
UNIT 4 INTRODUCTION TO EPICS, PURANAS AND BHAGAVAT GITA

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *Itihasas* - Epics
- 4.3 Ethical Insights of Epics
- 4.4 Political Thought in Epics
- 4.5 Eighteen *Puranas*
- 4.6 Bhagavat Gita
- 4.7 Idea of God in Gita
- 4.8 Three *Margas* in Gita
- 4.9 Path of *Bhakti* as means to Liberation
- 4.10 Let us Sum up
- 4.11 Key Words
- 4.12 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit attempts to give a general outlook of the popular scriptures of Indian tradition namely the epics, *puranas* and the Gita. The popularity of them is due to their narrative style with illustrations, mythological stories and dialogical forms. They do contain high philosophical notions, but given in a popular language. Emotional attachment and devotion towards personal deities and God are the general outcome of this sort of literature.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Sanskrit tradition, scriptures are divided into two types: Revealed Texts (*Sruti* – *what is heard*) and Remembered Texts (*Smrti* – *what is remembered*). The four Vedas and 108 Upanishads come under the *Sruti* category and *Bhagavat Gita*, 18 *Puranas*, *Sastras*, *Tantras*, *Agamas* and many others, come under *Smrti* category. *Smrti* literally means recollection or memory. It is a secondary authority; it derives its authority from *sruti*. Its object is to expand and exemplify the principles of *sruti* or the Vedas. The *smrti* consist of Gita, *Brahma Sutra*, *Itihasas* (epics), *Puranas* (chronicles and legends), *Sastras* (codes of law), *Agamas* and *Tantras* (manuals of worship). The distinction between *sruti* and *smrti* is important for two following reasons; 1. In case of conflicting views, *Sruti*'s views will hold good. 2. Without requiring any change in the *sruti*, the *smrtis* preserve the authority admitting changes in it.

Agamas

Agamas are that which has been handed down as a tradition. These are the scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God. They prescribe detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper. Each agama consists of four sections. They are philosophy, mental discipline, rules for the construction of temples and images, religious practices. The agamas are divided into

three according to the deity that is worshipped. The Vaisnava *agamas* (also called the *pancaratra* and *vaikhanasa agamas*) for Vishnu, the *Saiva Agamas* for *siva* and the *sakta agamas* (*tantras*) for *sakti*. Each glorifies its particular deity.

Sastras

These are codified laws regulating the society from time to time. The important law givers are: *Manu*, *Yajnavalkya* and *Parasara*. Their codes of law are known as *Sastras*. *Dharmasastra* constitutes another very important source of Indian ethics and philosophy in which detailed rules of conduct and practical moral instructions are given. *Manusmṛiti*: according to Manu by following *dharma* one attains perfection. Manu prescribes duties for all the four stages of life and four different categories of persons in the society. This book of Manu comprises the laws of Manu which has become Aryan laws. Manu is considered to be great law giver in Vedic period. The code of conduct has three divisions; rituals, discharge of social responsibility and atonement for sins. They contain 'prescription and proscription.' They are like constitution and penal code. They emphasize two aspects of life; 'dharmic' and social. The role of ritual is restricted to individual life; household work to be precise. These codes have some rigidity imposed in their interpretation and implementation. Fixation of duties and emphasis upon duties resemble, to great extent, the directive principles enshrined in the constitution. While four-fold division of society is one type, fourfold division of individual life is another. *Smṛiti* is very clear about not only four classes, but also four stages (*brahmacharya*, *garhastya*, *vaanaprastha* and *samnyasa*) in the life of an individual. There is no scope for switching from one position to another in a random manner. This will help us to infer the kind of political system which *smṛiti* supported. Surely, *smṛiti* did not support democratic system, though during *Vedic* age democratic system flourished.

4.2 ITIHASAS - EPICS

Itihasa is epics. The two well-known and popular epics from Sanskrit tradition are the *Ramayana* by Valmiki, and the *Mahabharata* by Vyasa. Though the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are two epics which have influenced literature for several centuries in all parts of India. The *Ramayana* accepts the principles of *Sanatana Dharma* and duties of ruler in particular. The aim of the epics is to drive home to all the laws of the *smṛitis* and the principles of the *śruti* by means of the exploits of their great national heroes – Rama and Krishna. The *Ramayana* is the account of the deeds of a divinely great hero who set an example for the entire human race. It deals with ideal conditions of humanness a sense of brotherhood obedience to moral law firmness of character, honesty, sacrifice and unbounded goodness. *Mahabharata* has a more profound theme which involves history, mythology, ethics and metaphysics. It is the history of Bharadas, a royal family of North Indian which divided into 2 parties, *pandavas* and *Gauravas*, and so the war breaks out between them. It is an encyclopedia of Hindu dharma.

