person addicted to smoking is slightly nervous about quitting it, as he has been addicted to it for years. Hence, there is a doubt if he can live without it. There are withdrawal symptoms and he has to train himself to handle them. This is the discovery of true independence. This third stage is called *nididhyasanam* and through it the person learns to drop dependences and be independent. Initially there is fear, and there are also withdrawal symptoms. But later he finds that he can be happy without people around. He discovers he can live alone too. In short, *nididhyasanam* helps in converting knowledge into emotional strength. Thus through *sravanam*, *mananam*, and *nididhyasanam*, a person becomes *jivanmuktah*, a liberated person.

2.11 LET US SUM UP

This unit has largely focused its attention on the general religious philosophy of Hinduism from the Vedic perspective. Since we have other units dealing with the philosophy of various traditions in India, we do not intend to repeat them here. The metaphysical thinking of Vedic Hinduism is centered around the concept of the self as individual and supreme. The ethical concepts are derived from the scriptures, primary and secondary texts. For liberation, knowledge is said to be important.

2.12 KEY WORDS

Purusarthas liberation	–Supreme goals of human life such as wealth, pleasure, virtue, and liberation
Rta	– Concept of order and regulation in the cosmos.
Sravanam	– Knowledge obtained by listening to the teachings.
Nididhyasanam	– Contemplative knowledge.

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UNIT 3 INTRODUCTION TO SIKHISM

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

Though Sikhism is the latest religion in the Indian sub-continent, it has a tremendous impact on the life and belief system of the people of India. Sikhism is indebted to the Hindu Vaishnavite *bhakti* tradition and the Islam Sufi mystic tradition. This paper introduces the student to the background, the contribution of Guru Nanak, the Guru tradition, Sikh Scriptures, the concept of Gurudwara, the *Khalsa* Movement, rituals and festivals, ethical teachings, and the basic principles of Sikhism, so that the student may broaden his/her understanding of other religious traditions and approach them with openness and respect.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) in the 15th Century AD in the present day Punjab. The word Sikh means disciple — from the Sanskrit word *shishya*, or the Pali root *sikkha*. In this sense, the Sikhs are the disciples of the ten Sikh Gurus starting from Guru Nanak. The word Sikh is also interpreted by some as the elect, chosen by God, or God's own. Sikhism, the youngest of the world religions, has integrated ideas, practices, and doctrines mainly from Islam and Hinduism. Like the Golden temple with open doors to all sides, Sikhism is a liberal religion open to other religions and cultures. Like many other religions, Sikhism also has undergone transformations and accommodates paradoxes in its existence — like simplicity and splendor, military prowess and tenderness, and poetry and pragmatism. Most of the Sikhs live in the state of Punjab, the others in Haryana, Delhi, and in the other parts of India. Many have migrated to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and to other countries in Europe.

3.2 THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF SIKH RELIGION

The Mogul rulers exploited the poor economically and persecuted the Hindus in the name of religion, imposed a religious tax on them, and conducted forced mass conversions. The *Brahmins*, the dominant class in the Hindu society, though submissive to the Muslim rulers were intolerant towards the lower class. The life of an ordinary Hindu was miserable because he was politically exploited by the Moghul rulers and religiously exploited by the high caste *Brahmins*. Rampant social evils like *sathi*, child marriage, the dehumanizing caste system, and female infanticide aggravated the misery of the ordinary people. The socio-cultural milieu was ripe

enough for a transformative movement. That was the time Guru Nanak appeared on the scene with his liberal ideas on God, religion, and social life. Nanak found that “The kings have become man-eaters, their officials behave like dogs, they lick blood and eat flesh of people.” He lamented, “O God! Thou who art the Lord of us all, didst Thou not feel pain when there was so much slaughter and lamentation?” “O *Lalo*, modesty and religion have disappeared and falsehood is reigning.”

The origin of the Sikh religion can be traced back to the *Vaishnavite bhakti* tradition which started in Tamil Nadu as a protest movement against the *Brahmin* hegemony over the Hindu rituals and the dehumanizing caste system, and the Islam Sufi mysticism. The Sufis welcomed the non-Muslims to their gatherings and they believed in singing hymns of praise and meditation under the leadership of a Guru. Lalla – a Kashmiri *vishnavite* saint, Namdev – a *vaishnavite* saint and poet, Ramananda of Banares, and Kabir the Sufi mystic considerably influenced the religious atmosphere of the time. Kabir (1440-1518) the mystic poet of the Sufi tradition was the link between the *Vaishnavite Bhakti* tradition and Sufi mysticism. Kabir who was from a low caste weaver’s family, inherited and integrated both the Sufi and *bhakti* traditions. His mother was a Hindu, and his father a Muslim who must have been a Hindu convert.

3.3 GURU NANAK AND HIS LIFE

Guru Nanak (1469- 1539) was born into a Hindu family in the village of Talvandi of a Muslim *zamindar*, 65 kilometers away from Lahore. His father, Mehta Kalu, was a revenue collector belonging to the Bedi (conversant with the Vedas) sub-caste of the *Kshatriyas*. He inherited the name Nanak from his mother’s father. As a child, at the age of 5, he was sent to a Hindu *pandit* and later was educated by a Muslim teacher. After his education, he got married to a girl in Sultanpur and had two children. For a while he worked as the accountant of Daulat Khan, the Afghan chief in Sultanpur. Later he came in contact with a Muslim servant, Mardana. Mardana gave music to the hymns composed by Nanak and together they conducted community singing. They organized a common canteen where people of different castes and religious traditions could eat together without any hesitation, at a time when caste discrimination controlled every walk of life.

It was the habit of Nanak to wander around in solitude and to spend time in meditation in the forest of Sultanpur. Around the age of twenty he received illumination and set out to awaken “a depressed, demoralized, superstitious and priest ridden race.” Once while he was having a bath in the river, he disappeared into the water for three days and when he reappeared he proclaimed, “There is no Hindu, there is no Mussulman.” The first written account on Nanak is known as *Janamsakhis* — birth stories in prose written in the Gurumukhi alphabet, developed and refined by Nanak himself. Some of the stories related to the life of Nanak are:

- Nanak as a boy refused to wear the sacred thread; asked for a thread that would not break or burn, or get soiled or lost.
- Nanak used to be in trance while the cattle grazed unattended.
- Once Nanak was sent to purchase food materials with a servant. He gave away the money to beggars and returned empty handed; his father got angry.
- Went for a bath, disappeared into the water; then he was taken to the court of God where he was given a cup of nectar and commissioned to teach others; appeared after three days.

