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Misconceptions
regarding
Hinduism

Misconceptions regarding Hinduism

- There are several misconceptions regarding Hinduism, most commonly that it is a **polytheistic religion** associated with
 - only idol worship
 - meaningless rituals and
 - blind superstitions
- Even among the followers, there is confusion regarding
 - which form to worship & which rituals to follow
 - which temple to visit or how many temples to visit
 - why is the God / Deity in the temple so special
 - what does one's dharma (duty / responsibility) comprise
- Does Yoga constitute only physical and breathing exercises ?

A 'long journey' of the Soul

- According to the most popular belief in Hinduism, the 'Soul (Jivātma)' is the 'source of life' in every living being
- As per one of the most famous verses of Gita - while every living being appears to be going through the cycles of birth and death, in reality, the eternal Soul is moving from one body to another
- The goal of every human being is to 'END' this journey of Soul at the earliest

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ Gita Ch 2 ver 22

Just as a person discards worn-out garments and wears new ones, similarly, the Soul (Ātma / Jivātma) leaves the worn-out body and enters (transmigrates) into another new body

A 'long journey' of the Soul

- During each earthly manifestation of Soul, the 'karma' (actions) of the living being determines its destiny, which also includes the physical form, psychological state, the conditions (happy or painful) and circumstances in the next life

शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः ।
गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥

Gita Ch 15 ver 8

Just as the wind carries scents from their sources, similarly, the Soul / Jivātma (Lord of the body) takes these (mind and the senses; refer verse 15.7) from the body which it leaves behind and migrates to the new body which it acquires. Also refer verses: 8.6; 15.7-11; 2.13; 2.16-25; 2.28; 2.30; 13.19-22/20-23; 13.32-33/33-34

- Our inclinations, tendencies, thoughts, attachments, likes, dislikes, habits in the present life are influenced by our mindset and experiences in the past lives

A 'long journey' of the Soul

- In other words, our **choices** (at every stage / moment) decide the fate in our current life and also in the future births
- In this regard, the **scriptures** which are the backbone / **lifeline** of Hinduism provide the knowledge and also guidance to take the right decision - applicable to every person at every situation

तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ ।

ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥ Gita Ch 16 ver 24

Therefore, scriptures are the **standard authority (guide)** for you in deciding what should be done and what should not be done (what is one's duty and what is not). After understanding the instructions described in the scriptures, you should perform the work (fulfill your duties / responsibilities) accordingly in this world. Also refer verses:

3.31; 17.11; 18.63

- The way of life as prescribed by the scriptures is referred as '**Sanātana Dharma**' and the term 'Hinduism' is now widely considered as a misnomer

Sanātana Dharma

- Sanātana Dharma is a **way of life** that is deeply rooted in a sense of **ethical concern** and **spiritual growth**
- While Sanātana means 'Eternal', **Dharma** can mean
 - Duty or responsibility
 - Righteousness
 - Law, order, code of conduct - Principles of life based on ethics and virtues
- Just as the **traffic system** has been designed for our **safety** and **convenience**, similarly, the **rules** and **recommendations** of Dharma are NOT restrictions to our freedom, but are meant for **peaceful co-existence** of humans (in the society) in **harmony** with the **nature**

Sanātana Dharma

- The extent of freedom / free-will enjoyed by all living beings except humans is limited as it is primarily guided by instincts for survival and reproduction
- The **free-will** of **humans** is special as it is **guided** by **intellect** (faculty of reason and discrimination) and **conscience** which are further strengthened by **knowledge & wisdom**
- Humans gain wisdom through experience in their life-time and also from the society where collective knowledge is accumulated over generations
- The human free-will is extremely powerful and should be exercised very cautiously. In this regard, scriptures have described the code of conduct (virtues) to guide our free-will (for peace and stability within ourselves, family and in the world / planet)

Sanātana Dharma

Virtues (regarded as good / noble conduct in the society) include

- Honesty and truthfulness (needs courage, determination and discipline)
- Endurance, fortitude, forbearance (to hold onto noble values)
- Compassion towards others (humans & all living beings), kindness, charity, humility, love, respect, forgiveness
- Purity of the mind (thoughts), Control of sense organs, speech and actions; controlling anger
- Enthusiasm to learn / gain Knowledge which would help in taking the right decision (ability to discriminate good vs bad and make the right choice in a complicated world) and liberate one from worldly / psychological entanglements

Sanātana Dharma

- The culture of a community or nation is based on the values that its people live and uphold
- There have been several invasions on India, however, Hinduism / Sanātana Dharma survived because of the strength of its culture (based on scriptures)
- “**Dharmo rakshati rakshitaha**” - Dharma protects those who protect (and uphold) it - applicable to both individuals and community / country / civilization
- Scriptures include primarily **Vedas** and **Upanishads**, which contain the eternal truth and principles of Dharma. Hence, Sanātana Dharma is also referred as **Vaidika samskriti** (**very well refined tradition** based on Vedas)

Sanātana Dharma

- The same information has been summarized in **Bhagavad Gita** (in 700 verses), and also presented as a story in 'Itihasa' / epics (Ramayana & Mahabharata) for easy remembrance
- There must be a source for the scriptures - must have been given or propounded by some one
- Once we read scriptures (at least Gita), we can realize that it is not possible for humans to possess so much knowledge and wisdom even if it was accumulated over generations
- Hence, we could conclude some divine (super-natural, supreme) being to be the source of scriptures - whom we commonly refer as 'God'

Sanātana Dharma

- Scriptures describe the nature of God, the reasons and different methods of worshipping God (various rituals), our duties / responsibilities (towards family, society), different types of Yoga, and the ways of attaining God
- Human birth is a great opportunity to understand / realize the absolute Truth and the purpose of our life (the journey of 'Soul' continues until then)
- Human Dharma - **live wisely** and **ethically** and work for our liberation as intended by God. We have a choice to live in whatever way we want. However, we should always try to progress spiritually - try to uplift ourselves and not degrade
- Scriptures teach that the spirit of service and selfless work for others' happiness (carried out as a service to God) brings an individual closer to God

Gods & Goddesses

- Scriptures explicitly and unequivocally state that there is only **ONE GOD**. This leads to several questions...
- Who is Brahman? Is he same as 'Brahma - the creator'
- Who is Paramātmā (Supreme Soul / Spirit)? What is the relationship with individual Soul (Jivātma)
- How many forms and names does God have ?
- Then who is the Goddess? What is Her relationship with the God?
- Who are devas / devatas ? What is their relationship with God ?
- What are the different ways of worshipping God?
- Can we attain God by visiting temples and performing rituals ?

The answers to the above questions constitute **absolute / eternal truth / reality**

Manifestations of God

- Scriptures clearly state that **GOD** has a '**FORM**' and is also '**FORMLESS**' at the same time
- This description, although confusing, is similar to the '**dual nature of light**' as described in Physics. **Light has both particle (form) and wave (formless) nature simultaneously**
- The **formless** (nirguna and nirākār) or unmanifested state of God can be realized or experienced as
- **Brahman / Parabrahmam**: the sub-atomic 'God' particles present in matter / every atom and the light / energy pervading the entire universe (Brahman should not be confused with 'Brahma' - the manifestation of God as 'creator')
- **Paramātmā / Supreme Soul or Spirit**: Supreme consciousness present in every living being (not just humans)

Manifestations of God

- Scriptures unequivocally state that the manifestations of God (with a 'form') are 'infinite'. However, the principal or popular forms include
 - Saraswati - Brahma (for creation)
 - Lakshmi - Vishnu (for preservation / sustenance)
 - Parvathi - Shiva (for dissolution)
- Avatars (incarnations) of Lord Vishnu
 - Matsya*, Kurma, Varāha, **Narasimha**, Vāmana, Parashurāma, **Rāma**, **Krishna**, **Buddha**, Kalki
- Ganesha, Kartikeya, Hanuman, Ayyappa, Surya, Shani...
- Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Itihasas, Chapters 10 and 11 of Bhagavad Gita describe few more

*Interestingly, there are similarities between the stories of **Matsya avatar** and **Noah's Ark**

God and Goddess

God has three forms of **energy**:

- **Māyā / Material energy / Nature**: with which Universe is created (kalpa ārambha), sustained and annihilated (pralaya) and this cycle goes on. Creation (universe) is subject to continuous change
- **Jiva shakti / Spiritual energy**: comprises all the individual Souls. **Jivātma** / Soul, which imparts 'life' to a body (organism), is eternal and is NOT subject to change. Further description is available in the 2nd, 13th & 15th chapters of Bhagavad Gita
- **Yoga Māyā/ Ātma Māyā/ Ātma Yoga** (divine, inherent, mysterious power of God): by which God manifests in different forms (Saraswati-Brahma, Lakshmi-Vishnu, Parvathi-Shiva, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna,...), although **He pervades the entire universe** and the **entire universe is present within Him** (as Brahman)

God and Goddess

कविं पुराणमनुशासितारमणोरणीयांसमनुस्मरेद्यः ।
सर्वस्य धातारमचिन्त्यरूपमादित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात् ॥ Gita Ch 8 ver 9

One who meditates on the Supreme God, who is omniscient (knows everything), primordial / eternal, controller / ruler (of the universe), **smaller than the atom (constitutes the basic sub-atomic particles), yet sustainer of everything**, with a form beyond human comprehension / imagination, **radiant like the Sun**, and far beyond the darkness of ignorance (attains Him, refer verse 8.10)

- The above verse clearly mentions that 'sub-atomic' particles form the basis for the entire matter in the universe
- This is supported by the current concepts of Particle physics - few 'elementary / fundamental' particles are arranged in different configurations to give different atoms and various combinations of atoms give rise to different molecules

God and Goddess

- Different molecules arranged/combined in various configurations, proportions give rise to different types of matter in the universe
- These arrangements are caused by various energies / forces (nuclear/atomic, chemical, electromagnetic, gravitational...) resulting in the vast diversity of the visible universe which include
 - Galaxies, stars and planetary systems - their generation and dissolution
 - The evolutionary process resulting in various types of life forms (plants, animals, microbes,..) on a planet surviving in complex ecosystems
 - The process of development of each and every organism from a single cell (zygote)
- All the different types of matter, forces and energies in the universe are part of the '**material energy**' of God (also referred as '**Nature**')

God and Goddess

- **Material energy** of God ('Nature' or 'Prakriti') which nourishes all the living beings is **personified** as the **Goddess** or **Universal Mother**
- However, the 'life / Soul' in each living being is provided by the **Jiva shakti** / Spiritual energy of God

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि सर्वाणीत्युपधारय ।
अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 6

Understand that these **two natures (material and spiritual energies of God)** are the **wombs / source for all beings***. I am the source / cause of the creation as well as dissolution of the entire universe. Also refer verses 2.28; 7.7; 8.17-19; 9.7-8; 9.10; 9.17-19; 10.8; 10.32; 10.34; 11.32; 13.26/27; 14.3-4

(*while non-living beings are generated by material nature, **all living beings are manifested by the combination of material nature and Soul / Jivātma**)

God and Goddess

- The most popular manifestations of the Goddess include Durga/Parvathi, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Sita, Radha, Bhu Devi,...
- Just as light and heat cannot be separated from fire, similarly Goddess cannot be separated from God. They are always **ONE**
- However, with His '**Yoga māyā**', God manifests in infinite forms with a **definite reason for each of the manifestation / incarnation**
- Manifestations as the beloved couple such as Parvathi-Shiva, Lakshmi-Vishnu, Saraswati-Brahma, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna,.... are the most popular
- For the common people and beginners of spiritual journey, the Divine Couple are related as our parents so that we can worship Them with love & affection

Who is a Deva or Devata

- While the Material energy of God / Nature is personified as Goddess, **each individual element / part** of the **nature** is also personified and worshipped accordingly
- Each personification is referred as a '**Deva**' or '**Devata**', also referred as '**DemiGod**' by some scholars
- Devatas representing the manifested forces of nature, are also described as the **presiding deities** of the respective elements of nature, including the **organs** and **functions** of human body
- A common analogy found in spiritual books - if God is the Government, then 'Devatas' are similar to the various 'ministers' or 'secretaries' of Govt.
- Some of the popular forms include Sun (Surya), Moon (Chandra), Earth (Bhu devi / Prithvi), Water (Varuna, Sagara), rain (Indra), Wind (Vayu, marut), Fire (Agni), Healing (Ahwini Gods) ,...