The epics are essentially different from the early Vedic literatures. They arose not among the priestly classes but among traditional bards called *sutas*. These also served as charioteers who witnessed the actual battle-scenes and described them at first-hand in their ballads. They are martial poetry, concerned not with the praise of deities but of kings and nobles, not connected with the details of sacrifices, but with events like wars, and imbued not with higher philosophical motives, but with the practical purpose of gaining some reward from the audience before whom

they were recited. We do not have them in their original and untampered form. They are added to by different hands at different periods. To the nucleus many pieces of the ancient bardic poetry containing legends connected or unconnected with the life of the epic heroes, of sacred poetry dealing with numerous myths and legends of brahmanical origin. And large sections devoted to philosophy and ethics, cosmologies and genealogies in the fashion of *puranas*, legends, fables and parables. These additions indicate the great popularity which this epic has enjoyed at all times. The zealous spirit of compilers to bring together all that could be collected in it.

The three dimensional view of Mahabharata – on mundane plane, the story deals with the realistic account of a fierce war or annihilation with its interest centred on the epic characters. The meaning on the ethical plan views the war as a conflict between the principles of *dharma* and *adharma*, between good and evil, between justice and injustice, in which the contending parties are regarded as incarnations of *devas* and *asuras* and the war ends in the victory of *dharma*. On the ethico-psychological plane, the epic aims at impressing upon the reader, the paramount of moral values. On the transcendental plane, which takes us beyond *dharma* and *adharma*, the war is fought not only in the *kuruksetra* but also in our own minds; this perpetual battle between the higher self and the lower self of man for establishing mastery over the body is symbolized by the fight between the cousins for sovereignty. Here we are face to face with the deep mysteries of life. The self under the guidance of the super self emerges successful in this conflict, after he has destroyed with the sword of knowledge ignorance embodied in his illegitimate desires and passions symbolized by his relatives, teachers, elders and friends ranged on the other side. Individual self, *jivatman* is Arjuna; absolute self is Krishna. Dhrtarastra is a symbol of the vacillating ego-centric self, while his sons ‘symbolize in their aggregate the brood of ego-centric desires and passions. Vidura stands for ‘*buddhi*,’ the one pointed reason, and Bhishma is tradition, the time bound element in human life and society. Though symbolism is not applied to all characters, the metaphysical interpretation leads us to the deeper meaning of the epic. The epic poets, ‘are using every means in their power to expound, illustrate, and popularize, what the philosophy of the self, a lofty philosophy of ethical autonomy, with emphasis on the application of these principles to the problems of daily life.’”

It will serve our purpose if we concentrate on philosophical component of the *Mahabharata*. We can trace two philosophical issues in this work; one is expounded in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, rather in a very unsatisfactory manner, because it is mainly a work in theistic tradition. Second one is morality and polity expounded by two prominent characters; Vidura and Bhishma. But these philosophical issues in this work suffer from a serious drawback – draw back from philosophical point of view. Nowhere in this work do we find discussion, or criticism which is the hallmark of philosophy. More than anything else, what we find is only a sermon.

4.3 ETHICAL INSIGHTS OF EPICS

From the point of view of ethics, it is desirable to regard some characters as personification of virtue. *Vidura* and *Bhishma* belong to this category. In contrast to these characters in the *Mahabharata*, we have other characters which are regarded as personification of evil. Why should any epic portray evil characters? This is one question. Are they in a broader perspective, really evil forces? This is another question. The second question is much deeper philosophically and cannot be answered easily. First one is slightly easier to handle. An epic must be vast.

Hence it ought to include all facts of world and all aspects of life. So evil characters ought to find place in any epic worth the name.