- At Mecca, once the Guru was sleeping with his legs towards the *Kaaba*. An infuriated *mullah* kicked Nanak. Nanak asked the *mullah* to show him a place where God is not present.
- The Mogul emperor Babur invaded Punjab and imprisoned Nanak; made him grind corn at a hand-mill; Nanak sat in meditation and the hand-mill worked on its own.

Nanak called himself *sachiar*, a man of truth, but his followers considered him a reincarnation of one of the numerous immortals and called him a *deva*. At the time of Nanak's death, three factors were well settled in the Sikh community: a) 974 hymns composed by Nanak which formed the origin of the *Adi Granth*, b) a well knit community with an ideology, c) a well-established guru tradition

Influence of Guru Nanak on the Sikh Community

- Self-confidence and courage
- Sense of unity
- Open minded and free from superstitions
- Free from caste discrimination
- More practical in their approach
- Galaxy of warriors, patriots, scholars, poets, and saints

Three interpretations regarding the status of Guru Nanak

- An *avatara*
- An ordinary person made perfect
- Guru a man, but born perfect

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What was the socio-religious background of the origin of Sikhism?

2) What were the two major influences on the early Sikh Religion?

3) How did Nanak and Mardana start their mission?

4) How did Nanak influence the Early Sikh community?

3.4 THE GURU TRADITION IN THE SIKH COMMUNITY

Guru Angad. (Guru 1539-52) Twenty days before his death, Nanak installed Lehna a *kshatriya* disciple as the next guru. Both his sons were not fit enough to succeed him as guru. While on the way, the guru's jug fell into the mud, both the sons refused to get down into the mud and get the jug, while Lehna got the jug washed, filled it with pure water and gave it to the guru. After a stirring speech, Nanak placed a coconut representing the universe and five coins representing the five elements of the universe and named him Guru Angad and bowed to him. Angad, as the second Guru, consolidated the Sikh community, collected the poems of Nanak and systematized the Gurmukhi language.

Guru Amar Das. (Guru 1552-74) Constructed a water tank with eighty-four steps representing the numerous births of a human soul. He divided the Sikh community into 22 *Manjis*, each under the leadership of a head called *Sangatias* and appointed woman preachers. His policy was *pehle pangat* (eating) *piche Sangat* (meeting). Emperor Akbar sat with him for a common meal. He was generous, open, and tolerant towards other cultures and religions. Akbar figures prominently in the life of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th gurus. *Guru ka Langar* was a way of emphasizing the equality of all mankind irrespective of their birth and status.

Guru Ram Das (Guru 1574-81) Son-in-law of Amar Das, founder of the city of Amritsar, concentrated on social reforms like *sati* and widow remarriage. He composed a hymn which is widely used in the Sikh marriage ceremony. Numbers increased considerably and the guru's role became more important in building up the community.

Guru Arjan (Guru 1581-1606) His time saw the unprecedented growth of the community; many *jats* joined and fought against the Mughal tyranny. *Daswandh* (10% tax) was regularly collected from the members. The revenue was used for the construction of large tanks and holy buildings. Harmandir at Amritsar was constructed during his time. While guru Arjan was away on missionary work, his elder brother Prithi Chand compiled a collection of hymns and put it forward as the authentic scripture of the Sikhs. This attempt by Prithi Chand prompted guru Arjan to entrust the work of compilation to Bhai Gurdas. The completed compilation was installed in the Harmandir in August 1604 and is known as the Adi Granth. In these verses you will find three things —, truth, peace and contemplation. Besides Amritsar he built three other cities — Taran Taran, Kartarpur, and Hargobindpur. Arjan was martyred. The following Mughal emperors were associated with the history of Sikhism: Babur 1526-30, Humayun 1530-40 and 1555-56, Sher Shah 1540-55, Akbar 1556-1605, Jehangir 1605-27, Shah Jehan 1628-58, Aurangzeb 1658-1707.

Guru Hargobind (Guru 1606-44) developed royal authority and maintained an army. He emphasised the idea of *Piri* and *Miri*. *Piri* from the root *pir* that was used in Sufism to denote a religious teacher, and *miri* from the Muslim term *amir* (used by Caliph Umar) meaning

commander. The third and fifth gurus engaged in politics, and supported the overburdened peasants and the poor Hindus. These two concepts continued till the tenth guru. Today the Sikhs speak about *tegh* and *deg*, meaning sword and cooking pot, which represent the protection of the oppressed and the feeding of the hungry. *Tegh* and *deg* show the social responsibility of the Sikh community. Fighting is considered as the last resort. Hargobind seems to have given more importance for *miri* than *piri*. Goswami Ram Das, the guru of Sivaji asked Hargobind, 'I hear that you are the successor of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak had renounced the world while you wear the sword, keep horses and an army, and people call you *Sacha Padshah*. What kind of a sadhu are you?' The Guru replied, 'Saintliness is within. Sovereignty is external.' Bhai Gurdas presented some similar popular accusations against the guru in one of his poems. Bidi Chand, one of the guru's famous companions, was a reformed bandit. He reformed the *dharmasala*, provided a pennant for his troops which became the flag of Sikhism, and a kettle drum for them which later became a necessary item in each *gurudwara*.

Guru Har Rai (Guru 1644-61) Son of the eldest son of Guru Hargobind became guru at the age of fourteen. He was soft hearted but firm in decision. During the last days of Emperor Shah Jehan, war broke out between two of his sons Dara and Aurangzeb. The Guru supported the former with an army of 2000, but Dara was defeated and Aurangzeb became the emperor. Guru Har Rai's son Ram Rai remained with the Mughal court as a rival to the Sikh gurus.

Guru Har Krishan (Guru 1661-64) became the guru at the age of five and was taken to Delhi to meet emperor Aurangzeb. There he contracted small pox and died.

Guru Tejh Bahadur (Guru 1664-75) was the great uncle of Har Krishan. Tej Bahadur was a brave fighter. Once appointed the guru, he rose to the occasion and provided brave leadership to the community. When there was dissent in the community and a plot to kill the guru, he pardoned the assassin. Meanwhile Aurangzeb started vigorous Islamisation by destroying Hindu temples and closing down Hindu schools. Compulsory religious tax or *jizya* on non- Muslims and forcible conversions gave rise to civil war. Guru Tej Bahadur was imprisoned. When he refused to get converted, he was martyred. His martyrdom was a brave act of sacrifice for religious freedom and liberty.