Jivātma

- Every living being is made up of the basic elements of nature and is brought into life by the **Soul / Jivātma** (refer Gita verses: 7.4-6; 13.5-6/6-7; 13.26/27; 15.7-9)
- Living beings could be compared to various electrical machines with 'life / Soul' being the electricity. The properties of electricity are the same universally, although it runs various machines which perform different functions
- Jivātma (individual Soul) is a part of 'Paramātma' (Supreme Soul / Spirit) analogous to a 'drop of water' and an 'ocean' respectively
- The characteristics of Jivātma are same as 'Paramātma' except the magnitude (refer Gita verses: 13.22/23; **15.7**)
- While **Jivātma** is confined to **one** living being, **Paramātma** is present in **every living being** (refer Gita verses 13.15-17/16-18)

Jivātma

- While every **Jivātma** experiences the dualities of life (such as joy and sorrow; pleasure and pain), **Paramātmā** is the **witness** of every action of all the living beings (refer Gita verses: 9.18; 13.20-22/21-23; 15.9; 15.15-18)
- Because of the various attachments, **Jivātma** takes one body after another (among all the living beings, taking / getting birth as a human is considered difficult)
- A human being is compared to a chariot, where the senses are the horses, mind is the reins, intellect is the charioteer and the owner (passenger) of the chariot is the Jivātma
- Intellect should control the Senses with the mind, and take the owner of the body (Jivātma) to the destination (God)

References from Gita

- **Brahman:** 3.15; 4.24; 6.29-30; 7.7; 8.3; **8.9**; 8.20-22; **9.4**; 9.6; 9.16; 10.42; 12.3; 13.12-15/13-16; 13.30/31; 14.3-4; 14.27; 17.23; 18.46
- **Paramatma:** 6.7; 6.29; 6.31; 8.4; **9.18**; **10.11**; 13.15-17/16-18; **13.27-28/28-29**; **13.31/32**; **15.15**; **15.17-18**; 18.61
- **Infinite forms of God:** 9.15; **10.19**; 10.40
- **Material energy / Māya:** **7.4**; 7.6-7; 9.8; **9.10**; 10.8; 13.19/20; 14.3; 18.61
- **Spiritual energy / Jiva Shakti:** **7.5-6**; 7.9; 10.20; 10.39; **14.4**; 15.7
- **Yoga Māya / Ātma Māya / Ātma Yoga:** **4.6-9**; **7.25**; 9.5; **11.47**
- **Creation, Maintenance, Destruction of universe / life forms:** 2.28; **7.6-7**; 8.17-19; **9.7-8**; **9.10**; 9.18-19; 10.8; 10.32; 10.34; 11.32
- **Nature is mother, God is father for all living-beings:** 7.6; **9.17**; 13.26/27; **14.3-4**
- **Soul (Ātma / Jivātma):** 2.13; **2.16-25**; 2.28; 2.30; 7.5-6; 7.9-10; 10.20; 10.39; 13.2/3; 13.19-22/20-23; 13.32-33/33-34; **15.7-11**; 15.16

Note: The above compilation is meant to provide few examples and is not exhaustive. The first verse (Arjuna's query) in the 13th chapter is not counted in several versions of Gita. Hence, two numbers have been provided for each verse of 13th chapter

Worshipping God

- People worship God for several reasons
 - To overcome challenges, troubles, difficulties of life
 - For the fulfillment of worldly / materialistic desires (to attain wealth, power / position, fame,..)
 - Out of 'Fear of God' (probably inculcated by ancestors so that people will stay away from evil, unethical, immoral thoughts and actions)
 - To successfully complete their work, duties or responsibilities
 - To express their gratitude for whatever they have / got in life
 - To obtain knowledge and understand the Absolute Truth (of our existence)
 - To obtain **pure, unconditional love & devotion towards God** (e.g. Prahlād, Ambarish, Janak, Vibhishan, Hanuman,...) Refer Gita verse: 7.16
- The practice of worshipping God daily or regularly is meant for remembering God at all times

Worshipping God

- One can worship God as the formless Brahman, Paramātmā (Supreme Soul) or in any other beloved form
- However, it is explicitly stated in Bhagavad Gita that the **spiritual journey** of a devotee engaged in the **worship of formless Brahman / Paramātmā is difficult and time consuming**

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ।
अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥

Gita Ch 12 ver 5

Difficulties / obstacles are greater for those whose minds are attached to (interested in) the unmanifested aspect of God (formless Brahman / Paramātmā). Indeed, the path for attaining God in the formless state is painful for the embodied / living beings (path is difficult to understand or follow resulting in disappointment / sorrow)

- It is much more difficult to focus on God in the unmanifested state than a beloved form of God, because human beings need to perceive via the senses (in the beginning of spiritual journey)

Worshipping God

- Worshipping God in a **beloved humanly form** is always better and has several advantages, especially during the early stages of spiritual journey. Generally the various forms of God are depicted using
 - Paper, cloth (as paintings)
 - Metal, stone, clay, wood,.. (as sculptures)
- Fortunately, India is extremely rich in terms of paintings and sculptures which have been beautifully prepared by artists
- Scriptures (e.g. Dhyana slokas) describe the characteristic aspects of the popular manifestations of God. Accordingly, artists by imagining / visualizing the Lord in their mind, paint the pictures or carve sculptures

Worshipping God

- Just as pictures, graphs, charts are used to explain a theory / principle / data, similarly pictures / sculptures of the various forms of God are used in spiritual education, as not every human is intellectually capable of understanding the spiritual text and visualize God mentally (especially in ancient times)
- These depictions help the devotees to focus easily. We **can relate to God as our parents (Parvathi-Shiva, Sita-Rama) or as a child (beloved Sri Krishna, Radha,..) enabling us to express our love, affection** and worship with pure devotion
- Just as we have statues / monuments of freedom fighters / national heroes which act as reminders and inspire generations to live up to their ideals, similarly, the pictures / sculptures of God represent the **spiritual ideals demonstrated and lived**, especially during His incarnations (e.g. Lord Rāma)

Which form is better for Worship

- Most importantly, it does **NOT** matter which form is better or superior
- Scriptures explicitly state that God is omnipresent and **could be visualized in any form** for the sake of worship
- The Sanskrit proverb “Yad bhavam tad bhavati” could also be applied here, i.e., we can visualize **God in any beloved form** which is **most pleasant to us** and fix that image permanently in our mind / heart

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।
तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 21

Whichever form (Deity) any devotee desires to worship with concentration and faith, indeed I stabilize (make firm and unwavering) his/her focus and trust on that particular form / Deity. Also refer verses 4.11; 7.22

Worshipping God

- Scriptures contain sacred verses which are chanted before worship to invoke God in the symbol (picture, sculpture) and also in ourselves (e.g. Mahanyasam, Laghunyasam)
- We have to try to understand these verses (or at least Dhyana slokas), visualize the Lord in our mind and **meditate** upon Him (pictures would help us if we have difficulty in visualization)
- By worshipping the symbol and by focusing / tuning our mind on the symbol, we will gradually develop love for God. We can then slowly realize the true essence of what is represented by that outer symbol. Once we practice to 'see / visualize' God in the symbol, eventually our vision will expand to see God everywhere
- Finally, we will gain the divine knowledge & wisdom to realize the nature of God / absolute Reality beyond all names and forms

Rituals

- Rituals are meant
 - To inculcate a habit of worshipping God daily / regularly, express our gratitude and remember Him at all times
 - For **relaxation / to attain inner-peace** (from the tensions of life)
- Rituals should NOT be considered as an obligation; just as we have coffee / tea to relax & recharge ourselves, similarly rituals are meant to purify & recharge our mind to fulfill our duties
- We have to understand the meaning of rituals and then perform them with enthusiasm & utmost dedication / concentration
- Contemplation of God should be continuous and single-pointed (attained by regular practice / discipline, determination and patience / perseverance)

Rituals

- Scriptures prescribe several rituals for the worship of God. While some are meant for daily worship, others are meant for special occasions (festivals) which are performed at our homes or temples e.g. Satyanarayana Puja, Rudrabhishekam, different types of Yagna (fire sacrifices) of which Chandi Homam is very popular
- The most common form of daily worship (nitya puja) is the 'Shodashopachara' (Shodasha + Upachara = 16 services) puja, which is analogous to the way we treat a relative or a guest visiting our home
- During this worship, God is invoked in the picture or sculpture by reciting 'mantra' (a sacred verse) which is followed by the 16 services such as offering seat (āsana), water, performing bath (abhishekam), offering food, flowers, light (diya, deepam), ...

Rituals

- At the end of the worship, usually an '**Ārati**' is offered to God
- A light / flame of 'ghee' / oil lamps or burning camphor is waved in circles illuminating the entire form of the Lord, while chanting prayers / singing melodious songs. Then the light / flame is passed to everyone who **place their hands over the flame briefly and then touch their eyes**
- Significance: We would like to keep the image of God (present in the sanctum-sanctorum which is usually dark) observed with the help of Ārati, permanently in front of our eyes (in our mind/heart)
- Another version: God who is seated in every living being, is covered by the darkness of ignorance. Only when we burn our ego, desires, anger (comparable to camphor, oil, ghee) and obtain divine spiritual knowledge & wisdom (light / flame) then we will be able to 'see' God with in us and also everywhere

Rituals - Yagna / Yajna / Yagya

- **Yagna (Yajna / Yagya)** is a Vedic sacrifice and one of the most important rituals in Sanātana Dharma during which different materials are offered to the fire while chanting sacred verses from the scriptures
- There are several Yagnas meant for different manifestations of God and also devatas
- Among all the devatas, the Fire-God (Agni) is considered to be the youngest one
- During Yagna, when some material is offered in the fire, it is believed that Agni will carry it to the Deity for whom the Yagna is being performed
- Any **selfless work dedicated to God** also becomes a Yagna (Refer Gita ch 3 ver 9)

Significance of Yagna

- When we receive a gift or favor from someone, it is a basic courtesy that we at least thank them for their generosity
- Since many of our basic necessities are provided by nature, we should express our gratitude to the nature
- Agriculture has been the backbone of human civilization and a good harvest is highly dependent on the nature along with human effort
- So all the elements of nature are personified and worshipped by providing a part of the harvest. Most of the Yagnas / Homam consist of the same
- Gita clearly states that God created humans along with Yagnas. By the performance of Yagnas, Devatas will be pleased and fulfill our necessities

Significance of Yagna

सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।
अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेष वोऽस्त्विष्टकामधुक् ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 10

In ancient days, upon creating mankind along with Yagnas*, Lord Brahma said, “by these (performance of Yagnas), you shall prosper and they shall fulfill your wishes (provide you the necessities / requirements and desired objects for living happily)”.

***Yagna (Yajna / Yagya): Vedic sacrifice / oblation / any unselfish work done with a pure motive and dedicated to God / selfless service performed for the welfare of others**

देवान्भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।
परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 11

Devatas will be pleased by the Yagnas, and in turn those Devatas shall bless you (bestow their grace upon you, i.e., with rain and other requirements of life). Thus, by mutual satisfaction / cooperation you shall attain the supreme good (prosperity will reign for all).