Vidura's exposition of moral principles begins with a clear distinction between *shreyas* (desirable) and *preyas* (pleasing). He compares *shreyas* with medicine which is not palatable. It is immediately followed by a second analogy to demonstrate the status of pleasure which is invariably accompanied by evil. To make this concomitant relation explicit, *Vidura* compares pleasure with honey, pleasure seeker with one who collects honey and evil with abyss and says that the pleasure hunter is busy only in seeking honey unmindful of impending danger of falling into the abyss. In the *Mahabharata*, *Vidura* plays his role on three occasions. On second occasion, *Vidura* plays the role of a counselor. His counseling has moral base. He makes an explicit distinction between two states of mind; those of wise man and ignorant. While Plato speaks of four cardinal virtues, *Vidura* speaks of six cardinal vices. Greed is one among them. He makes out a case for wise man by listing the remaining vices - lust, anger, irrational attachment, arrogance and jealousy – which he does not possess. There is no need to describe the personality of one who is free from these vices. *Dharma* according to *Vidura* consists in everyman doing his own duty and this is the cardinal principle of welfare state. *Vidura* talks of death and the need to accept the same. Death and fear are nearly inseparable if man does not accept that death is inevitable. In this context *Vidura* accepts reality, i.e., human nature and maintains that man hardly follows wisdom.

4.4 POLITICAL THOUGHT IN EPICS

Bhisma's advice to *Dharmaraya*, specifies only the duties and responsibilities of ruler with no mention of the duties of citizen. Against this backdrop, it becomes obvious that in real sense, citizen is the king and ruler is his guardian. *Bhisma's* lecture not only explicitly mentions king's qualities and duties but also it is first ever treatise on public administration. King should be proactive, truthful and straightforward. According to *Bhisma*, these are the most important qualities of king. He should be compassionate but not too soft. The essence of '*rajadharma*' is safe-guarding the interests of citizens. In fact, *Bhisma* lists thirty-six qualities in an ideal king which are necessary to follow *rajadharma* without which the citizens do not receive protection from the king. Foreign policy is another aspect of public administration. Foreign policy involves two forces, enemies and friends. The role of friends is not much highlighted. But he emphasizes that king should know how to deal with enemy. Prudence is always the guiding force. *Bhisma* makes it very clear that war is not the solution. Nor did he mean that enemy can be spared. Constant vigil, concealing one's own weakness and proper judgment only can ensure safety and security. All these descriptions apply under normal circumstances, whereas in distress even enemy should enjoy compassion because a humanitarian treatment may destroy enmity. Ultimately, humane outlook scores over other considerations.

4.5 EIGHTEEN PURANAS

Purana is a 'story of the old days' and is more than a 'myth.' It is a record of stories of antiquity. Having no parallel in western literatures, these are meant for the celebration of religion, the glorification of saints and kings, and the edification of readers, whose faith is to be strengthened. They are prolix, flowery, repetitive, derivative from earlier models, with a good deal of

borrowing, and conflation and lacking even the slender thread of history. Although we cannot date *puranas* by its character of repeating the stories of the old days, one can trace their composition from 300 CE to 1000 CE. They speak of ascendancy of this or that main god in the evolving pantheon, they tend to dedicate to that god, around whom the old stories are retold.

Puranas is devotional material from the bhakti tradition; the stories about the gods who are the objects of people's loyalty, and practices of various kinds appropriate to the worship of those gods. These consist of chronicles and legends and genealogy of kings. They are treatises of history, of cosmology, with various symbolical illustrations of philosophical principles and so forth. According to tradition there are 18 puranas. These are the scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God. They prescribe detailed courses of discipline of the worshipper. Each agama consists of four sections. They are philosophy, mental discipline, rules for the construction of temples and images, religious practices. The agamas are divided into three according to the deity that is worshipped. The Vaisnava agamas (also called the *pancaratra* and *vaikhanasa agamas*) for Vishnu, the Saiva Agamas for *siva* and the *sakta agamas* (*tantras*) for Sakti. Each glorifies its particular deity. People's response to their gods is in terms of religious practices of bhakti, prayers, ceremonial hymns, gifts given to Brahmins and gods, vows to service, *sraddhas* or ritual practices and *tirtahas*.

The doctrine of avatar (divine incarnation) is fully developed in the epics and the puranas. The purpose of an *avatar* is; 1. for protection of the virtuous, 2. for destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of *dharmā* (moral order). According to the puranas there 10 avatars of visnu. *Matsya* –fish, *Kurma* –tortoise, *Varaha* – boar, *Narasimha* – the man-lion, *Vamana* – dwarf, *Parasurama* –Rama with the axe, *Ramacandra* – hero of the Ramayana, *Krisna* – the god of *Bhagavad gita*, *Balarama* – Warrior Rama, *Kalki* - the hero on a white horse who is to come at the end of the *kali-yuga*.