Guru Gobind Singh (Guru 1675-1708). He had the good qualities of his illustrious predecessors. He was highly educated, skilled in arms and horsemanship, chivalrous and generous in character. The most important guru after Nanak, he fought against the Islamization of Aurangzeb, and supported Bahadur Shah the next ruler. The starting of the *Khalsa* and installation of the Adi Granth as the Guru Granth Sahib were the two most important decisions by Gobind Singh. The Sikhs believe that the spirit of the Guru will be present where there are five (*panch pyare*) assembled together. He was a restorer of *dharma* and one who identified the *sangat- guru* as and True Guru. Sikhism which followed a *panth* tradition seems to have taken over militant political ideology with the war cry of Banda Singh 'Raj Karega Khalsa' in 1710

3.5 THE SIKH SCRIPTURES

The Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib is the most important scripture in the Sikh religion. It contains the poems of the first five Gurus: Nanak (974), Angad (62), Amar Das (907), Ram das (679), Arjun (2218), Gobind Singh who incorporated 115 hymns composed by this father Tegh Bahadur. Poems by the Hindu *bhaktas* or Muslim saints like Kabir, Namdev, Trilochan Sein,

Ravidas, and Jaidev are also incorporated in the Adi Granth. The first surviving compilation was made by the grandson of Guru Amar Das at the instruction of the Guru. Guru Arjan made another enlarged compilation of the poems in 1604, and Guru Gobind Singh by adding the poems of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur made another compilation in 1704 which is the present Adi Granth. Adi Granth in the present form has about 6,000 hymns in 1430 pages and thirty one sections. The language used in the Adi Granth is Gurmukhi. The singing is called *kirtan*, and the congregation may or may not participate. There are three singers, one at the drum, another with a portable harmonium and a third one who sings and explains the hymns which are sung in simple *ragas*. The Adi Granth is soteriological in character and the basic concern is the essential unity between God and the human soul. Right living is the key to a proper relationship with God. Truth, contentment, and meditation are the three important ideas dealt with in the Adi Granth.

The Guru Granth Sahib plays a very important role in the daily life and worship of the Sikh community. People reverently bow down as soon as they enter the Gurudwara. In the 1920s, because of the conflict between the traditionalists and the reformists, there arose a controversy whether or not to accept *karah prasad* from the low caste Sikh converts. The Adi Granth was consulted and it read: "Upon the worthless he bestows his grace, brother, if they will serve the True Guru. Exalted is the service of the True Guru, brother, to hold in remembrance the divine name. God himself offers grace and mystic union. We are worthless sinners brother, yet the True Guru has drawn us to the blissful union". (AG 638:3) These words of Guru Amar Das settled the issue.

The Dasm Granth. These are the poems of Guru Gobind Singh and his contemporaries compiled by Bhai Mani Singh in 1734.

Rahatnamas contain the code of conduct for the members and the traditions of the Khalsa community.

3.6. GURUDWARA

Gurudwara means the gateway to the Guru. Guru Nanak built the first Sikh temple at Kartarpur which is known as *dharmasala* (place of faith). There are more than 200 historical gurudwaras associated with the Gurus, which are controlled by the Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak committee (SGPC). The Golden Temple in Amritsar (a-mrit-sar —undying waters or water of immortality) is the most important place for the Sikhs. The temple was built during the tolerant Muslim ruler Akbar's reign in 1761, and used a unique style of construction borrowing from both Hindu and Muslim architecture. The Persian Muslim Ahamed Shah destroyed the temple and killed devotees. The present structure was reconstructed by Maharaja Ranjith Singh. Tarn Taran is the second most important gurudwara built by Guru Arjun who was cured of leprosy in the waters there. Lepers go to Tarn Taran for healing even today.

Guru Hargobind founded the Akal Takt, the throne of the immortal, opposite to the Golden Temple, and introduced a military set up in the Sikh community. Emperor Jehangir imprisoned Hargobind Singh but later released him. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Siromani Gurudwara Pargandhak Committee (SGPC) is the highest decision making body based on the Sikh Gurudwara Act passed in the year 1925. Guru Gobind Singh, before his death, installed the Adi Granth as the living Guru of the Sikhs.

The following items are kept in the treasury of the Golden Temple:

- Eight gold doors
- The curved sword of Maharaja Ranjith Singh
- Five gold spades
- Horse-tail-like fan
- Wedding veil
- Smaller golden swords
- Sixteen silver candle sticks
- Hemispherical shell of gold
- An inverted bowl

The Akal Takht and the Darbar Sahib stand vis-à-vis. The Darbar Sahib is dear to all Sikhs, whereas the Akal Takht is dear to the devotee of the war like diety Akal, who are called Akalis.

Check your progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What were the important contributions of Guru Arjan?

2. Guru Gobind Singh is known for two major contributions, what are they?

3. How do you explain the two compilations and the composition of the Adi Granth?

4. What is the importance of a Gurudwara and the Golden Temple?

3.7 THE KHALSA MOVEMENT

Aurangzeb imposed a special tax on the hill tribes and kings of the hill regions of U. P and Punjab. They revolted and fought against the emperor. But the tribes got divided amongst themselves on the basis of caste and race. The Sikh army, under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh, decided to form an army that was free from caste considerations. Like Nietzsche, Gobind Singh believed in 'will to war, and will to power'. "Blessed is he," says Gobind Singh, "in this world who cherishes war in his heart at the same time does not forget God". Gobind Singh in a letter to Aurangzeb wrote, "When affairs have gone beyond all means, it is virtuous to take a sword in hand. I have been forced to come to arms and to enter a battlefield." (Sher Singh 1966, p. 49)

Khalsa in Persian means pure, a new fraternity was started by Guru Gobind Singh, on the Hindu New year day on 13 April, 1699. During the Hindu New year celebrations Guru Gobind Singh with an unsheathed sword in hand asked for a head for the cause of *dharma*. When everyone backed out, five of the backward caste came forward; he baptized them and in turn got baptized by them. They were called the *panch pyare*. He was of the opinion that Indians had an inferiority complex, so he advised his followers to “live courageously but not dangerously”. The five Ks are compulsory for all the members of *Khalsa*: i) *Kesha* or long uncut hair, ii) *Kangha* or comb to clean up the hair and the beard, iii) *Kara* or steel bangle, ; a symbol of the Guru’s grace and omnipresence of God, iv) *Kacha* or drawers; a symbol of chastity, v) *Kirpan* or the symbol of resistance.