Devatas are the personifications / manifestations / presiding Deities of the respective elements / forces of Nature

Purpose of Yagna

- Yagnas (Vedic sacrifices) are meant for the **benefit of the entire society** and not for personal gain
- Most importantly, Yagnas serve as a **reminder** about **conservation of natural resources** and **protection of environment**
- Yagnas should be performed with enthusiasm and great dedication (**utmost concentration and interest**) as per the procedures described in the scriptures, which include
 - auspicious location and time (Temples are usually the best places and festivals are best times for performing Yagnas)
 - procurement of required materials & having required number of priests
 - recitation of the mantras / verses with great concentration
 - proper remuneration to the priests for their services

Purpose of Rituals

- Most of the festivals have originated to celebrate the incarnation of God and/or victory of good over evil
- Festivals remind us to destroy the darkness of ignorance with the light of knowledge and invoke the divinity within ourselves
- This is achieved by **destroying the evil tendencies** (including ego and arrogance) and controlling our senses & mind with intellect. We have to **purify our mind by nurturing good / noble qualities** and contemplate on the purpose of our life
- Tonsure is another common practice meant for reminding people to shed their ego, arrogance and develop humility
- Similarly, all the rituals prescribed in the scriptures and which are meant for the worship of God have a very clear reason and objective (available in spiritual books and also online)

Need for Temples

- In the present day, several pictures and sculptures of the various manifestations of God are easily available
- However, hundreds and thousands of years ago, it was not the case. There were no photos / prints! The only possibility is to have a painting or most commonly a sculpture made of stone, metal, wood or clay
- But not every person is an artist to prepare (or could afford to purchase) a beautiful painting or a sculpture of God for worship at their homes
- Hence, temples were the only means in ancient times to visualize the various forms of God and worship collectively
- Temples were constructed by Kings and rich people or collectively by the entire community of a village / town (sharing the cost and labor)

Need for Temples

- Although few alternatives did exist, such as worshipping natural elements (Sun, Moon, Earth, rivers,..) or **Ashvattha (peepal)** tree, **Tulasi, Cow**,.... temples had their own importance
- In summary, temples were needed
 - as it is **easier to worship** God by **focusing on a beloved form**
 - as they were the only means in ancient times to see & understand the various forms of God and collective worship (helpful for visualization)
 - to gain spiritual knowledge (as most of the spiritual scholars / saints used to reside near temples); practice meditation and devotion
 - as they served as an auspicious location for performing Yagnas (for the benefit of the entire society / country / planet) and celebrating festivals
 - as community centers and also centers of art & architecture
- The next question is which temple to visit & how many times or how many temples to visit

Temples and their popularity

- India is a land of Temples. They are of two types
 - Temple is constructed at a site where God is believed to have manifested e.g. Jyotirlinga temples, Swayambhu lingam temples, Vaishno devi shrine
 - In the second type, a temple is constructed and a Deity (usually a sculpture carved out of stone or made of metal combination) is installed and worshipped
- There are thousands of temples in India, however, only few of them are extremely popular e.g. Tirumala, Vaishno devi, Kashi,...
- The popularity of a temple is based on its spiritual energy/power which could be understood by considering the following analogy
- There are several brands and models of cars available today, however, only few models are extremely successful which is dependent on their performance and features

Temples and their popularity

- A successful car model is dependent on the following
 - Design of the car & engine (which is based on the intention / requirements such as good mileage, low maintenance, good pickup,....)
 - Quality of materials used for the manufacture
 - Quality of manufacturing process (of the individual parts) and
 - finally the assembly process
- Similarly, popularity of a temple is based on its **spiritual power / energy** which is dependent on the
 - intention (to construct the temple)
 - temple environment (surroundings)
 - procedure to be followed during temple construction
 - Prāna-prathishta - invoking God in the symbol (sculpture/picture), i.e., requesting God to reside in the temple forever

Temples and their popularity

- **Intention to construct the temple** (analogous to the design of the car) - should be for the spiritual enlightenment and benefit of the society rather than for personal benefit (expecting materialistic reward / result) and 'recognition / fame'
- **Temple environment / surroundings** (analogous to the quality of materials used for car manufacture) - should be very clean and free from all kinds of pollution including dust and noise
 - No one would like to live in a house which is located in the center or adjacent to a busy road (with a lot of dust, smoke and noise) or next to an open sewage drain
 - Similarly, **temple is a house of God**. Hence, the surroundings of the temple should be very clean and serene; **away** from **polluted areas** (with domestic & industrial waste), **dust**, **smoke** and **noise** (roads, busy & over-crowded localities)

Temples and their popularity

- It is very important to note that several ancient, famous temples are located on a hill-top and/or in the middle of a forest
- These temples were originally constructed in an isolated area away from populated areas such as villages and towns (although now they have become very busy pilgrimage centers)
- One of the most probable reasons could be to provide a **clean, healthy** (surrounded by trees) and **serene** environment for devotees which is very important for studying/ learning scriptures & spiritual information, practising yoga and meditation
- Along with the surroundings, the purity of mind of the people (owners, sponsors & workers) involved in the construction of the temple is also very important

Temples and their popularity

- An artist prepares a painting or sculpture by visualizing the form of God in his mind. So the intensity of devotion and dedication of the artist towards God will decide the outcome (i.e. how **lively** the painting or sculpture appears)
- There are many temples for Sri Venkateswara, however, the Deity in Tirumala looks so lively - probably because the artists who carved the sculpture were so intensely devoted to the Lord that their work has become so famous in the history of mankind
- **Procedure to be followed during temple construction** (analogous to the quality of car manufacturing process) - The procedure of design and construction of temple including the Vedic rituals and Yagnas which have to be performed should be as per the scriptures (from the day of laying foundation stone to the consecration ceremony). This will strengthen the spiritual power of the temple

Temples and their popularity

- **Prāna-prathishta** (analogous to the assembly of engine into the car frame). Prāna - life; Prathishta - placing
- It is the process of placing or infusing 'life' (invoking God) into the symbol / idol / image (sculpture, picture) i.e., requesting God to take the temple as His home
- After completing the construction of the temple and when the sculpture of the Deity is ready, an auspicious date and time are selected
- Several rituals are performed as per the scriptures and by chanting sacred **mantra** (verses or hymns) with devotion, the power of the Deity or Supreme consciousness is brought / infused into the symbol (sculpture)
- Chanting of sacred mantras is similar to providing electrical energy / ignition to the engine

Temples and their popularity

- After Prāna-prathishta, the symbol (sculpture) is treated as a living being. The Deity is offered bath, clothes, ornaments, food along with other articles of worship (flowers, incense, āraṭi..)
- Most of the temples also have a 'Kalash / Kalasam' (an inverted pot made up of metal combinations) on the top of the towers (shikhara / gopuram). The 'kalash' represents / serves as a reminder of the formless (nirguna, nirakar) aspect of God
- Scriptures describe temple as the representation of the universe in a miniature form
- When a temple is constructed as per the scriptures and the Deity is worshipped daily, more people will come to offer their prayers, perform rituals and the temple gains spiritual energy and also popularity

Temples and their popularity

- Few more things are required to run a car
 - clean fuel
 - regular maintenance
 - a good owner/driver to efficiently run and take care of the car
- Similarly, a temple also needs the following (which provide the spiritual power)
 - Nitya puja / daily worship (analogous to fuel)
 - Special services and rituals (analogous to maintenance) performed during festivals e.g. Yagnas, 'Pavithrotsavam' (for purification / correction of errors) at Tirumala
 - Good administrative team (analogous to good owner / driver) to serve the God and devotees (without corruption & politics)

How many temples should we visit

- People visit several temples, mostly
 - To overcome problems & difficulties in their lives
 - To fulfill their desires
 - For spiritual knowledge (very few)
- This usually happens by listening to others, who claim that their problems were solved or their wishes / desires were fulfilled by visiting a particular temple
- By listening to the various recommendations of family members, friends,.. people visit several temples or most often make resolution (promises to God) to visit one or more temples, once their problems are solved or desire is fulfilled

How many temples should we visit

- It is important to note that in ancient times, people didn't have pictures / photos and since a form of God is preferred for worship, temples were the primary places for worship
- It is very clearly mentioned in scriptures that God is omnipresent. Hence, there is **no need of visiting multiple temples** (to get solution for our problems)
- **Devotion** (**unconditional love** and complete **faith** in God) is most essential, even if we visit just one temple or worship God staying at our home. **Reading scriptures** improves our spiritual knowledge (clears our doubts), eventually **strengthening** our **belief / faith / trust** and ultimately devotion to God
- However, some of the rituals (Yagnas) and special services during festivals are difficult to perform at home, hence they are performed collectively at temples

How many temples should we visit

- When we visit other places (either on a business or personal trip), we could always visit the nearby temples
- People usually have vacation at famous temples situated on hill-tops (serving the dual purpose of vacation and visiting temple)
- But we also have to consider the following. Travelling to distant places also leads to
 - Fuel consumption (causing / increasing air pollution)
 - Increase in vehicular traffic and congestions (resulting in waste of time, frustrations, anger)
 - Also impacts currency value and national economy (as a country like India imports fuel)

How many temples should we visit

- Hence, we could visit any temple which
 - is closer to our home
 - has clean surroundings
 - is in a peaceful area
 - is well maintained (with cleanliness, discipline, where scriptures are properly followed and visitors are treated equally without any discrimination based on financial, social and professional status)
 - has good management (without corruption & politics)
- Pictures, sculptures (of God), temples and rituals are helpful in the beginning stages of spiritual journey. Ultimately, we have to **worship God in our mind / heart**

How many temples should we visit

- 'Rudrabhishekam' is one of the most popular methods of worshipping Lord Shiva
- During the worship, sacred verses are chanted to invoke Lord Shiva in the Lingam (while worshippers / devotees mentally visualize the Lord in the Lingam)
- Later, Mahanyasam and /or Laghunyasam are chanted to **purify** our body, mind, intellect and **invoke Lord Shiva in ourselves**
- **Purity of mind** (by getting rid of ego, worldly desires, greed, arrogance, jealousy, hatred, anger, vengeance) is extremely important to invoke God within us
- Once we have invoked (visualized and **mentally placed**) **God in our heart**, like Hanuman and other devotees, there is no need of any pictures or rituals

Construct temple in our heart

- Hanuman, a great devotee of Lord Rama, has permanently placed the beloved Sita-Rama in His heart (which itself is a temple) and has been worshipping Them with his mind
- We should not be obsessed with building temples or installing statues. We have to construct a temple in our heart before constructing one in the physical world
- Through Hanuman, Lord is instructing us to realize and experience the Supreme Soul (Paramātmā) present in every living being and **serve Him by working for the welfare of the society**



Hanuman is also a great example of discipline, determination, humility and reminds us to NOT waste time in God's work

Rituals - misconceptions

- Just as visiting temples, people perform various rituals to
 - overcome / solve their problems & difficulties
 - fulfill desires
- To attain the above, we get **several recommendations** from family members, friends to **perform various kinds of rituals** (for e.g. Satyanarayana Puja, different Yagnas,..)
- These suggestions often **cause more confusion and frustration** (if our problems are not solved or wishes are not fulfilled). This might actually lead to loss of faith in God
- Rituals are meant for **inculcating a habit** of worshipping God, without expecting anything in return
- Rituals should be performed with enthusiasm, utmost concentration and devotion as prescribed in the scriptures and should NOT be considered as an obligation

Rituals - misconceptions

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः ।
वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥
कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम् ।
क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥
भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानां तयापहृतचेतसाम् ।
व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥

Gita Ch 2 ver 42-44

O Arjuna! People with limited knowledge / understanding, who are delighted by the statements of Vedas, give flowery speeches about Vedic rituals and argue that they are meant for fulfilling worldly desires and nothing else. Full of materialistic desires and considering heaven as the supreme goal, they prescribe numerous special rituals for attaining wealth, power and enjoyment, which finally lead to re-birth (as the fruit of their actions). People, whose minds are carried away (deluded) by such teachings and who are deeply attached to worldly pleasures and opulence, do NOT have the steadfast / resolute intellect (to understand the divine, spiritual knowledge) for attaining Samādhī (eternal peace and equanimity obtained when mind is offered to God; mind is in a meditative state, always attached to God even while performing duties) Also refer verses: 4.12; 7.20-23; 9.20-21; 9.23-24; 17.12; 17.18; 17.21; 18.24; 18.27

Rituals - misconceptions

- People, who are interested in wealth and worldly pleasures, are focused only on the **Karma kānda** or ritualistic portion of the Vedas which lays down specific rules and specific actions for the attainment of specific fruit (fulfilling a desire)
- They are not interested in understanding / realizing the inner meaning of the Vedic rituals
- According to Vedas, the **purpose** of human life is to **know / realize and experience the absolute Truth** (to obtain **spiritual knowledge, unwavering devotion** and perform duties / **work for the welfare of the world as a service** to God) and not just to live superficially
- In order to understand the **spiritual knowledge** which is both **subtle** and **divine**, the **mind** must be **purified** and **prepared** (focused)

Contents of Vedas

- Vedas consists of three parts: **Karma kānda**, **Upāsana kānda** and **Gnāna kānda**
- **Karma kānda**: ritualistic portion (meant for purifying the mind) - contains procedures for performing various rituals
- Rituals (e.g. Yagna) should be performed for the **benefit of the entire society** and not for the fulfillment of materialistic desires