The gods are stratified, for there appear both vedic and post vedic deities together. Of the vedic gods, *indra*, *agni*, *soma*, *vayu* and *surya* reappear in puranic lore, but they are no longer central, as they were to vedic ritual and some of their functions have changed. It is as if they have been demoted in favour of the famous Hindu 'triad' of Brahma, the creator, Visnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer, who dominate puranic literature. Each of the three has a goddess as consort; Brahma's wife is Sarasvati, patroness of music and learning; Visnu's wife is Laksmi, goddess of fortune, sometimes beneficent and sometimes not; and Siva's wife is Parvati, daughter of the Himalaya mountain. Notable exception is found in Devimahatmya, section of the *Markandeya purana*, in which the ferocious Durga and the black Kali created spouseless out of the combined energy of the gods, become manifest to do combat with demons. Though other minor deities appear, the three major gods play an important role. The divine population includes a host of supernatural beings, like *pitrs*, dead ancestors, *gandharvas*, *apsarases*, *devas*, *asuras*, *raksasas*.

They are the instruments of popular education. Dharma or social duty reflects the same Hindu law codes basically Brahminical, and is given in illustrative stories, and in lecture form. The *puranas*, "...afford us far greater insight into all aspects of phases of Hinduism – its mythology, its idol-worship, its theism and pantheism, its love of God, its philosophy and its superstitions, its festivals and ceremonies, and its ethics, than any other works."(M. A. Mehendale, "The Purans," in *History and Culture*, vol.3. *the Classical Age*, 1954, p.296.)

'Purana' word has two slightly differing etymological meanings; *pura* (past), *ateetam* (Lost), *anaagatam* (about to happen) – is one meaning. *pura* (past), *bhavam* (happened) is another. In terms of structure *purana* consists of five components. They are; Description of nation or nations and their history, History of creation, History of re-creation, Description of dynasties, Story of each *Manu* (*Manvantara*) First and fourth components do incorporate elements of history. However, there is a vital difference between history and mythology. History follows a certain method and therefore, at some point to time or the other, it is possible to dispute what a historian claims, because history tries to gather as many evidences (not facts) as possible. *Puranas*, however, are altogether different. The relevance of evidences is totally alien to puranas. It is, therefore, impossible to refute what *puranas* claim. Nor can we defend the same. In addition to five components mentioned earlier, many *puranas* deal with cosmology. Perhaps this is the only topic common to philosophy and *puranas*. Interestingly, one *purana*, viz., *vayu-purana* attempts at geography, music, etc. Apart from the neglect of evidence, *puranas* suffer from one more defect. All *puranas* combine legends related to gods and demons, life after death, etc. which disqualify mythology from becoming worthy of serious philosophical study. In defence of *puranas*, it can be said that though *puranas* are related to mainly theological issues, they include almost all activities of life and hence they ought to occupy an important position in the list of disciplines. But this all inclusiveness itself is a serious defect.

4.6 BHAGAVAT GITA

In Sanskrit tradition there are many *gita* literature. One that got popularity as it is attributed to Krishna and formed part of the famous Mahabharata, is *Bhagavat Gita*. The term '*bhagavad*' means Lord, *gita* means song, and so the meaning of *Bhagavat gita* is literally, 'Song of the Lord.' This is the literature written in poetic form that must have been compiled around 200 BCE. In the battle of *kurusetra* Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to do his duty, good or evil without any attachment for the fruit of actions (*niskama karma*). *Gita* is short beautifully harmonizes the philosophy of action, devotion and knowledge. Three *gunas* *satva* (principle of light), *rajas* (source of activity), *tamas* (responsible to resist the actions) are explained well. There are two possible approaches to the *Gita*. One is regarding it as a sacred text in conformity with tradition; second, regarding it as a philosophical text. The first alternative is irrelevant to us. The second one is disappointing, because we cannot find much philosophy in it. Whatever little philosophy that can be traced in the *Gita* is of minor importance only. Generally, we expect consistency in any philosophical argument. But this is totally alien to the *Gita*. If so, what is the position of the *Gita* within the framework of philosophy and what are its virtues, if it has any?

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

Bhakti. It shows that religion receives precedence over philosophy. This becomes a stumbling block in studying the Gita from a philosophical perspective.