3.8 RITUALS, CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

Guru Nanak was against any kind of ritual or ceremony. Once at Haridwar when some devout Hindus were throwing water towards the east as an oblation to the ancestors, Nanak started throwing water to the west saying that he was watering his farmland. Arjun Singh said, “I neither perform *haj*, nor go on pilgrimage, neither worship one particular way nor the other, for, I bow down within my heart to the one formless God and not another.” Respect for all human beings and love and concern for all creatures was the basic approach. The Sikh Gurus were against performing miracles because they believed that by performing miracle they are denying the grace of God. The highest form of prayer is meditative silence or *ajapa jap*.

Nanak was strongly against any kind of pilgrimage:

“One gains but a seed’s weight of merit

Through pilgrimages, austerities and benevolence;

One might rather mind God’s bidding and cleanse himself

By the love he bears within his heart.”

“If bathing in the Ganges affords salvation, how fortunate are fishes and frogs.

Going on pilgrimage, you may indeed gain some reverence for water, but

All places of pilgrimage are valueless, even though the pilgrim drowns himself at Kashi (Benares)”.

But now there are pilgrim groups in the Sikh community. Satnamis—low caste, chamars — leather workers, Kabir Panthis — Kabir followers, Sahajadaris — Nanak followers, and Nirankaris—the formless, are some of the pilgrim groups.

3.9 THE OTHER MOVEMENTS IN SIKHISM

Nirmalas: A group of scholars, pundits. Five disciples were sent to Benares to study Sanskrit and Hindu Philosophy and the influence of western thinking. Overdependence on Hindu philosophy and stress on scholarship made them unpopular and later gave rise to the Akali Movement and the Singh Sabha movement, *Ham Hindu Nahim*.

Gyanis: Theologians of the religion, expositors of Adi Granth who focus on the doctrinal expositions and *Janam Sakhi* (life story) and traditional exposition. These scholars move from place to place and concentrate mostly translations and commentaries.

Namdhari: As a reaction to the luxury and pomp, Baba Ram Singh advocated a simple life and meditation.

Check your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What is *Khalsa* and what is its relevance in the Sikh religion?

2. What are the five K's?

3. What are the other movements in Sikhism?

3.10 ETHICAL TEACHINGS

Sikhism, basically is an ethical religion based on three fundamental concepts i.e., i) work, worship and charity (*kirt karo, nam japo and vand cako*) should be the guiding principles in life; ii) Self-reliance is the greatest obstacle to God realization which is manifested in lust, anger, greed, materialism, and pride. Guru Nanak remarked, "Sweetness and humility are the essence of all virtues" (AG 470); iii) It is as a householder that a Sikh should seek God realization. 'The householder who gives all he can afford to charity is a pure as the water of the Ganges, (AG 952). God realization through renunciation is easy but it is more challenging and difficult while being actively involved in the world. Guru Nanak said, "Do not covet your neighbour's possessions. Without the Name we cannot attain inner peace nor still our inner hunger. The Guru has shown me the real life of the city, the real life of its shops, it is the inner life. We must be traders in truth, moderate in our eating and sleeping. This is true yogism." AG 939).

As a reaction to the then existing social evils, Sikhism was against the caste system, and demeaning the status of women. The Harmandir at Amritsar had four doors open to all the four castes. Sikhism accepted people of all denominations irrespective of their caste or social status. Hereafter no one is distinguishable by caste (AG 349). Guru Arjan spoke about the Adi Granth, "This divine teaching is for everyone, Brahmin, Kshatriya, vaishya and Sudra. Whoever utters the Name which lives in all hearts, under the Guru's instruction, is delivered from Age (Kal Yug)' (AG 747).

Guru Nanak as a spiritual preceptor followed the principle of non-violence even in slavery and violence by the Babur's army. He even considered the Mughal invasion as the chastisement by God for the evils of the people. "Are you pitiless, Creator of all? You have sent Yama (god of death) disguised as the Mughal. Did you feel no pity for what happened, for the screams of those who cried in agony? The social realities in the later times forced the subsequent Gurus to take to arms to protect the poor and helpless people from the exploiters. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh, accepted the idea of just war: "When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail, Lawful is the flash of steel, it is right to draw the sword." But he reminded his followers that a Sikh should never be the first one to draw the sword.

Vegetarianism is commonly practiced in the Sikh *langars* but there are different opinions regarding the strict adherence to vegetarianism. Respect for women was part of Sikh social life, widow remarriage was encouraged. Care of the needy and service to the poor is practised in the Sikh community. *Sangat* is a democratic gathering and *langar* allows people to eat together irrespective of their caste and social status and ensures social equality.

Check your progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What are the three basic concepts in Sikhism?
2. Explain the understanding of non-violence, and fight against evil in Sikhism?
3. Explain the approach of Sikhism towards the social evils like the caste system, *sati* etc.?

3. 11. KEY WORDS

Adi Granth	The Guru Grant Sahib, sacred scripture of the Sikhs compiled by guru Arjan in 1604
Akhandapath	'Unbroken reading', an uninterrupted reading of the entire contents of the Adi Granth performed by a relay of readers
Amrit	Nectar, the water used for baptism in the initiation ceremony of the Khalsa
charan pahul	Baptism with water in which the guru's toe has been dipped.
Dasam Granth	The Book of the Tenth (Guru), a collection of writings attributed to Guru Gobind Singh

granthi	A reader of the Guru Granth Sahib, the functionary in charge of a gurdwara
gurduwra	Gurdwara, Sikh temple
Gurmukhi	From the mouth of the guru, the script in which the Punjabi language is written
Gurupurab	A Sikh festival celebrated on the birth or death day of a Guru
Harimandir	The Temple of God, the central Sikh shrine in Amritsar, commonly known as the Golden Temple
Hukam-nama	A decree, a list of instructions
Janam-sakhi	Hagiographic narrative, especially of the life of Guru Nanak
karah parsad	Sacramental food prepared in a large iron dish.
Khalsa	The Sikh order or brotherhood, instituted by Guru Gobind Singh.
Kirtan	The singing of hymns, particularly from the Adi Granth.
langar	The kitchen attached to every gurdwara from which food is served to all, regardless of caste or creEd.
pahul	The Khalsa initiation ceremony.
panj kakke	The five Ks, the five external symbols which must be worn by all members of the Khalsa.
Rahit-nama	A recorded version of the Khalsa code of discipline.
sangat	Assembly, religious congregation.
Sraddha	Rites for the dead performed after cremation to nourish the deceased for the passage to the world of ancestors.