अफलाकाङ्क्षिभिर्यज्ञो विधिदृष्टो य इज्यते ।

यष्टव्यमेवेति मनः समाधाय स सात्त्विकः ॥

Gita Ch 17 ver 11

A sacrifice which is performed according to the directions of scriptures, by people **without any expectation of reward**, and with a resolution of mind that it is **surely their duty to perform sacrifice**, is in the nature of **sātvika / goodness (pure)**. refer 17.12-13

- We should always try to cultivate 'Sattva / Sātvika' qualities to purify our mind - avoid unethical / evil actions and fill our mind with positive and spiritual thoughts

Contents of Vedas

- When we are sick, the doctor gives advice and restrictions (about diet and daily routine) so that we can recover very soon
- Similarly, Vedas are not binding us by various restrictions and directions, as **we are already bound by desires, hatred, fear, greed... Vedas are only meant to release us from bondages**
- Just as children are encouraged in studies by giving some gifts / rewards, similarly, the rewards of Karma kānda are meant for
 - 1) **Encouragement:** People might get interested in spiritual knowledge if their problems are solved or desires are fulfilled
 - 2) **To stay focused:** by engaging in Vedic rituals, our mind is not distracted by the worldly pleasures or sinful activities (especially for those in the initial stages of spiritual journey)

Contents of Vedas

- **Upāsana kānda**: worship portion (meant for preparing the mind)
Upāsana means 'sitting near'
- We choose a beloved form of God (being attracted by the qualities and attributes of that particular form / manifestation) and use a symbol (picture / sculpture) of that Deity for worship - Ishta devata upāsana
- Although the procedure of worshipping a Deity is **symbolic**, it is extremely useful to **seed the feelings of divine / pure love towards God** and also to visualize God mentally and practice worship in our mind
- Just as a flag is not just a piece of cloth but represents the nation's values, culture and aspirations. Similarly, a 'symbol' of Deity represents the divine ideals, absolute truth, supreme energy and consciousness

Contents of Vedas

- Just as we tune to a particular channel to watch a program in the television, similarly, the use of symbols (pictures, sculptures) are meant for focusing our mind to gain the same virtues / qualities of the Deity we worship e.g. Sita and Rama
- Once we understand the significance / truth behind each form, worshipping and meditating on the symbol / particular form will result in a blissful / ecstatic experience
- The joy and peace that we experience by **constantly visualizing** the beloved form of God in our heart is itself a blessing
- Worshipping God regularly (even for few minutes every day) also helps in detaching our mind from the world (helps to prepare our mind), **experience** the **Jivātma** within us and realize the purpose of our life (liberation of Soul / Jivātma)

Contents of Vedas

- **Gnāna kānda**: knowledge portion (meant for attaining God - liberation of Soul from the cycles of birth & death)
- This portion describes the various aspects of God - Brahman (formless reality), Paramātmā (Supreme Spirit / consciousness dwelling in all living beings), various forms, incarnations and Their purpose (for creation, maintenance, dissolution,..)
- Vedas unequivocally state that there is only **one God or supreme Reality**, who manifests through various powers represented by the forms of Gods and Goddesses
- This description is similar to 'electricity' whose properties are universal, however, it is manifested in various forms (as light, sound, heat,...) through different electrical equipment
- Gnāna kānda describes the source, origin of the entire universe as well as its dissolution

Contents of Vedas

- Gnāna kānda also describes the purpose & significance of human life along with our duties in each stage of life and roles / responsibilities in the family and also in the society
- In fact, the worship of three forms of Goddess is also to achieve the goals of the three portions (kāndas) of Vedas
- Durga - for destroying all the evil tendencies (impurities) in our mind (for purification of mind)
- Lakshmi - to attain the real / true wealth i.e., to cultivate noble virtues and qualities (for preparation of mind)
- Saraswati - to grant us spiritual knowledge and wisdom to attain '**unwavering Devotion** towards God' and understand / realize the goals / objectives of our life (enabling us to attain eternal peace and God finally)

Gnana Yagna

- There are several types of Yagna (refer Gita 4.24-33). While some are performed with materials, Gita emphasizes **Gnana Yagna (obtaining knowledge and spreading it to others for the welfare of the world)**, which should be performed wholeheartedly with enthusiasm and utmost concentration / dedication

श्रेयान्द्रव्यमयाद्यज्ञाज्ज्ञानयज्ञः परन्तप ।

सर्वं कर्माखिलं पार्थ ज्ञाने परिसमाप्यते ॥ Ch 4 ver 33

O scorcher of foes! the **sacrifice performed through knowledge (Gnana Yagna - studying / obtaining knowledge and spreading it to others for the welfare of the world)** is **better than the sacrifices performed with various materials**. O son of Kunti, in totality, all works / duties culminate in knowledge / wisdom. (also refer verses 4.10; 4.28; 9.15; **18.68-71**)

- The objective of Gnana Yagna is to realize the presence of God everywhere, in every living being and **serve the Lord by serving the family, society selflessly**

Gnana Yagna

- When we have a health problem and visit a hospital / clinic, we **don't get cured by just looking at the doctor** (have 'darshan') and paying our obeisance
- In order to get cured we have to listen to the doctor's advice and follow it promptly
- Similarly, in order to **face the challenges and find solutions to our problems in life**, we have to **listen to the God's advice** and then **follow it** promptly
- Scriptures constitute the advice of God which include
 - **Shruti** - knowledge revealed by God himself (Vedas, Upanishads,..)
 - **Smriti** - knowledge that is remembered - Itihasas (epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata), Puranas,..

Spiritual journey

- The process of obtaining spiritual knowledge / education could be understood by considering the analogy of a child going through various stages / grades in school
- During the stage of kindergarten, a child goes to playschool and meets his/her teacher, learns and sings rhymes, has snacks and plays with friends
- Similarly, in the beginning stage of spiritual journey, we visit temples*, have 'darshan' of the God/Deity, learn and sing devotional songs, meet friends and have 'prasadam', participate in festivals and cultural programs (many people remain in this stage for their entire life-time)
- *In ancient times, temples were the **centers for obtaining spiritual knowledge** (especially for the beginners in spiritual journey)

Spiritual journey

- During primary school, the child learns to read and write, learns stories and gets exposed to the basic subjects (language, science and maths)
- Similarly, in the next stage of spiritual journey, we learn and chant few verses (*'slokas'* and *'mantra'*), learn few stories about God, His manifestations / incarnations and an overview of scriptures
- During high school and in college, the student learns about the details of subject matter gradually
- Similarly, in the spiritual journey, we have to read the scriptures and try to understand the message in them
- **Scriptures teach higher values** (ethical and moral) of life and guide us to take the right decisions in complicated situations

Spiritual journey

- Vedas and Upanishads, referred as 'Shruti' (revealed by God himself; knowledge which is heard) are the primary source of spiritual information / knowledge
- However, the contents of Vedas and Upanishads are vast and requires lot of effort, time and patience to read, understand and then practice / implement the principles / message in our lives
- The entire divine knowledge of 'Shruti' is also provided as a practical application (Smriti - knowledge that is remembered; taught / spoken from memory) e.g. Ramayana, Mahabharata
- **Bhagavad Gita**, which is a part of Mahabharata is described as a **summary** of Vedas and Upanishads

Spiritual journey

- Similarly, the **entire knowledge** of Vedas and Upanishads is described / presented as a **story** in '**Ramayana**', since human mind / brain can remember a story better than plain text
- While **Gita** constitutes '**theory**', **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** constitute '**practical lessons**'
- Bhagavad Gita contains only **700 slokas / verses**, Valmiki Ramayana contains 24,000 verses and Mahabharata contains 100,000 verses
- Hence, we should strive to read and understand at least **Gita** as it is the **shortest text** compared to other scriptures
- It is not enough to read Gita once (at least for most of the people). We have to contemplate on the verses repeatedly to completely understand their message which may be subtle

Spiritual journey

- Just as we take bath everyday, we have to clean our brain (mind & intellect) regularly with Gita
- Just as all successful sportspersons practice their game everyday (with strict discipline), similarly, we should have a discipline to read Gita everyday (e.g. 2 - 4 verses/day depending on the available time) and contemplate on their message
- Once we start reading Gita regularly, and start implementing the principles in our daily lives, our understanding will also improve (just as a student understands the concepts of maths and physics by practicing to solve the problems)
- Another analogy: Gita is the most powerful 'anti-virus software' for our mind and intellect which has to be 'executed everyday' to destroy the 'viruses' (delusions) and to face the 'attacks' (challenges of life everyday)

Spiritual journey

- The concepts and principles of Gita will help us in facing the most difficult situations in life, just as it helped Arjuna during the most stressful time of his life
- While Gita is the summary, **Ramayana** is a **manifestation of Vedas** and both of them contain the core spiritual knowledge
- Ramayana is also described as '**Dharma shastra**' (a demonstration of righteous living) as it is an embodiment of
 - Noble / righteous conduct, ethics, virtues
 - Courage, determination, discipline
 - True sacrifice, unconditional love and devotion
- It also highlights the spiritual goals and the purpose / significance of human life

Spiritual journey

- Most of the characters in Ramayana have **sacrificed their personal happiness to uphold Dharma** (righteousness)
- However, Dharma is subtle and might be confusing at certain circumstances of life. As in Ramayana & Mahabharata, we can see the same kind of dilemmas and challenges in our lives
- Through the characters of Ramayana and Mahabharata, we can learn about all possible patterns of human behavior, responses, thoughts and attitudes. Their **actions and the resultant consequences** teach us what is right and wrong i.e., fine differences between 'dharma' and 'adharm' (e.g. dilemma faced by Vibhishan, Bharath, Arjuna, Bhishma, Dronacharya, Karna)

Spiritual journey

- Most importantly, our personal obligations, ambitions, goals **should not divert** us from the path of righteousness i.e., our actions should not be harmful to the society / country / world
- No individual is above dharma, however, any individual who upholds and protects dharma becomes noble and a great person
- In order to progress in spiritual journey, we also have to get rid of personal weaknesses, e.g. Yudhishtira had a weakness for playing dice game which eventually led to lot of problems. It also serves as a reminder that we should not engage with evil people even for a formality (e.g. Shakuni, Manthara)
- Mostly, the characters of **Ramayana** teach us **how should we lead our life** and the characters & events of **Mahabharata** teach us **what should we avoid in life**

Spiritual journey

- Both Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita are also considered as 'Shruti', since Gita is revealed by Sri Krishna and it is mentioned in Ramcharitmanas that **Ramayana was first narrated by Lord Shiva** to mother Parvathi (Note: several cycles of creation & dissolution have passed before and God has incarnated as Rama in every cycle in different worlds / planets)
- 'Ādi-kavi' - Maharshi Valmiki is considered as the first author of Ramayana in the current 'MahaYuga' (cycle of creation)
- Just as Valmiki, there have been several spiritual masters / saints who sacrificed their lives for the propagation of the divine knowledge, e.g. Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda,...
- Several organizations have been setup by the followers of these saints, with some members proclaiming that their master is greatest or most supreme among all the gurus/saints

Spiritual journey

- In this regard, we have to follow Lord Rama. Vashishta was the guru / teacher of Rama. During his life-time, Rama met several gurus / sages, such as Atri, Agastya, Bharadwaja, Vishwamitra, Valmiki,.. It is very important to note that **Rama showed equal respect to all the gurus / saints / sages**
- We should pay attention to the message and teachings of all the saints / spiritual masters / great devotees rather than analyzing their greatness and supremacy
- **Purānas** constitute another source of spiritual knowledge and rituals
- However, Purānas may appear contradictory and confusing because each Purāna glorifies a particular manifestation of God and describes that form as the supreme and everything else originated from that particular manifestation

Spiritual journey

- Puranas include the following contents
 - **Sarga**: creation of fundamental particles of universe
 - **Pratisarga**: creation of diversity (Galaxies, stars, planets, living and non-living entities) within the universe
 - **Vamśa**: genealogy of the Gods, sages and kings
 - **Manvantara**: cosmic cycles, history of the world during the time of one patriarch
 - **Vamśānucharitam**: legends/ lives of individuals born during a manvantara
- While Itihasas (epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata) are based on facts, Puranas include stories intended for education / wisdom
- The stories may appear contradictory with respect to the location and time, however, our **focus** should be on the **message / moral**