4.7 IDEA OF GOD IN GITA

In Gita, God is more personal. He is identified with *Krishnavatara*. He is named as *purusothama*. *Purusothama* means one who is a supreme being and intelligent with the mystical mind. He becomes a ground for mutable and immutable aspects of the universe that is he is *purusothama* in whom the whole world is grounded. Everything works by his divine intelligence and he is the creator of everything he is the ultimate cause principle of everything and has power of everything. And so, he is both transcendent and immanent. Wherever *dharma* is on decline the supreme being *purusothama* embodies himself to protect the upright and to punish the wicked and to establish *dharma*. Though he is unborn and imperishable lord of beings, yet comes into the world in his own images to maintain *dharma* in the universe. (*Gita* 4:6). Verse 14:27 says, "I am he upholder of immortal and imperishable. Brahman of absolute bliss" *Purusothama* is an embodiment of karma (actions). He is ceaselessly busy in maintaining the cosmic model. *Avidhya* should be overcome by the right knowledge. So we should unite our will and intelligence with God without expecting any fruits of our actions. Thus, he becomes the object of faith and devotion, source of mercy and love. (*Gita* 9:31).

The concept of *avatar* is prevalent even from the time of Vedas. Upanishads speak of *amsavatara* (partial manifestation of God or *avatar* is full conscious descent of god, yet into phenomenal world accepting the conditions of becoming. Wherever *dharma* is on decline the Supreme Being *Purusothama* embodies himself to protect the upright and to punish the wicked and to establish *dharma*. 7:24. Though he is unborn and imperishable lord of beings. Yet comes into the world in his own images to maintain *Dharma* in the universe 4:6. Thus, we find in Gita, God is of love and grace who evokes faith, love and devotion.

4.8 THREE MARGAS IN GITA

Karma, *jnana*, *bhakti* are three paths proposed as spiritual disciplines by Gita for the betterment of one's wealth. Karma Yoga: according to Gita every individual is expected to be *karma-yogin* ethically and intellectually virtuous. A karma yogi is the one in whom there is an absence of pride, conceit, vanity, egoism and presence of forgiveness, sincerity, purity, steadfastness, self control, renunciation, strong devotion to the Lord, reverence to the master and love for the scriptures. So if one does his duty, by his very duty, he becomes *karma-yogin* (*niskama karma*). Jnana Yoga: one should be *jnana yogi* also. *Jnana* of Brahman or *purusothama* refers to his wisdom and so for the *jnana-yogin* this *jnana* is an essential quality for his liberation. Bhakti Yoga: It insists on devotion. In this devotion a devotee should be a sincere and continuous seeker of truth. And so, he should try to get the *jnana* about the supreme being by loving the sacred scriptures. One of the means to do so is *saranagathi* which means total self-surrender of oneself to God.

One point becomes clear from the Gita; no one can attain *moksha* if he or she renounces this world. Renouncing the world is tantamount to renouncing obligations. Hence in defence of the Gita one assertion can be unhesitatingly made, that the Gita does not prioritize spirituality at the

expense of worldly life. However, neither the charge that it does so, nor the countercharge that it does not, is philosophically insignificant. But this point is mentioned because attainment of *moksha* in relation to *karma* has primary importance in the Gita.

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

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

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

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

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

4.9 PATH OF BHAKTI AS MEANS TO LIBERATION

The term *bhakti* is defined as "devotion," or passionate love for the Divine. *Moksha*, or liberation from rebirth was not in the following of rules, regulations or societal ordering but it was through simple devotion to the Divine. Within the movement at large, useful distinctions have been made by contemporary scholars between those poet-saints who composed verses extolling God *with* attributes or form, namely, "*saguna*" bhaktas, and, those extolling God without and beyond all attributes or form, "*nirguna*." While the differences between these two branches are indeed

important, their overarching similarities cannot be minimized; both focused on singular devotion, mystical love for God, and had a particular focus on a personal relationship with the Divine.

A clearer expression of Bhakti began to be formed during the Epic and the Puranic periods. Texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata Purana clearly explore Bhakti Yoga or the Path of Devotion as a means to salvation. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna preached the message of devotion to a personal God. Bhakti (love of God) not only leads the religious man to liberation, for this is a grace God is willing to bestow on all who seek to know him and love him, but is the goal itself, uniting man to God in eternal and dependent state of being. The God of Bhakti is gracious to men and has compassion for all. He is specially benevolent to those who love Him. His devotees are dear to Him. It is thus man's loving response to this divine graciousness on which he acknowledges himself utterly dependent for his salvation.