3.12 FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIKHISM

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- 4.2 The Ultimate Principle as Unity
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Sikhism has developed a philosophy, though indebted to Hindu philosophy, with creative interpretation and new ideas. As in the case of Hinduism, Sikh philosophy cannot be completely segregated from the religious philosophy. This article is an attempt at introducing the students to the rich and varied interpretations of the different concepts in Sikh philosophy, so that the students will get a better understanding of those concepts.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Sikh philosophy subscribes to an idealistic monism with the characteristics of dynamism, non-dualism, and social commitment. Idealism in Sikhism can be understood in two ways i.e., the metaphysical sense and the epistemological sense. In the metaphysical sense, idealism is the theory of the ultimate Reality and in the epistemological sense it maintains that the object perceived is not independent of the perceiver. Sikhism is idealistic in its nature because it starts with the enquiry of the nature of the ultimate reality i.e., *Ik*, and this inquiry is spiritual in nature. Epistemological idealism starts its inquiry from the plurality of objects and ends with monism.

Sikhism is indebted to Islam and Hinduism in its development of the concept of metaphysical monism. Nanak played a decisive role in interfacing the salient features of these two religious traditions and at the same time judiciously avoided the unhealthy elements in them. Sikhism considers *atman* and body as the inseparable aspects of the one single spiritual reality. The ultimate spiritual reality is immanent in the cosmos and at the same time it is transcendent. The immanent aspect of the ultimate reality is emphasized through dynamism, non-dualism, and social involvement, which leads to the acceptance of differences or modifications. The difference in the empirical level is explained in terms of personal and impersonal aspects of the ultimate Reality. *Ik*, in association with the created world, becomes personal (*saguna*) and in its unmanifest form becomes impersonal (*nirguna*).

Islam's understanding of the ultimate reality was influenced by Greek, Hellenistic understanding which was first clearly articulated by the Greek philosopher Parmenides (c 514 BC) as 'the absolutely real Being.' Ibn ul Arabi (13th C. AD) the Islamic Sufi scholar, might have been influenced by Parmenides' concept of Being, in developing the 'unity of Being' and the phenomenal world as its manifestation in Islam. Though the classical Islamic scholars did not subscribe to Ibn ul Arabi's concept of the unity of Being, the Islamic scholars in India welcomed this concept because of its similarity with the Vedantic philosophy of non-dualism.

Earlier to the Rg Veda, the understanding of the ultimate Reality was polytheistic or henotheistic. The Vedic seers understood the ultimate Reality (*sat*) as, one but people interpreted it as many (*Rg Veda* 1.164, 46). The Rg Veda presented the empirical realities as the manifestations of the primordial person (*Purusha*). By the time of the Upanishads, the *Purusha* in the Vedas gradually gave way to an impersonalistic non-dual reality i.e., *Brahman*. In the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata tradition, the Reality assumed a personalistic form as the incarnation of Vishnu. Later, the various schools in the Vedanta philosophy interpreted the ultimate Reality as either personal or impersonal or as both.

4.2 THE ULTIMATE PRINCIPLE AS UNITY

During the time of Guru Nanak, there were diverse, at times mutually opposing interpretations of the concept of Reality. How to convincingly explain the 'otherness of the created beings' without mitigating the ultimate unity of the Reality was a challenging problem for Nanak. For Nanak the ultimate Reality was a dynamic *Ik* which integrates the personal and the impersonal dimensions. This dynamic metaphysical approach explains the otherness of the manifested things and at the same time the impersonal aspect of the ultimate Reality. The two traditions of scholars, i.e., the Nirmala School (non-dualistic interpretation of the Reality) and the Giani School (the exegetical interpretation of the Adi Granth), in the Sikh tradition contributed considerably to the development of the Sikh philosophy after Guru Gobind Singh.

The *mulamantra* (the fundamental tenet) composed by Guru Nanak and always given in the beginning of the Adi Granth presents the central theme of the Sikh metaphysics. The *mulamantra* as it is enunciated by Nanak harmoniously integrates the unity of the personal God and the spirit of impersonal idealism. The personal and the non-dual nature of the Ultimate Reality is the underlying current of the Sikh scriptures. The aspect of unity of the Ultimate Reality is represented by the Sikh concept *Ikomkar* which is a combination of three terms i.e., *Ik* meaning one, *om* which stands for the primary cause of the empirical world, and *kar* that represents the creative aspect. On the one hand the concept *Ikomkar* represents the non-dual, personal unity of the Ultimate Principle; on the other hand it represents the unity of the entire cosmos with its multitude of beings, time, and space. On the whole the concept *Ikomkar* represents the non-dual 'systematic unity' in Sikh philosophy.

There are different kinds of unity: aggregate unity or mere collection of units; mechanical unity where the units are connected by an external agent; organic unity in which units are integrally connected. None of these is perfect unity because all of them are trans-relational. The perfect Unity is trans-relational which transcends all relations. Systematic unity, which Sikhism speaks about, is the perfect unity because it is beyond all kinds of relations.

The term 'systematic unity' implies two aspects, i.e., the aspect of hierarchy and that of coherence. The origin of everything in this universe can be traced in a hierarchical order going

back to the subtle, formless, and the Ultimate Reality. All created beings emanate from the non-dual, formless, eternal Truth. The self-luminous spiritual beings come in the first level in the hierarchy followed by human beings because they have consciousness. Insentient and the material beings are in the lowest level because they are devoid of consciousness, but they get upward mobility by the power of Guru's word. The manifested beings reveal the formless principle in varying degrees in a hierarchical order. The revelation of the Ultimate Reality is not limited only to the living beings. According to the Sikh philosophy the Reality is present in varying levels even in material objects; for Nanak says, "there is no grain which is without life."