Spiritual journey

- Hence, in the present day world, **Gita** and **Ramayana** are **sufficient** (and also the best sources) to obtain the required spiritual knowledge
- There are four stages of life (prescribed for every human being): Brahmacharya (student / bachelor), Grihastha (house-holder), Vanaprastha (retirement) and Sanyasa (renunciation)
- Although the first stage (Brahmacharya) is ideal for learning scriptures / spiritual knowledge, however, it could be started at any stage of life (all we need is enthusiasm and determination)
- We should always strive to progress (move up) in the spiritual journey
- We should put wholehearted effort to obtain spiritual knowledge while fulfilling the duties according to the stage of life

Spiritual journey

- It will also be very helpful to practice detachment of mind from the world and experience (focus on) Soul / Jivātma for emotional stability and peace
- We should always have good intentions, strong & positive mind and also great / noble ideals
- Practise of good qualities must be for spiritual enlightenment and attaining God (and not for recognition / fame)
- When our intentions are pure (and selfless); efforts and prayers are sincere (constantly trying to attain God); our heart/mind and actions will get purified, then God, who is present in every living being as 'Paramātmā' would grant us the 'divine vision' and give the divine knowledge & wisdom transcendently (as obtained by Arjuna, Sanjaya)

Spiritual journey

तेषामेवानुकम्पार्थमहमज्ञानजं तमः ।

नाशयाम्यात्मभावस्थो ज्ञानदीपेन भास्वता ॥ Gita Ch 10 ver 11

Indeed, to bestow My grace upon them (devotees who are striving to attain God), I, residing in their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the radiant light of knowledge

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च ।

वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ॥ Gita Ch 15 ver 15

I am also situated in the hearts of all living beings. From Me comes memory, knowledge and reasoning power (to clear illusions, doubts & misconceptions). I am the One to be known through all the Vedas. Indeed, I am the author of Vedanta and have the complete knowledge of the Vedas. Also refer verses: 4.3; 7.1-3; 9.1-2; 10.1; 10.10; 10.32; 13.17/18; 14.1-2; 18.50; 18.64; 18.73

Obtaining divine knowledge and realization of absolute truth is regarded as a second birth e.g. all enlightened saints, sages (Buddha, Valmiki, Vishwamitra,..)

Spiritual journey

- The goal of spiritual education is to sacrifice our worldly / materialistic desires and realize the purpose of our life
- Our spiritual efforts should be dedicated to Lord alone and **not** for gaining power or recognition / fame
- Just as we apply the subject knowledge (obtained at school and college) at work, similarly, we **should strive to apply the principles / message of Gita and Ramayana in our daily life**
- If we are confused and cannot find a way out of our problems, Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata will guide us in tackling the issues and show the path to lead a noble life while fulfilling our responsibilities, and also help us in obtaining liberation from the bondage / cycles of birth and death

Ignoring Scriptures

- An individual, community, country flourishes with the promotion of 'Dharma', but when principles (ethics, values) are ignored, it will result in moral deterioration and destruction of the individual / community / country
- Scriptures also warn that one who does not follow the prescribed way of life will suffer ultimately

यः शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः ।
न स सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुखं न परां गतिम् ॥ Gita Ch 16 ver 23

One who ignores the instructions of scriptures and acts under the influence of materialistic desires, attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal (liberation / God). Also refer verses 3.16; 3.32; **9.3**; 17.5-6; 17.13; 18.58

- Every individual's actions will have an influence on the society, similarly the customs / traditions of the society also greatly influence the individuals

Evil practices

- Unfortunately, because of ignorance and misleading information there are several wrong and evil practices continuing in our society. One of them is the **sacrifice of innocent animals** during rituals or festivals
- Some people hurt or injure themselves to 'please' God, e.g. walking barefoot on burning coal, burning camphor on the palm of hand, climbing steps on knees,...
- Gita clearly states that such acts are of 'Tāmasic' nature (arising from ignorance)

मूढग्राहेणात्मनो यत्पीडया क्रियते तपः ।
परस्योत्सादनार्थं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥

Gita Ch 17 ver 19

Penance (tapasya) which is performed out of foolish / deluded notions (under the influence of false / obscure theories), by **causing pain to oneself** or meant to **destroy / harm others**, is declared to be Tāmasic (quality / mode of ignorance).

Also refer verses 17.5-6; 18.25; 18.27

What should sacrifice constitute?

- If possible we should **sacrifice** the following (instead of torturing and killing innocent animals or hurting ourselves)
 - **Ego, Arrogance, Jealousy, Hatred, Anger and Vengeance**
 - **Desires** for materialistic pleasures which include not only **lust** but also **wealth, power / position and fame**
 - **Social barriers** and the **discrimination** created and deeply rooted in our mind based on **religion, caste, race, skin color, appearance, nation, region, language, affiliations, profession, financial status,..** (God is present in every living being as Paramātmā)
 - The **reward** or **fruit of our work / actions** (as described in Gita)

Evil practices - Sati

- There were/are few more evil practices e.g. **Sati**, **Dowry**,..
- Sati was an old custom (practiced until 19th century) where a widow immolates herself (either willingly or forcibly) in her husband's funeral pyre (or commits suicide by another method)
- Most probably, one woman could have jumped into the funeral fire because of love towards her husband, another woman might have jumped because of no support / means of survival after her husband
- Eventually this could have become a practice (most often forcibly) either to get rid of a 'burden' or to eliminate a heir to the ancestral property or to prevent remarriage of the widow,...
- A lot of innocent girls and women lost their lives because of this inhumane, brutal practice that continued for quite some time

Evil practices - Dowry

- Dowry is another practice responsible for the torture and deaths (either suicides or murders) of many women
- The practice started with affluent families giving wealth (property, gold, money, house-hold items) to the groom's families along with their daughters during weddings. Very soon this became a practice and every groom's family started demanding for dowry
- Wedding ceremony is also a huge financial burden for the bride's family (belonging to middle-class and poor class)
- Dowry along with increasing costs of wedding ceremony are among the major factors responsible for female foeticide and infanticide
- Scriptures state that 'God dwells in those houses where women are truly happy and respected'

Evil practices - Dowry

- If women in a family/society are unhappy, abused and humiliated, then there will be no peace or prosperity in that family / society
- It is the responsibility of everyone in the society to get rid of the dowry system (just as the practice of 'sati' has been eradicated)
- Every **new trend** is set by a **few role models / leaders**. Even if some people would stop the culture of giving or taking dowry, eventually everyone else would follow
- In addition, both the families (of bride and groom) should **equally share the cost of wedding ceremony**

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 21

Whatever a great / noble person does or practices (however he/she conducts or behaves), common people also do / emulate the same. Whatever standards he/she sets or implements (in their life), the world will follow / pursue the same

Caste system

- It is very unfortunate that the caste system has created deep divisions in our society and this has caused a lot of damage to our culture and values
- It is very clearly stated in scriptures that an individual's **caste** is determined by his/her **qualities**, **actions** and **profession** and **not** just by mere birth in a particular family or community. Refer Gita chapters **14**, **17** and **18**
- Accordingly, the four castes of the society have been described

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परन्तप ।
कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 41

O scorcher of foes (Arjuna)! The duties / activities of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are clearly divided according to the qualities born of their own natures. Also refer verses 4.13; 14.5; **18.40-46**

Caste system

शमो दमस्तपः शौचं क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च ।
ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 42

Control of the mind and senses (calmness), performing austerities*, purity of body and thoughts, patience / tolerance, forgiveness, honesty and also propagation of knowledge, wisdom and faith in God (for the welfare of the world) are the duties of **Brahmanas**, born of their own nature (intrinsic to their nature). *refer 17.14 - 16

शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।
दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 43

Bravery, radiance / exuberance, determination / steadfastness, capability / dexterity, fearlessness (not retreating) in battle, generosity and good leadership are the duties of **Kshatriyas**, born of their own nature (based on their own natural inclinations)

कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।
परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 44

Agriculture (production), cattle rearing / protection, and commerce / trade / business are the duties of **Vaishyas**, inherent to their nature; and performing services to others are the duties of **Shudras**, born of their own nature

Caste system

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 46

From Whom all beings (living & non-living) originate and by Whom the entire universe is pervaded, by **worshipping Him (God) through the performance of one's own duties (with utmost dedication), a person attains (spiritual) perfection**

- Every person has the three qualities of nature (satva-rajas-tamas) in various proportions
- Each and every attribute of a person is because of the dominance of one quality over others (in varying ratios), refer Gita verses 14.10-13
- However, **these ratios are not rigid / static but dynamic** i.e., they are subject to continuous change because of **external** and/or **internal influences**

Caste system

- **NOTE:** If there is a **change** in a person's **nature / qualities and work / profession, then his/her caste will also change**. There are two excellent examples for the same - **Vishwamitra** and **Valmiki**
- Vishwamitra (Kaushika) was initially a king / Kshatriya. Because of his rivalry with Vashishta, he renounces his royal lineage, performs penance (tapasya) for thousands of years and becomes a Brahmarishi
- According to the legend, Valmiki (son of sage Pracheta) was lost in the forest at a very young age and was raised (as Ratnakara) by a hunter. Ratnakara was trained to be a hunter and later, to meet his family needs, he started robbing. After his encounter and discussion with Nārada, he did penance for thousands of years and became a Maharishi
- **Vishwamitra** is a very good example of **determination, perseverance** and the story of **Valmiki** is an example of **good / noble influence**

Caste system

- There have been several fights, riots and wars over religion, race, caste,.. However, it is very important to **note** the following
- Prahlād was tortured by his own father - Hiranyakashyapa
- Sita was separated from Rama (and faced difficulties) because of the people of Ayodhya
- Devaki and Vasudev (Krishna's parents) were imprisoned and tortured by Kamsa (Devaki's cousin brother)
- Most of the problems for Pandavas were caused by their cousin brothers (Kauravas)
- Similarly, **several problems** which **many people** are facing today are **caused by** their **own family members / community**

Good and Bad Influences

- The first and foremost aspect of 'Dharma' is **good conduct** in life/society irrespective of one's educational, financial or social status
- Rāvan had studied Vedas, performed Yagnas, however his actions /conduct was evil (to Devatas, Sita, Vibhishan,..). Based on **actions**, a person is said to be **good** or **evil** (Gita chapter **16**)
- It is important to stay away not only from sinful activities but also from **bad / evil people** (e.g. Shakuni, Manthara) as it will finally lead to the destruction of even the good people (e.g. Karna)
- Some times even good people help or support the evil actions of others (or evil practices in the society)
- Bhishma, Drona, Karna are considered to be good personally, but had their own reasons to support Duryodhana during the war

Good and Bad Influences

- We should never support or help the 'adharm' (unrighteous activities) what ever the reason or justification may be, as the consequences will always be very bad
- No obligation / justification is greater / superior than Dharma. Bhishma realizes the same at the end and teaches '**Rāja Dharma**' to Yudhishtira (Mahabharath series*: episode 94)
- While the influence of bad people will destroy one's life, it is also true that the **influence of a good / noble person will uplift one's life**, e.g. Valmiki who was raised as a hunter and later became a robber (as per the legend) turned into a great sage (Maharishi) after listening to the advice of Nārada

*Mahabharath TV series produced by B.R.Chopra in late 80s

Good and Bad Influences

- **God** may not appear directly, but He **advises** us in the form of subtle thoughts (conscience) or through a **well-wisher**
- Rāvan is known as a great devotee of Lord Shiva. So Hanuman (incarnation of Lord Shiva), advises Rāvan to return Sita to Rama
- Few of his well-wishers (Vibhishan, Mandodari,..) also repeatedly plead the same. But Rāvan does not care about any of their requests (Ramayan series* episodes 49, 46, **71**, 74)
- However, most of the Rāvan's family (sons, brothers), support him based either on their strength & power (e.g. Indrajit), or love towards Rāvan (Kumbhakarn) or out of fear of Rāvan (ministers, military commanders, soldiers)
- During the war, all of his sons and brothers (except Vibhishan) died first, and Rāvan had to perform funeral rites for them