Bhakti is a very important topic found in the scriptures and with various shades of meanings in different contexts. The word bhakti is used in the scriptures in two different meanings. Bhakti means devotion towards God. Devotion is love directed towards a higher principle. Reverential love can be defined as devotion. We talk about *matr bhakti* and *pitr bhakti*. In our tradition, we look upon the parents as of worship. Similarly, we talk about *guru bhakti*, *desa bhakti* and *isvara bhakti*. Therefore, in general, bhakti is love towards a higher principle, especially love towards God. Three forms of love are 'means- love, end-love and self-love. Scriptures point out that all forms of love that a human being entertains are directed towards only three things. The first one is love of goal, wanting to achieve some end. Secondly, it is because we love them that we want to acquire them. Since the means are useful to accomplish the ends, we love the means also. The third object of love is oneself. Everyone loves himself or herself. The scriptures point out that there is a gradation in the intensity of these three forms of love. Love of the means is the least in its intensity. Love of the end is medium and love of oneself is the highest form of love, wherein the love has got the highest intensity. Most of the time love for people is purely the love for the means to accomplish the end. And often money is the end. Therefore the love for the end is superior to the love for the means. I love various ends hoping that they will give me comfort, security, happiness. It is for my benefit, my comfort, my security, my happiness, I love various ends.

Three grades of devotion

Scriptures point out that the intensity of love depends upon how you look upon God, because different people see God in different ways. The way you look upon God will determine the intensity of love. Majority of people look upon God only as the means for various worldly ends. As long as you look upon God as a means, that love is called *mandabhakti* (inferior devotion). The next set of people is still rare. They don't look upon God as means for various ends. They are mature enough. Their understanding of God is clearer. They are able to choose God as the end of life. The end of life means the goal of life. They know God represents security. God represents peace. God represents happiness. They know that everyone is seeking security, peace and happiness alone. Naturally their love of God is as the end and therefore it is more intense than the previous one. Therefore, this bhakti is *madhyama bhakti*. *Uttama bhakti* is third and rarest form of love which is the most intense form of love. It is a love in which I look upon God neither as the means nor even as the end. The lord and the self being identical, God-love is equal to self-love. Since self-love is the most intense love, that form of love is called *uttama bhakti*.

For *manda bhakti* god is dear. For *madhyama bhakti* god is dearer and for the *uttama bhakta* god is the dearest. Krishna beautifully elaborates this in the seventh and the twelfth chapters of the Gita. There are nine forms of bhakti. First three are, *manda*, *madhyama* and *uttama bhakti*, where in bhakti is the love of God. The next three are: *kara rupa*, *upasana rupa* and *jnana rupa bhakti*, wherein bhakti means spiritual discipline. The last three are *eka*, *aneka* and *arupa bhakti*, depending upon our understanding of God.

4.10 LET US SUM UP

Generally, Philosophy is meant by ‘searching for’ ‘finding out,’ inquiry into’ what is truth or reality. Search for meaning has been a human activity from time immemorial, when first human beings started questioning. The possible explanations and the conclusions of their quest for truth, become philosophical thoughts. From the primitive to contemporary human being, this quest for truth is continuous. Time and again, Human society checks with its conclusions and definitions of reality, in the time of contemporary issues and questions. When encountered with irrelevant answers from the previous conceptions, they try for new answers for the new questions or even for the same old questions. In our present endeavour, we understand that the thoughts of the people of that time are ancient. As the quest for truth is an on going process, we consider the thoughts of people at the ancient times are not totally ‘antiquated.’ If they deserve only to be beautiful antiques, they would lose the significance and relevance to us today. The philosophical quest and the conclusions of the ancient times are ever fresh in our contemporary period too. They are ancient but never antiquated, out dated. ‘Ancient’ also brings to our mind, the concept of history. We fix the period in the past and look into what went on in that period in the minds of our ancestors. In India, we do not have strict linear understanding of history. Indian history is most shaped by circular notion of history. It is more of *kairological* than chronological. Therefore, we take care of thoughts being recorded in oral or written form. Often, something is considered to be philosophical, only when they are presented in a written form. In India, more than the written forms, ideologies are recorded in various other means of communication, such as oral transmission, art, architectures, dance, songs cultural customs and traditions.

The *puranas*, *itihasas* and *gita* emphasize on the necessity of ethics and advocates deep contemplation on moral virtues and self-control. It deals with cosmic & moral order maintaining peace, harmony and order in society and cosmos. In them, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics are intricately interrelated that it is very difficult to understand any of them in isolation. It is cosmic and spiritualistic, synthetic and integral. A clearer expression of Bhakti began to be formed during the Epic and the Puranic periods. Texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata Purana clearly explore Bhakti Yoga or the Path of Devotion as a means to salvation.

4.11 KEY WORDS

Puranas : Ancient legends or histories of heroes and gods.

Bhakti : Devotion or love towards Personal God.

Nishkama karma : Doing action without any attachment to the fruits of them.

4.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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