The hierarchical order is succinctly presented by Guru Nanak at the end of his *Japjee* with the help of the *khandas* beginning with righteousness, "The consciousness (*surai*) simultaneously moves through cognitive (*gian*), affective (*saram*), and conative (*karam*) dimensions and culminates in the dimension of the truth (*sac khand*). These dimensions (*khands*) represent hierarchical characteristics of the 'systematic ninety.' (Nirbhai Singh, 1990 p.63)

The element of coherence in the concept of systematic unity represents inner harmony. The entire cosmos with its innumerable beings is regulated by the cosmic principle (*haukam*). The cosmos being the aggregate of numerous beings, elements, and units has to be interconnected with each other without any inner contradiction. This inner unity is made possible with the help of the cosmic will (*haukam*) and the systematic unity with its elements of hierarchy and coherence. Nanak interpreted the Hindu concept of dharma which means social order or righteousness as cosmic harmony or coherence.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) The Sikh understanding of the Ultimate Reality was indebted to the Islamic and Hindu concept of the Ultimate Reality. Explain.

2) How do you explain the unity of the Ultimate principle and the created beings in Sikh Philosophy?

3) How do you explain the term 'systematic unity' in understanding the concept of *Ikomkar*?

4) Explain the concept of hierarchy and coherence in Sikh Philosophy?

4.3 THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN SIKHISM

Sikhism teaches uncompromising monotheism. In the *Moolmantra*, Nanak describes God as “By the Grace of the Sole One, Self-existent and Immanent, the Creator Person, without Fear or Unconditioned, Without enmity or Un-contradicted, the Timeless One, Un-incarnated, Self-created and Enlightener.” (AG1). Sikh Gurus repeatedly assert the monotheistic character of God by saying, ‘God is the one, the only one, the one without a second’. Though the understanding of God in Sikhism is strictly monotheistic, it accepts two aspects of God i.e., the *nirguna* and the *saguna*. God (*Parameshur*) in his *nirguna* aspect is beyond all attributes including *sat* (truth), *akal* (beyond time), and *ajuni* (not becoming). In the *saguna* aspect, God is attributed qualities like *Sabd* (word), *Nam* (personality), and Guru (enlightener). God is the creator of the universe, and the origin, existence and survival of the universe depend on the all-powerful will (*hukam*) of God.

God created the world without the support of any other factor like *prakrti*, and the creator and the created world are different in their nature. God is uncreated and unchanging, whereas the created world though not unreal is changing and limited. God existed even before creation in His transcendent nature, but through the act of creation he became immanent, “In the region of Truth, God creates perpetually, watches His Creation with a Benevolent eye.” (AG 8). God in His transcendent nature cannot be explained in empirical terms, because God is beyond time and space; “When here was no form in sight, how could there be good or bad actions? When God was in the Self-Absorbed state, there could be no enmity or conflict. When God was all by Himself, there could be no attachment or misunderstanding.” (AG 290). God through his word (*Naam*) creates the world and sustains it, “God creates the universe, takes His abode in it and sustains it.” (AG 788). “Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and is separate too.” (AG 4). “He is in the midst of all and is yet distinct.” (AG939). God in His immanent nature is comprehensible by empirical mind and incomprehensible in His transcendent nature.

The human person, because of ignorance, considers him/herself as the lord of creation and self-reliant. Because of these wrong identifications, humans get attached to the material world and the attachment leads to endless cycles of births and deaths. Liberation (*mukti*) from the cycle of births and deaths is possible only by becoming aware of the constant presence of God within (*gurmukh*) and by the grace of God. Any number of rituals or pilgrimages is not capable of bringing in liberation for the seeker because God is present within each one; what is required is right conduct. The awareness of the presence of God within a person is expressed through selfless service (*sewa*) and this is main characteristic of a liberated person while alive.

Attributes and the Ultimate Principle

God immanent means, God is the ocean of attributes, values, and virtues. God immanent is the standard and direction of moral values and ethical living. God who is the creator and sustainer of

the universe is concerned about the wellbeing of the world and of the human beings. God is not passive but actively present in the life and struggles of the people leading them to liberation. It is the will of God which controls and directs everything in this world. According to Sikhism, God never incarnates, “May that mouth burn which says that God has incarnated.” (AG 473). Though there are many gods, the formless one, the transcendent one never takes birth in this world. The Sikh God is a God of grace whose will and grace are active in a becoming world without any other influence. God is completely free and creative, who is equated with *Naam*, the Ultimate Reality.

4.5 SIKH METAPHYSICS

Like the Buddha, the Sikh gurus were more concerned about the wellbeing of the people; however, they did not neglect the metaphysical issues completely. Though the Ultimate Reality, *Naam*, is presented in various ways in Sikhism, it is the Highest Creative power supporting the universe. *Naam* is equated with God, the creator of the universe, sustainer of the universe, permeating and informing all things. The Adi Granth repeatedly asserts the role of God as the Ultimate Reality, at the same time God is addressed as Thou, Mother, Father, Brother, Beloved, Lord, etc. These terms underline the intimate relationship between the Creator and the created things and at the same time maintain God as the wholly other. This kind of an intimate relationship requires a dynamic metaphysics to explain the process of becoming in the cosmos. Vedanta philosophy subscribes to a static and abstract understanding of the Absolute. Sankara presents *Brahman* devoid of all phenomenal categories (*nirguna*). Such an analysis denies the possibility of the historical development of consciousness and knowledge. In contrast to the static and abstract metaphysics of the Vedantins, Spinoza, in the Western philosophy, presented a dynamic and concrete metaphysics. For Spinoza, God exists in nature as the universal essence and things exist in him as the modes of his reality.

Sikhism brings in both the static and dynamic elements in its metaphysics with the help of an all-inclusive principle i.e., *Ikomkar*. *Ikomkar* in its formless, transcendent existence represents the static aspect and the same principle in its manifested form, as the cause of the visible universe through emanation and systematic unity represents the becoming aspect. The dynamic aspect of the Reality is ensured in the inner unity of the elements in a hierarchical order. The higher and closer the element to the Reality, it attains higher refinement and harmony. Sikhism subscribes to the structural unity of transformation and assimilation which consists of three main concepts, “the idea of non-dual unity, the concept of continuous transformation and assimilation, and the idea of self-regulative and creative principle (*hukam*). The structure is a unity in which the elements re-subordinated to the cosmic law (*hukamai andari*), and no element exists in isolation (*bahari*) from one another.” (Nirbhai Singh, 1990 p.71)

Check your progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) How do you explain the concept of God in Sikhism?

2) How do you analyse the transcendent and the immanent aspects of God?

3) According to Sikhism, God never incarnates. Explain.