***Ramayan TV series produced by Ramanand Sagar in late 80s**

Good and Bad Influences

- In Mahabharata, although Dhritharashtra was **not** a great devotee, **Lord Krishna** advises, requests and pleads him to do justice to Pandavas (Mahabharath series episode 65)
- Few other well-wishers (Bhishma, Vidur,..) also repeatedly plead the same. However, Dhritharashtra, out of affection towards his sons and also the throne, did not listen to any of the advices
- Whatever wrong / evil actions have been carried out by Duryodhana (and his team), Dhritharashtra always supported them by never opposing or restraining them
- Finally, during the war, all of his sons died and Dhritharashtra couldn't even perform the final rites

Good and Bad Influences

- When some one (even a close family member) does not listen to good advice (even after repeated attempts), it may be better to leave them (only to uphold Dharma / righteousness)
- When Rāvan abducted Sita and brought Her to Lanka, Vibhishan could foresee the impending catastrophic consequences to both the family and the country. He tried very hard to explain / convince Rāvan to return Sita (to Rama)
- After being kicked out by Rāvan, Vibhishan (following his mother's advice) joins the side of Lord Rama and provides strategic help during the battle against Rāvan. This might appear as if he betrayed his family and country (Lanka)
- But actually, Vibhishan did his best (to fulfill his responsibilities / duties) to protect his family, country and also uphold 'dharma'.
Hence, Vibhishan was not touched by any sin

Good and Bad Influences

- Lord Rama anoints Vibhishan as the King of Lanka and asks him to serve the people and guide them to the path of truth and righteousness
- As per the famous dictum '**Dharmo rakshati rakshitah**' - one who protects / upholds 'Dharma' under all circumstances, will be protected by Dharma (God)

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 66

Abandoning / giving up all duties, take refuge in Me alone (completely surrender to Me). I will liberate you from all sins, do not grieve / worry. Also refer verses 4.10; 7.1; 7.14; 7.19; 7.29; 9.32; 15.4; 18.56; 18.62

Why people commit sins?

- When Arjuna asks about the reasons for people committing sins, Sri Krishna replies as follows

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।
महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ Gita Ch 3 ver 37

Arising from Rajo-guna (quality of rajas), it is the **desire** and it is the anger (arises when desire is not fulfilled). Realize this **desire to be insatiable, extremely sinful and the enemy here on earth**. (Desire induces one to commit sin against their conscience)

धूमेनाव्रियते वह्निर्यथादर्शो मलेन च ।
यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम् ॥ Gita Ch 3 ver 38

Just as fire is covered by smoke, a mirror is covered by dust, and as the embryo / fetus is covered by membrane (amnion), similarly, **knowledge / wisdom is covered by DESIRE**.

Also refer verses 2.33; 3.16; 3.39; 16.4; 16.7-18; 16.21

- Human beings are pulled down and deeply rooted in the world of illusion by desires. The **more we try to satisfy desires, the stronger they become**

Why people commit sins?

इन्द्रियाणि मनो बुद्धिरस्याधिष्ठानमुच्यते ।
एतैर्विमोहयत्येष ज्ञानमावृत्य देहिनम् ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 40

The organs (of senses & action), mind and intellect are said to be the seats (residing places) of DESIRE. Through them, desire covers (obscures) the knowledge / wisdom of the individual and causes delusion

- **Desires** manifest as (Mostly, people crave for)
 - Sexual pleasure / Lust
 - Wealth (materialistic luxuries / pleasures)
 - Power / Position
 - **Fame / Recognition**
- Worldly desires are not satiated by their fulfillment, our attempts to fulfill a desire will give rise to more desires, leading to restlessness, anxiety, fear, frustration and anger

Why people commit sins?

- Sri Krishna states in Gita that there are **three doors to Hell**

त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥ Gita Ch 16 ver 21

These three types of doors to hell - **desire**, **anger** and **greed** lead to the destruction of the individual (and downfall of the Soul). Therefore, one must leave these three

- Scriptures describe six eternal enemies of humans - **desire** (kāṁ), **anger/hatred** (krodh), **greed** (lobh), **delusion** (moh), **arrogance** (madh) and **envy / jealousy** (mātsarya)
- While desire, greed increase slowly like a **flood**, anger usually manifests as a **tsunami** and delusions are like **quick sand**
- When 'desires or urges' grow out of proportion breaking the controls of conscience and limits of society, it becomes a perversion ('Vikriti')

Self-control

- Though freedom from desires leads to ultimate peace and happiness, but humans suddenly cannot get rid of all the desires
- Then how can one control the senses, mind and intellect from evil inclinations?
- Fortunately, scriptures teach how to live righteously while controlling our desires, anger, greed, envy, ego, without becoming slaves to them and finally attain freedom from all of them
- The methods of self-discipline include **Tapasya** (austerities / penance), **Yagna** (sacrifice / selfless service), **Charity** (donations), **Meditation, Yoga, obtaining Spiritual Knowledge**
- **Controlling the senses & mind: Gita Verses:** 2.41; 2.45; 2.53; 2.57-59; **2.61-65**; 2.67-71; **3.6-7**; 3.34; 3.41-43; 4.21; 4.26-27; 4.39; **5.20-28**; 6.4-8; **6.10-26**; **6.35-36**; 8.5-14; 9.14; 12.2-4; 12.8-9; 12.13-19; 13.7-11/8-12; 15.3-5; **16.1-3**; **17.14-16**; 18.33; 18.36-37; 18.49; 18.51-54; **18.57**

Yagna, Daan and Tapasya

यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।
यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥

Gita Ch 18 ver 5

Acts of Yagna (sacrifice), donation and austerity (tapasya) should not be abandoned / given up; they must be performed. Indeed, **sacrifices, donations and austerities are purifiers of the wise / noble people**. Also refer verses 4.30-32; 17.23-27

एतान्यपि तु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलानि च ।
कर्तव्यानीति मे पार्थ निश्चितं मतमुत्तमम् ॥

Gita Ch 18 ver 6

But even these activities (sacrifices, donations & austerities) must be **performed as duty (wholeheartedly)**, without any attachment and expectation of fruits / rewards. O Pārtha! This is My **decisive and best opinion**

- It is clearly stated in Gita that **Gnana Yagna** - sacrifice performed through **knowledge** (studying / obtaining knowledge and **spreading** it to others for the welfare of the world) is **better** than the sacrifice **performed with material objects**. Refer Gita verses: 4.10, 4.28, **4.33**, 9.15, **18.68-71**

Tapasya / Penance / Austerities

- Tapasya or Penance is generally viewed as renunciation of family / worldly life, going to a secluded place (forests, mountains) and meditating upon God for a long time
- However, Gita shows us an alternative which could be practiced by everyone without leaving family
- It consists of austerities for the body, speech and mind

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।
ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥

Gita Ch 17 ver 14

Worship of God, the twice-born (self-realized / enlightened saints), teachers and the wise; cleanliness (purity), simplicity, honesty, chastity and nonviolence are said to be the **austerities (tapasya) of the body**

Tapasya / Penance / Austerities

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।
स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥

Gita Ch 17 ver 15

Speaking words that do not cause agitation / mental anguish / distress to others (not offensive / abusive), which are truthful, pleasant and beneficial, as well as the practice of studying scriptures are said to be the **austerities (tapasya) of speech**

मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।
भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते ॥

Gita Ch 17 ver 16

Cheerfulness of mind (satisfaction with what one has), gentleness (kindheartedness), silence (not thinking of worldly matters), self-control and purification of inner feelings / intentions / thoughts - these are said to be the **austerities (tapasya) of the mind**

Donation

दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे ।
देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् ॥

Gita Ch 17 ver 20

A donation / charity which is given with a sense of duty (wholeheartedly), without expecting anything in return, at the right time and place (appropriate to the circumstances), and to a deserving person is considered to be in the nature of Sātvika (pure; mode of goodness). Also refer verses 17.21-22

Meditation

- Meditation is a great way to control thoughts, focus our mind, **eliminate negative feelings, control anger** and reduce stress
- It helps in calming the mind and to **focus on the purpose of our life** amid all the agitation and sorrow of the world
- **Contemplating** on **ethics** and **virtues** (as described in **Ramayana** such as upholding righteousness / Dharma, honesty, dedication to duties, devotion, self-restraint, non-violence, forgiveness, valor..) helps in **purifying our intellect, mind and senses**
- It also helps in opening the inner eye (strengthening our conscience), expanding our spiritual awareness, bringing deep peace and steadiness to the mind and body
- Bhagavad Gita has a chapter (#6) on meditation and self-control

Yoga

- In the beginning, Yoga constitutes only physical exercises and breathing exercises (Prāṇayama)
- However, Yoga as described in scriptures has a much higher purpose
- Life is full of **dualities** - happiness and sorrow; success and failure; profit and loss; honor and humiliation. These are **unavoidable** and **seasonal**, i.e., they come and go just like the seasons

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।

आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥ Gita Ch 2 ver 14

O Kaunteya (Arjuna), the **experiences of happiness and sorrow (the dualities of life)** are indeed caused by the sense perceptions i.e., contacts of the senses with their respective objects. These **experiences are transient, which come and go like the continuously changing seasons of cold and hot temperatures.** O Bhārata! **Tolerate / bear them patiently.** Also refer verses: 2.15; **2.38**; 2.45; 4.22; 5.3; 5.20; 5.22; **6.7**; 7.27-28; 12.13; **12.18-19**; **14.24-25**; 15.5

Yoga

- **Unaffected by the dualities of life, one should always strive to perform his / her prescribed duties (responsibilities) with utmost dedication & courage (always striving for perfection at work)**

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ Gita Ch 2 ver 48

O Dhananjaya (Arjuna)! Established in the science of yoga*, perform your duties, giving up attachments and be even-minded (equipoised / unperturbed) in both success and failure. Such equanimity (evenness of mind) is called Yoga. Also refer verses 2.50-51

***following the principles of Karma Yoga, Gnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga**

- There are different methods and types of Yoga which are very helpful to control our senses and mind, so that we are not disturbed by the continuous changes around us
- Another most important purpose is to **get rid of attachments**

Attachments

- The defect in Karma / work is not in the action itself but in **attachment** i.e., expectation of the fruit / reward
- What are attachments? how are they caused and how can we avoid these ?
- Attachment is a state of bondage (of the mind) to a specific **work, result, person, community, any living being, object, event, issue, arrangement** at home (family), work place, society
- Attachments are caused because our **perceptions, actions** and **responses** are controlled by our **likes, dislikes** and **fear**
- Attachments to **work** are caused when we
 - **Expect (like / desire)** a particular outcome / result
 - **Hate** a particular outcome
 - are **afraid** of another outcome

Attachments

- Similarly, **attachments** arise towards **situations, arrangements, events, issues** at home / family, work place, country, world based on our **expectations / desires, attraction, hatred and fear**
- Gita describes how attachments lead to destruction of a person

ध्यायतो विषयान्पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।
सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ Gita Ch 2 ver 62

A person **contemplating on worldly matters, issues (related to family, work and society) or objects of the senses, develops attachment** to them; from attachment, desire is born; and desire (when unfulfilled) gives rise to anger

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥ Gita Ch 2 ver 63

From anger comes obsession, clouding of judgement and delusion, which result in loss / disorder of the memory and confusion. Failure of memory (and a state of confused mind) leads to the destruction of intellect (reasoning power, conscience, wisdom) which culminates in the complete ruin (of the person)

Attachments

- Attachment to the rewards or fruits of work / actions is the cause of rebirth. A physical body is required to enjoy them
- How to **avoid** or **give up** attachments
 - Renounce the fruits (rewards) of the work / actions
 - Perform duties as a service / offering to God (for the welfare of society)
 - Have faith in God and keep trying / working
 - Have / lead a simple life
 - get rid of materialistic desires, hatred, anger and most importantly **fear**

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 9

Work must be performed as a sacrifice (selfless and dedicated to God); otherwise, it will cause **bondage in this world**. With that intention **perform your duties** efficiently, O Arjuna, being **free from attachments** (without desiring, fearing or hating the outcome)

Attachments

- If a student works hard, gets good results in the exams, then he would get a good job. **Renunciation of the fruit** doesn't mean that he has to renounce / sacrifice the job offer, instead he/she has to
 - Perform the job / work with enthusiasm and strive for perfection
 - Take good care of his/her family with the earnings
 - **Live a simple life and work for the welfare of the society**
- Work should be performed as an offering / service to God without expecting any reward (including **recognition** or **fame**). This is in fact true sacrifice / renunciation and devotion to God
- Initially, Arjuna also felt that it is better to renounce the kingdom rather than to fight with his own family members. But Sri Krishna advised (Gita) him to perform his natural duty (to **fight for justice**) **selflessly** (as a service to God)

Attachments

- When duties / actions are performed as a sacrifice (for the sake of God), without any desire for the fruits, one is released from the bonds of birth and death and attains immortal bliss

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।

जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥ Gita Ch 2 ver 51

People with spiritual intelligence and wisdom (of Karma-Yoga), verily **renounce the fruits produced by their work**, thereby get **liberated from the bondage / cycle of birth & death** and attain the state / abode which is free from sorrow and all miseries (moksha / nirvana)

श्रेयो हि ज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्ध्यानं विशिष्यते ।

ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम् ॥ Gita Ch 12 ver 12

Indeed, knowledge is better than practice; meditation (on God) is better than knowledge; and **renunciation of the fruits / rewards of works** is better than meditation. Such **renunciation immediately leads to peace / tranquility**. Also refer 18.9; **18.11**

Attachments

- Attachments arise towards **people**, when we **like** / are **attracted** to / are **afraid** of / **hate** / are **angry** with / **expect something** (either **knowingly** or **unknowingly**) from a person, group / community
- The above perceptions are based on their **social status** (religion, caste, race, nationality, lifestyle, affiliation,..), **physical attributes**, profession, power, position, **financial status**, character, capabilities, actions, choices, opinions, which are relative and subject to change
- However, **pure love** is **free from all attachments** as there is no selfish motive or intention or expectation
- If we truly love someone then we should only wish and work for their happiness without expecting anything in return - **not even their recognition** or **gratitude** (please watch Ramayan series episodes **25-27** produced by Ramanand Sagar)

Attachments

- Another major source of attachments is our **weaknesses** (usually begins as a social activity, grows into a habit and then weakness)
- Yudhishtira was a pious, righteous person, however, he had one weakness - playing dice game which led to lot of problems
- **Note:** Attachments have a deep impact in our current life as well as in future lives. Gita clearly states that our thoughts at the time of death will greatly influence our next life / birth (refer **Gita verses: 8.6; 15.7-8**)
- Biologically, attachments consume a lot of memory in our brain
- When we are attached to a particular result, object, person or an issue, we repeatedly contemplate about them (obsessively) and our brain will be filled, predominantly with those memories

Yoga

- Ultimately, only those memories (based on the intensity of attachment) **will persist at the time of death**
- Among the attachments, **fear** and **hatred** are more powerful, followed by materialistic / worldly desires
- The principles / methods of yoga give us the strength to face the dualities of life and also to get rid of attachments and weaknesses
- Scriptures broadly describe Yoga in three forms: **Karma Yoga** (of work), **Gnana Yoga** (of knowledge) and **Bhakti Yoga** (of devotion)
- It doesn't matter which is the best or supreme. We can start with any form of Yoga, try to obtain the knowledge (understand the inner meaning, purpose) of that Yoga and most importantly, implement it in our daily life

Yoga

Verses from Gita

- **Karma Yoga:** 2.38-40; 2.47-51; 3.4; 3.7-9; 3.14-15; 3.18-22; 3.30-31; 4.19-23; 4.38; 4.41-42; 5.2-7; 5.10-12; 6.1-4; 6.17; 7.28; 8.7; 8.27-28; 9.27-28; 11.55; 12.6; 12.10-12; 16.24; 17.11; 17.23-27; 18.5-6; 18.9-14; 18.23; 18.26; 18.45-46; 18.56-57; 18.68-69
- **Gnana Yoga:** 2.46; 4.23; 4.33-39; 4.42; 5.16-29; 6.8-9; 6.21-23; 6.27-32; 6.46-47; 7.1-3; 7.14; 7.16-19; 7.24-30; 9.15; 13.7-11/8-12; 13.18/19; 13.24/25; 15.15; 16.24; 18.18; 18.20; 18.30; 18.50-58; 18.68-73
- **Bhakti Yoga:** 6.31; 6.47; 7.17; 7.28; 8.14; 8.22; 9.13-14; 9.22; 9.26; 9.29; 9.32-34; 10.8; 10.10-11; 11.54; 12.2; 12.8-9; 12.13-20; 14.26; 15.19; 18.54-55; 18.65; 18.68-69
- If we could attain perfection in any one form of Yoga then automatically, we would have attained perfection in the remaining two forms also
- The ultimate purpose / goal of these three forms of Yoga is the same - to attain liberation from the cycles (bondage) of birth and death

Yoga

- We have a very good example in Ramayana to understand the Karma Yoga, Gnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga - **Bharath**
- Although he was offered the kingdom, he rejected and requested his brother Rama to come back. But on Rama's request he had to rule the kingdom for 14 years
- He performed his duties (administration of the kingdom) as a '**service**' to Lord Rama
- Even after 14 years of work, he didn't develop any desire / interest for the throne / kingdom (or expect any position for himself). He only wished to serve his brother eternally
- Similarly, we should perform our duties (selflessly) as a service to God without expecting any reward or fruit of the work

Yoga

- Scriptures also have methods to gauge our progress in Yoga. Diligence and perseverance are extremely important to attain perfection in any kind of Yoga

ज्ञानविज्ञानतृप्तात्मा कूटस्थो विजितेन्द्रियः ।

युक्त इत्युच्यते योगी समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ॥

Gita Ch 6 ver 8

A person who is satisfied with knowledge and wisdom (obtained by experience / realization), who is unperturbed (by the worldly pleasures / problems), whose senses & action organs are completely under control and to whom a **lump of earth, a stone and gold are the same**, is said to be a **Yogi steadfast in self/God-realization** (surrendered his mind to God). Also refer verses 2.53; 2.55-59; 2.64-65; 5.18-21; 6.7-9; 6.32; 12.13-19; 14.22-25; 18.54

- Prahlād, Ambarish, Janak, Vibhishan, Bharath... are all examples of great Yogis who did not renounce their family life, fulfilled all their duties and also are great devotees of the Lord (and finally attained Him)

Nature-Yagna-Karma Yoga

- Gita provides a very clear interrelation between Nature, Yagna, Karma (duties), Yoga and welfare of the society

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः ।
यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥
कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम् ।
तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 14-15

All living beings are born from food (existence of all living beings is dependent on food) and food is produced from rain. Rain ensues from Yagna / sacrifice and **Yagna originates from (and also accomplished by) the performance of prescribed duties** (selflessly as a service to God)

Know that the prescribed duties / actions originated from the Vedas; and Vedas came from the Imperishable (Supreme God). Therefore, the all-pervading Brahman (God) is always present in the Yagna (acts of sacrifice; selfless service). Also refer verses 3.10-12; 4.24-33; 9.16

Nature-Yagna-Karma Yoga

- The verses (3.14-15) describe the significance of Yagna for our survival and highlight the following two requirements
 - Activities of the **Yagnas** should be **performed whole heartedly** with utmost dedication (as described in scriptures) only for the **welfare of the society** (Note: **Gnana Yagna** is better than Dravya Yagna)
 - **Fulfilling our responsibilities** (towards family, professional work, society and nature) as a **sacrifice** (Yagna) / service to God
- Sanātana dharma holds everyone and everything together - unifies the society and integrates humanity with nature and God - leading to material prosperity and spiritual realization
- Conquering nature and using it to satisfy our materialistic desires should not be the goal of society, instead society should try to protect our environment and conserve natural resources

Nature-Yagna-Karma Yoga

- We could serve nature by volunteering and/or donating for
 - Protection / conservation of forests (**Reforestation**) and water bodies (ponds, lakes, rivers)
 - Protection of wild life (from abuse & poaching), taking care of sick, injured, stray and old animals
- **Everyone can serve nature by**
 - **NOT wasting natural resources** - food, water, energy (fuel & electricity), paper (trees) and Time !!
 - Reducing pollution via **segregating and recycling waste materials** - paper, plastic, glass, metal (old machines, devices), and converting bio-degradable waste into compost
 - **Educating others** about the importance and methods of environment protection; **planting trees** in their localities

Taking bath in rivers

- Taking bath in rivers especially during 'Kumbh mela' (in north India), 'Pushkaram' (in south India) is one of the most common practices (as it is considered very auspicious)
- Millions of people take bath in rivers causing lot of pollution which also disturbs the ecology of the water bodies (because of construction and lot of commercial activities along the banks of the rivers without proper foresight, planning and precautions for protecting the river ecology)
- Already rivers and water bodies are being polluted because of rapid and unplanned / poorly planned urbanization and industrialization (dumping sewage and effluents)
- In this regard, there is a very popular and interesting story about **Lord Ganesh**

Taking bath in rivers

- Once Lord Shiva conducts a competition asking His sons, Ganesh and Karthik to have bath in all the rivers of the world. Whoever completes the task and returns first will be anointed as the Lord of obstacles (Vignadhipathi)
- While Karthik goes to have bath in all the rivers, Ganesh just worships His parents (Shiva and Parvathi) because of which Karthik sees Ganesh finishing the bath and returning from each river that He visits



Taking bath in rivers

- The most important message of the story is that **taking good care of our parents (is more auspicious) gives us more merit ('Punya') than obtained by taking bath in all the rivers**
- In this regard, couples should not argue about the superiority of their parents (have mutual respect for both parents & in-laws)
- It is important to note that Rama and Sita worshipped their parents and in-laws with equal love, affection and respect. Please watch Ramayan episodes 26, **27** produced by Ramanand Sagar
- As per the scriptures, Goddess (mother Durga / Lakshmi,...) is the manifestation of nature. Any **effort** (should be **wholehearted with utmost dedication**) to **protect environment** and **conserve natural resources** is the **best way of worshipping Goddess**

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- In Sanātana Dharma, specific duties have been recommended for each individual based on their age, gender, profession & situation
- A person's dharma (primary duty) is to take care of his/her family and **serve (protect the interests of) the country / society**
- Family includes parents (& in-laws), grand parents, spouse, children, siblings, followed by close relatives like uncles, aunts, cousins..
- In order to take care of the family, we have to earn money and hence, have to do some work. We choose a profession / work based on our interests, capability and availability
- However, we have to be extremely careful that our **professional work upholds 'dharma'** i.e., **our work should not be detrimental to the society, country and our planet**

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- **Country / Planet** should be regarded as **Lord Rama** and its **wealth** (including **natural resources**) is equivalent to mother **Sita**
- Lot of the **basic necessities of our life** are provided by nature and society. Hence, it is also our **responsibility to contribute something back** to the **nature** and society / country
- Be **compassionate towards others (humans & all living beings)**
- We may choose to serve humanity by
 - Providing basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter to orphan children, homeless elderly people and the poor
 - Providing education and healthcare for the needy
 - Protecting children, women, elderly, poor and destitute from neglect and all kinds of abuse

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- Since we may not have the time and resources to contribute in all the areas, we could select one or two areas and serve accordingly
- Scriptures clearly describe the Dharma / duties for individuals (specific) and also for the entire human society (common)
- Society's Dharma - to protect and take care of disadvantaged, underprivileged (poor, destitute) and vulnerable sections

लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः ।
छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥

Gita Ch 5 ver 25

Sages (noble people) whose sins / impurities have waned away (who are purified), whose doubts are resolved (by knowledge), who are self-controlled (senses and mind are controlled and focused on God) and **who are dedicated to the welfare of all beings** attain liberation by uniting with Brahman / God. Also refer verse: 3.20; 3.25; 6.32; **12.4**

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- Main goal of life is to perform duties (fulfill responsibilities towards family, professional work and society - humanity and nature) as a **Yagna / sacrifice - service to God**
- However, we may face a **conflict of interest** while performing our duties (**principles vs family vs profession vs country**) e.g. Vibhishan, Bharath, Sita and Rama (during their separation), Arjuna, Bhishma, Drona, Karna..
- During such circumstances, scriptures recommend to **uphold Dharma** (**righteousness - ethics, values**) for the **greater good of the society** for which we may have to **make personal sacrifices**
- Especially, the **characters and events of Ramayana and Mahabharata will guide us in facing the challenges / dilemmas in our lives**