4) How are the *saguna* and *nirguna* aspects harmoniously integrated in *Ikomkar*?

4. 6. NON-DUALISM IN THE CONTEXT OF UNITY

Sikhism does not accept the plurality of independent units, but at the same time in order to explain the systematic whole there has to be a unity. How does one overcome this problem of independent units and systematic unity? The dynamic unity in the manifested world is ensured by the underlying impersonal unity of the three strands based on the fundamental principle *Ik*. The manifested world is a coherent and ordered whole regulated by the self-explanatory divine principle *hukam*. Unlike the Advaita Vedanta, Sikhism accepts the reality of the empirical world, but for a person with partial knowledge, the empirical world is real. For a person with the full knowledge the Ultimate Reality is the efficient cause of the universe, there is no need of an extraneous cause. The efficient cause is inherent in a potential state in the Ultimate Reality, which by means of emanation brings out the material world. The things in the world are varied in nature because of the difference in the elements but there is no difference between the units of elements in the world and the Absolute Reality in the level of essence both are the same. The Absolute is immanently present in the manifested things. Just like the power of burning is innate to fire, the power of emanation is innate in the Ultimate Reality. In Sikhism, the manifest (*saguna*) and the unmanifested (*nirguna*) are the two aspects of the one non-dual dynamic reality which also represent the personal and the impersonal dimensions.

“The *Ik* as absolute unity is all-inclusive and transcends all relational categories. Other unities and elements at manifest level consist of relations and units. Logically speaking, unity presupposes multiplicity as well as duality. It has been seen that units are to be harmonized with a nexus of internal relations. Here there is multiplicity of elements. It involves duality because the very assertion of the *Ik* implies epistemological duality between the subject (knower) and the object (known).” (Nirbhai Singh, 1990 p.80).

4.7 KNOWLEDGE OF THE ABSOLUTE

A genuine knowledge of the *Ik* and the manifested world is based on the knowledge of the essence of the reality. The essence of the reality can be perceived in two levels, i.e., in the worldly level with the help of the empirical means of knowledge, and in the transcendental level through the *brahma giana*. Both these knowledges are complimentary in the way the former culminates in the latter, hence there is no contradiction between the two. The difference between

the partial and the perfect knowledge are based on the higher or lesser coherence among the units. The knowledge of the transcendental reality will be highly coherent and harmonious, whereas the knowledge of the empirical realities is less coherent. The imperfect nature of the empirical knowledge will become clearer as the seeker proceeds in the level of *brahma giana*.

4.8 SIKH UNDERSTANDING OF APPEARANCES

Sikhism makes use of *Maya* to explain the manifested reality. The term *maya* is used in a different sense in Sikh philosophy than the way it is used in the Hindu philosophical traditions. Though the concept of *maya* can be traced back to the Rg Veda, it is Sankara who gave a philosophical implication to the term. Sankara was indebted to Buddhism through Gaudapada for the concept of *maya*. Sankara interpreted *maya* as the creative power of Brahma but at the same time as *anirvacaniya* — indescribable. Hence for Sankara, *maya* is not totally unreal but relatively real. Ramanuja considered *maya* as the real energy which is not distinct from the Supreme Reality.

Sikhism considers the universe as relatively real (*sat*) with various degrees of reality. Both the personal and the impersonal aspects of the dynamic principle *Ik* is manifested in the universe. Guru Nanak arrived at the idea of *maya* through an intuitive experience which made him aware of the transitory nature of the phenomenal world. Speaking about this intuitive awareness Sher Singh says: “Everything changes and the only thing that does not change is God in His *Aphur* state. As such the reality of the world is relative. This manifestation as such changes and is transitory. This is *Maya*. The essence of it is the divine element which is permanently real. *Maya* does not mean that the world is an illusion.” (Sher Singh, 1969 p. 189) Many of the hymns in the Adi Granth has used terms like *mithya* (illusion), *kur* (false), *supna* (dream), and *chaia* (shadow) to refer to the transitory nature of the manifested world. Nanak understood *maya* as an epistemological category on the basis of truth realization. *Maya* is the inherent and inseparable power of *Ik* which is manifested in different forms at creation. Nanak accepts creation in historical time whereas the essence of the Real is *akal* (eternal).

Sikhism, in order to explain the multiplicity of realities, adopts a rigorous ethical discipline which will lead to transcendence. This ethical discipline necessitates social involvement and commitment by means of protection to the weak and support to righteous cause. The world, according to Sikhism, is created as the moral stage where one has to struggle for perfection. In this struggle the finite self (*haumai*) is understood as a passing phenomenon. When the ego consciousness is dissolved, the union with *Ik* takes place from within.

Check your progress III

Note: Use the space given for your Answers.

1. Sikh philosophy does not accept the plurality of independent units, but how do they explain the systematic unity?

2) What is *brahma giana*? How is it attained?

3) How does Sikhism explain the appearances with the help of *maya*?

4.9 REALITY AND EXPERIENCE IN SIKHISM

Sikhism makes a distinction between the *gian* (knowledge) acquired through rational, perceptual means and the metaphysical knowledge (*tat gian*) acquired through intuition. *Tat gian* will lead a person to the awareness of the union with the Absolute. God is known through intuitive knowledge (*anubhav prakash*) whereas empirical knowledge is derived through perception or reason. Sikh epistemology accepts four kinds of knowledge: 1) Perceptual knowledge (*paratah gian*) or knowledge acquired through cognitive organs and mental perception. 2) Rational knowledge (*bibek gian*) which is gained through reason; faith and reason are complimentary to each other in realizing the absolute unity. 3) Scriptural knowledge (*sastri gian*) is the knowledge derived through the words of a realized person (*satiguru sabda*). Sikhism does not accept the Vedic scriptures as the valid knowledge. When the intellect and the will become still, the knowledge of the Ik will be revealed in the pure consciousness. The Guru Granth Sahib as a perennial source of revealed knowledge will guide the seeker to the realization of the Ultimate Reality. 4) Intuitive knowledge (*anubhav gian*) which is the highest form of knowledge revealed to the pure consciousness. In the perceptual and rational level the duality continues to exist, whereas in the intuitive level the duality disappears and the experience of the union is ushered in. In this state of existence the intellect and the mind are no more active, the consciousness (*surati*) plays an important role. Sikhism speaks about four states of consciousness i.e., *mati*, *man*, *budhi*, and *surati*. *Mati* the practical wisdom gets all information through the sense organs and passes them to the *man*, the mind. *Budhi*, the intelligence, will start working on the sense data received in the mind. *Budhi* is the faculty of discriminative reasoning which can be enlightened with the help of a guru's guidance. *Sudhi* (self-luminous knowledge) is the last stage which will lead to the intuitive awareness of the union with the Ultimate Principle.