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- Our actions would have an influence on the society and also future generations, hence the ethics / values that we live by and the choices that we make are extremely important
- Several noble people have sacrificed their comforts, wealth, happiness and even their lives for the welfare of the society and to uphold righteousness in the society / world

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।
लोकसंग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥

Gita Ch 3 ver 20

In fact, through work (performance of prescribed duties without attachments) alone, King Janaka and others* achieved perfection (enlightenment and finally liberation). Also, even with a **view of the welfare of the world** (to educate, guide the mankind / to serve as an example), you should **perform your work / duties (selflessly)**

*Prahlad, Ambarish, Janak, Vibhishan were Kings, but **remained unattached to the materialistic pleasures and performed their duties as a service to God**

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- Adherence to Dharma (righteousness - ethics, values) gives a sense of **dignity, direction** and **purpose** to every individual
- Scriptures recommend to **worship God regularly** and remember God during work which would give us the **strength and wisdom** to take the right decisions and uphold Dharma at all times
- It doesn't mean that we have to chant God's name during work. For e.g. it is not possible for a surgeon or an air-traffic controller to chant God's name during their work
- However, we could pray to God before starting the work and then perform our duties with **enthusiasm, utmost concentration** and **dedication** (realizing that our work itself is a service to God)
- The process of **praying God before work** need not be elaborate – it should be **simple, quick and effective**

Another simple alternative

- Chanting **Vishnu Sahasranāma** (1000 names) is considered to be very auspicious. When Parvathi asked Lord Shiva - how devotees can chant the Sahasranāma with out fail, and if there is any **alternative and easy** method that would include the power of all these thousand names, Shiva replied that **chanting Rama's name with devotion is equivalent to reciting the 1000 names of Vishnu**

**Srīrāma rāma rāmēti ramē rāmē manōramē
sahasranāmatattulyaṁ rāmanāma varānanē**

Om sri SitāRāmāya namaha !

- Valmiki became a Maharishi (from a hunter & robber) by chanting 'Rama'. Chanting 'Sita' purifies our mind & thoughts
- Sita and Rama have sacrificed their personal happiness to uphold Dharma and for the welfare of the society

Dharma - duties / responsibilities

- We should always **strive for perfection at work**, while carrying out our prescribed duties. The **enthusiasm, dedication and perfection at work** is itself a **worship to God**
- A **wholehearted and sincere effort** (in fulfilling our responsibilities) **protects** us from **great dangers** - “Dharmo rakshati rakshitaha”
- Another important note: There is no need to doubt this path. A person who doubts does not attain peace or success. Refer Gita verse 4.40

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।
स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥

Gita Ch 2 ver 40

In this endeavor (path of Karma-Yoga / selfless work performed as a service to God), there is **no loss (wastage) of effort, nor any adverse results / consequences** (due to failures in implementation / completion). Even a **little practice** of this dharma (righteous law / work ethic) **protects one from great fears / dangers**

Offerings to God

- There is a practice of offering gold jewellery, crowns studded with precious stones to the Deities of the temples
- Few temples have also been coated / plated with gold
- In this regard, there is an interesting story about pleasing God with gold, known as **Sri Krishna tulābhāram**
- Once in Dwaraka, Satyabhama attempts to trade Sri Krishna (from Narada) with gold (equal to His weight). Even after placing all the gold and precious stones that she possesses in the weighing pan, the other pan with Krishna did not move an inch
- She then requests Rukmini to rescue Sri Krishna. Rukmini places a twig of Tulasi on the pan and to everyone's surprise it weighs more than Krishna

Offerings to God

- In this regard, it is very important to note Sri Krishna's explicit statement about offerings to Him

पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।
तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥

Gita Ch 9 ver 26

Whoever offers Me with devotion, a leaf, flower, fruit or water, I accept that offering made with devotion by the pure hearted, striving person (earnest devotee trying to attain God)

- It is also important to note that Gold mining is detrimental to the local environment (loss of forests and/or water bodies also affecting the wild life) and the extraction process of gold from the ore consumes a lot of energy and contributes to pollution
- Moreover, import of gold would depreciate the value of currency of the nation

Offerings to God

- Offerings to God should be made with utmost love, devotion, without any feeling of possessiveness (show of wealth) and neither for the sake of recognition (fame / popularity)
- The most important offering is our **heart (mind / 'Manas / Mann')**

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥ Gita Ch 18 ver 65

Fix your mind on Me* (love God unconditionally), be My devotee, worship Me and offer obeisance to Me. **You will certainly come to Me.** I promise this truth to you, as you are dear to Me. (*as Hanuman fixed his mind / heart on Sita-Rama) Refer **9.34; 12.8; 8.7**

- We should have only ONE DESIRE - to attain **unswerving devotion (pure, unconditional, divine love) towards God**. Hanuman, Shabari, Vibhishan, Bhushundi, great devotees have requested **ONLY devotion towards the Lord** (Ramayan series episodes: 34, 43, 47, Uttar-Ramayan episode 7)

Offerings to God

- **Devotion** constitutes Unconditional love, Utmost attention (Shraddha), complete Faith, Respect, Work without expecting any reward, Determination, Discipline, Enthusiasm, **Courage (self-confidence)**, Humility and Gratitude (for what we have)
- Importance of courage and self-confidence in spiritual progress has been emphasized by Swami Vivekananda
- As mentioned earlier, we should perform all of our duties as an offering to God and with an attitude of total **surrender**

यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥

Gita Ch 9 ver 27

O son of Kunti (Arjuna)! **Whatever (work, duties) you do**, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you donate, whatever austerities you practice, do them as an **offering to Me**. Refer verses: **3.30; 12.6; 18.5-6; 18.57**

Surrender to God

- Many people who are frustrated, depressed and pained by the evil in the society, often feel that humans should have been programmed like robots (or trees) to live righteously
- In fact, such a feeling itself is the **clue** to attain God
- As per the scriptures, getting a human birth is difficult, and in a place, family without any problems (health, financial, family, resources, safety, regional / national stability & security) is even more difficult. Refer Gita verses 6.37-45
- Humans are the only living beings with a free will (guided by intellect & conscience) and ability to gain knowledge and wisdom
- We should **surrender ourselves**, i.e., our **free will to God**, program our mind as per the scriptures (Gita, Ramayana) and work like a robot for the welfare of the society (as a service to God)

Surrender to God

- **Fear, hatred** and **desires** are the most powerful attachments which bind the Soul to the physical body
- We have to get rid of these attachments which are the major hurdles in the process of attaining liberation / God
- Along with these internal enemies we also have to face several external challenges. In the present day world, economy is given more importance than environment
- However, in Sanātana Dharma, nature / environment has been given top priority as the existence of life depends on it, refer Gita verses: 3.10-11, 3.14
- Even if economy collapses, it can recover and become even stronger. However, there will be **no recovery if environment collapses**

Surrender to God

- Secondly, there is a **mad rush to earn more money** because of which relations (and values) are deteriorating rapidly
- We work hard to earn wealth with the hope of having a happy future. However, **our future depends on the nature of actions performed to earn that wealth**
- Our job activities (profession) to earn livelihood and take care of our family should not be detrimental to the society and nature
- However, with an ever increasing population there is a lot of competition in all sectors resulting in friction in the relations between people, communities, organizations & countries
- Irrespective of their origin, race or nationality, people can be classified into **3 types** based on their **qualities** (refer Gita chapters 14, 17 & 18) and **2 types** based on their **actions** (refer Gita ch.16)

Surrender to God

- We often have to face **difficult and complicated situations in life** for which there are no easy, black-and-white solutions. We need **courage, strength** and **positive attitude** to practise and **uphold Dharma** (this has been the main focus of Swami Vivekananda's teachings)
- When we worship God regularly with love and devotion, our mind and actions get purified, and solutions to our problems, challenges would then come subtly into our mind
- During worship, we should detach the mind from our daily life (materialistic desires, problems, challenges) and focus on God's advice, especially Gita, Ramayana and Mahabharata
- Reading scriptures will improve our spiritual knowledge, clear doubts, provide emotional stability and solutions to our problems, which shall strengthen our belief / faith and ultimately devotion to God

Surrender to God

- Gita and Ramayana provide a spiritual base and direction to the followers - every person, everywhere and at all times. They also indicate the goal of life and the ways to reach it
- **Every person has a purpose** of their life which gets covered by ignorance, materialistic desires, greed, hatred, anger, fear,...
- Once we **surrender to God** (by getting rid of our materialistic desires, anger, hatred, fear) and start performing our duties as an offering to God (renouncing the fruits of the work), we will understand / slowly **realize the purpose of our existence** (or goal of life), which often emanates **as a subtle and recurrent thought** that gets stronger, powerful and energizes our mind
- We have to try to achieve / fulfill that greater mission while fulfilling our daily / routine activities, which would lead us to liberation

Surrender to God

सर्वकर्माण्यपि सदा कुर्वाणो मद्ब्रपाश्रयः ।
मत्प्रसादादवाप्नोति शाश्वतं पदमव्ययम् ॥

Gita Ch 18 ver 56

Even while continuously performing all the duties / works, one who takes **refuge in Me (completely surrendered to Me)**, by My grace, attains the eternal, imperishable state (abode of God / spiritual liberation). Also refer verses: 4.10; 7.1; 7.14; 7.19; 7.29; 9.32; 15.4; **18.62; 18.66**

- Our purpose / duties depend greatly on the circumstances and sometimes may appear very ordinary (e.g. duty / goal for parents is to take care of their children, family)
- While disregarding what others say or think about us, we should fulfill the duties (according to the stage of our life) towards family, job / profession and society
- And work which is meant for the benefit of the entire society should be performed with **enthusiasm & dedication** in an attitude of worship (sacrifice; selfless service) and offered to God

Surrender to God

- Our work, character & conduct should serve as an inspiration to others / future generations
- We should also spread the message of Gita to family & friends, so that they can also face challenges, solve their problems, lead a righteous life and finally attain liberation (refer verse 18.68)
- One of the best ways to worship God and serve the society is through **Gnana Yagna** (obtain knowledge and spread it to others)
- Gnana Yagna (with spiritual & material knowledge) is even more significant these days to **show the right path / direction** to the people (to work hard, pursue higher / spiritual goals and live righteously in harmony with society and nature)
- Humans make mistakes and commit sins. Greatness lies in realizing our mistakes / sins, admitting them (owning responsibility) and taking corrective measures / actions

God's promise to devotees

- Even if a person is unsuccessful in the spiritual path (gets deviated by the worldly life), he is not destroyed and gets another chance in the next life. He takes birth in a family (without any problems) and re-develops the spiritual inclination. Refer Gita verses 6.37-45
- But if our efforts are sincere, while seeking only **unwavering devotion**, the same shall be obtained by the **Grace of God**, and also all of our duties will be fulfilled, finally leading to liberation

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

Gita Ch 9 ver 22

Without any other thoughts (of materialistic desires, hatred, fear or worries about worldly issues), people who worship Me, and who are always engaged in My service (by fulfilling their prescribed duties without attachments), **I take the responsibility of their welfare and safety / protection**

OM TAT SAT

Alternatives

Activity	Simpler / better alternative
Performance of Yagna (with materials)	Perform Gnana Yagna - obtaining knowledge and spreading it to others for the welfare of the world (Refer Gita verses: 4.10; 4.28; 4.33 ; 9.15; 18.68-71)
Reading Vedas and Upanishads	Reading & implementing the principles of Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana - the BEST WAY of worshipping and expressing our gratitude to Sri Krishna, Lord Shiva and Ganesh*
Sacrificing innocent animals or hurting oneself	Sacrifice ego, materialistic desires , anger, hatred, arrogance, social barriers , rewards of work
Taking bath in all rivers	Taking good care of our parents (story of Lord Ganesh)
Offering gold to Deities in temples	Offer leaves (Tulasi, Bilva), flowers, fruits, water, our work and our heart / mind (with unconditional love and devotion)
Chanting several mantras and Vishnu sahasranama	Just chanting one mantra as advised by Lord Shiva: 'Om sri SitāRāmāya namah'

*It is believed that Lord Ganesh wrote Mahabharata / Gita while being narrated by Vyasa