4.10 MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Sikhism is basically an ethical religion based on three fundamental concepts i.e., i) Work, worship, and charity (*kirt karo*, *nam japo* and *vand cako*) should be the guiding principles in life; ii) Self-reliance is the greatest obstacle to God-realization which is manifested in lust, anger, greed, materialism, and pride. Guru Nanak remarked, "Sweetness and humility are the essence of all virtues" (AG 470); iii) It is as a householder that a Sikh should seek God-realization. "The householder who gives all he can afford to charity is as pure as the water of the Ganges" (AG 952). God-realization through renunciation is easy but it is more challenging and difficult while being actively involved in the world. Guru Nanak said, "Do not covet your neighbour's possessions. Without the Name we cannot attain inner peace nor still our inner hunger. The Guru has shown me the real life of the city, the real life of its shops, it is the inner life. We must be traders in truth, moderate in our eating and sleeping. This is true yogism". AG 939).

As a reaction to the then existing social evils, Sikhism was against the caste system and also against demeaning the status of women. The *Harmandir* at Amritsar had four doors open to all the four castes. Sikhism accepted people of all denominations irrespective of their caste or social

satus. Hereafter no one is distinguishable by caste (AG 349). Guru Arjan spoke about the Adi Granth, “This divine teaching is for everyone, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. Whoever utters the Name which lives in all hearts, under the Guru’s instruction, is delivered from Age (*Kal Yug*)” (AG 747).

Guru Nanak as a spiritual preceptor followed the principle of non-violence even in slavery and violence by Babur’s army. He even considered the Mogul invasion as the chastisement by God for the evils of the people. “Are you pitiless, Creator of all? You have sent Yama (god of death) disguised as the Mughal. Did you feel no pity for what happened, for the screams of those who cried in agony?” The social realities in the later times forced the subsequent Gurus to take to arms to protect the poor and helpless people from the exploiters. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh, accepted the idea of just war: “When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail, lawful is the flash of steel, it is right to draw the sword”. But he reminded his followers that a Sikh should never be the first one to draw the sword. Vegetarianism is commonly practised in the Sikh *langars* but there are different opinions regarding the strict adherence to vegetarianism. Respect for women was part of Sikh social life, widow remarriage was encouraged. Care of the needy and service to the poor is practised in the Sikh community. *Sangat* is a democratic gathering and *langar* allows people to eat together, irrespective of their caste and social status, and ensures social equality.

Check your progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) Explain the Sikh epistemology and the different levels of knowledge?
- 2) Explain the understanding of non-violence and fight against evil in Sikhism?
- 3) Explain the approach of Sikhism towards the social evils like the caste system, sati, etc.?

4.11 LET US SUM UP

The *mulamantra* (the fundamental tenet) composed by Guru Nanak and always given in the beginning of the Adi Granth presents the central theme of Sikh metaphysics. The *mulamantra* as it is enunciated by Nanak, harmoniously integrates the unity of the personal God and the spirit of impersonal idealism. The personal and the non-dual nature of the Ultimate Reality is the underlying current of the Sikh scriptures. The aspect of unity of the Ultimate Reality is represented by the Sikh concept *ikomkar* which is a combination of three terms i.e., *ik* meaning one, *om* that stands for the primary cause of the empirical world, and *kar* which represents the creative aspect. On the one hand the concept *ikomkar* represents the non-dual, personal unity of

the Ultimate Principle; on the other hand it represents the unity of the entire cosmos with its multitude of beings, time, and space. On the whole the concept *ikomkar* represents the non-dual systematic unity in Sikh philosophy.

God created the world without the support of any other factor like *prakrti*; the creator and the created world are different in their nature. God is uncreated and unchanging whereas the created world, though not unreal, is changing and limited. God existed even before creation in His transcendent nature, but through the act of creation he became immanent, "In the region of Truth, God creates perpetually, watches His Creation with a Benevolent eye." (AG 8). God in His transcendent nature cannot be explained in empirical terms, because God is beyond time and space; "When here was no form in sight, how could there be good or bad actions? When God was in the Self-Absorbed state, there could be no enmity or conflict. When God was all by Himself, there could be no attachment or misunderstanding." (AG 290). God through his word (*Naam*) creates the world and sustains it, "God creates the universe, takes His abode in it and sustains it." (AG 788). "Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and is separate too." (AG 4). "He is in the midst of all and is yet distinct." (AG 939). God in His immanent nature is comprehensible by the empirical mind and incomprehensible in His transcendent nature.

As a reaction to the then existing social evils, Sikhism was against the caste system, and demeaning the status of women. The Harmandir at Amritsar had four doors open to all the four castes. Sikhism accepted people of all denominations irrespective of their caste or social status. Hereafter no one is distinguishable by caste (AG 349). Guru Arjan spoke about the Adi Granth, "This divine teaching is for everyone, *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Sudra*. Whoever utters the Name which lives in all hearts, under the Guru's instruction, is delivered from Age (*Kal Yug*)" (AG 747). Respect for women was part of Sikh social life, widow remarriage was encouraged. Care of the needy and service to the poor is practised in the Sikh community.

4.12. KEY WORDS

Adi Granth	The Guru Granth Sahib, sacred scripture of the Sikhs compiled by guru Arjan in 1604 and later in 1704 by Guru Gobind.
anubhav prakash	intuitive knowledge
gian	knowledge
tat giani	highest knowledge
gurmukhi	From the mouth of the guru, the script in which the Punjabi language is written.
haumai	ego sense, self-conceit, individuality.
hukam	will of the Ultimate principle
hukam-nama	A decree, a list of instructions.
Ik-om-kar	The Ultimate Principle in Sikhism
jiv	individual self
khalsa	The Sikh order or brotherhood, instituted by Guru Gobind Singh.
langar	The kitchen attached to every gurdwara from which food is served to all
pahul	The Khalsa initiation ceremony.

panj kakke	The five Ks, the five external symbols which must be worn by all members of the khalsa.
Rahit-nama	A recorded version of the Khalsa code of discipline.
Sachiar	person of truth
Surati	consciousness

4.13 FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

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