

DHARMA AND SWADHARMA

Dharma

The word '***Dharma***' is used by Hindus in many ways .It is used to denote duty. It is used in the context of the practices of Hindus in both temporal and transcendental contexts. Loosely the word ***Dharma*** used by Hindus is referred as religion by westerners equating it with their own ~~practice of using~~ context of religion and ~~for their~~ faith. Religion is easily defined for it means faith, may be in a person, or book or sayings of a Prophet, or sayings of leaders in the tribe and is followed through ~~by~~ generations. But ***Dharma*** has no equal or equivalent word in any language as has been accepted by several western thinkers including Max Muller. In fact ***Dharma*** goes far beyond faith. Whatever scriptures (Vedas, Upanishads), Puranas, and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata are opened, we immediately find the word ***Dharma*** mentioned at each step. The Bhagavad-Gita, which is part of Mahabharata and the quintessence of the teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna in Particular and to humanity in general, is ***Dharma*** with all its ramifications though it is taken as teachings of various ways of attiring the God. The Mahabharata epic is about the war between Pandavas and Kauravas. But the war was called ***Dharma Yudda*** and the place where it was fought was called ***Dharmakshetra***. It is resplendent with stories to stress different aspects of ***Dharma***. In this war, Lord Krishna personally took the side of Pandavas saying that they are fighting for ***Dharma*** even though both the Pandavas and Kauravas were related to Him. He contributed his mighty army called Narayana-sena to Kauravas which fought against Pandavas while He was a non-fighting supporter of Pandavas. He clearly stated in Bhagvad Gita that He is an avatar of the God and had descended only to re-establish ***Dharma***. Not stopping at that, He said that He would descend to set matters right whenever ***Dharma*** was at stake. The eldest of Pandava brothers, Yudhishtira is popularly known as ***Dharmaraja*** - to mean that he stands for ***Dharma*** or is the king of ***Dharma***. In his entire life, with all the struggles and adversity, he unswervingly upheld ***Dharma*** in all its facets. Duryodhana, his cousin and his mortal enemy with whom Pandavas fought, had implicit faith and respect in ***Dharmaraja***.

The Sanskrit word "***Dharma***", having no equivalent word in any language, should be understood from the root from which it was derived. ***Dharma*** comes from the root "Dhar" which means among several things, support, hold, sustain, and solid foundation upon which a superstructure is built. Thus *Sanatana Dharma* or *Vedic Dharma (Hindu Dharma)* is that which holds, governs and regulates the temporal and transcendental life of human beings.

The basic aspiration of a group of human beings when they come together, be it in the form of a family, be it a tribe or clan, is order and a leader. Usually order is designed by the group in the form of general rules to be followed by the group, written or implicitly understood, a code of conduct, again written or understood implicitly. The leader is expected to provide security, besides the responsibility of enforcing the rules and code of conduct. Even in primitive societies, we find the order and leader. By creation of an arrangement of having a leader and a

set of rules, the group has divested most of the worries and can find peace and happiness. The one thing every human being wants is HAPPINESS. Initially this happiness is sought only for the period of life time (from birth to death) because the idea that there is a different concept of life is beyond comprehension of human beings even in this age. But the ancient Indian thought was totally and radically different. The systematic logic had drawn them to the conclusion that life is not what is perceived (the span between birth and death physically) but has to be transcendental. This conclusion has far reaching consequences. First let us analyze the way they had come to this conclusion. The human being is not identical in any respect with any other human being. Some are born as males while some are born as females. There must be something that worked to have all these differences between human beings. The ancient Indian wisdom identified this agent as *Karma* (action) which is the result of action by individual for, they noticed that for every act of the human being some result was experienced; to get food some effort is needed. Some might kill to get food, some might snatch from somebody, somebody may steal and somebody may toil. In order to get food so many different approaches are seen. Logically they are responsible for the food. However, the human being that used a particular technique will have a particular response. For example, if food is acquired by stealing, then the person involved is called a thief and the act itself is termed as crime from the stand point of the society to which the person belongs. So, for differences among human beings, this *karma* is responsible. Then the differences at birth of individual human beings must be concluded to be the result of *karma*. Obviously, for a new born baby there was no chance to be involved in any action and so this must be result of *karma* performed earlier. How do we explain the extermination of Jews during the Nazi regime? How do you explain the massacre of Ukrainians in the communist regime? How do we explain the cattle slaughtered every day for food? Why should there be such killings of people in Africa? The individuals who died as human beings were not responsible for any crime. The cattle were not responsible for any crime to attract punishment of slaughter for food? Therefore, there was a past birth from which the accumulated *karma* followed with the birth of a child and hence the differences. Similarly it has to be inferred that the past *Karma* made these people to die in the Nazi camps and Ukraine; the cattle that is slaughtered every day are getting the fruits of their past births. Going a little further in this argument, we can see that the past-birth of a human being need not necessarily be human. Thus life has to be transcendental, and there is something common among all the organisms. It is, therefore, the totality of organism has to be taken care of. Any system that intends to set order has to take into consideration the human beings along with the entire organism. Thus -

Principle #1: That every species in the Universe has a right to exist and flourish.

This principle is the very first part of the Universal *Dharma*. How does it justify being called *Dharma*? The ancient Indian intellectuals have thought, with justification that as the human society looks for order for its safety and happiness, so the entire Universe consisting of moving and static organism has to be thought of a single entity for the purpose of setting order. Just as the human beings respect the civil laws which insist upon individual's rights and responsibilities,

the universal society must be given the same privilege. This principle is eternal and it is not confined to a particular region or time and so it is acceptable universally. When we accept this principle, for there is no way to do otherwise as it would mean questioning the right to live, we begin to respect every human being to start with and automatically we begin to respect every organism, thereby inadvertently conserve the nature along with the moving and static organisms. The moving organisms constitute the human beings, animals, mammals, birds and all types of life that moves while the static comprises of trees, mountains, rivers and oceans.

Principle #2: The basic elements viz., Ether, Air, Water, Fire and Earth are essential for existence of any kind of life.

The one objection for this principle is that there could be life in some other planets or galaxies, where these may not necessarily need for the life. This objection is not negation of the principle or the content of the principle but the area of application. Today the human knowledge for the existence of life does not go beyond these elements. But, we can think of including all such elements needed for life should it become necessary. The Vedas therefore make it clear that all elements are necessary but these five elements are absolutely needed for life on this planet. This is a blanket rule and does not need wanting to either include or exclude any elements. The abuse of these elements in any form leads to disaster for life in general and life on this planet in particular. Obviously, we have a responsibility to preserve and replenish or recycle wherever possible. This law is also eternal and is applicable universally. This is the second pillar for *Dharma*.

Principle#3: All organisms have something common-life. This is nothing but the part of the universal life called Brahman and understood as God. The word used for this common life is “*Chaitanya*” or consciousness. Consequently it is death-less.

This principle made the individual God-like. Some intellectuals call this *amsa* of God, some others call it *atma*. Whatever name it is called by, one thing is certain that this *chaitanya* in every individual organism is responsible for it to be called living and in the absence of it, the individual is termed as dead (Physically). The *chaitanya*, at the time of physical death leaves the body, perhaps to enter another body if it has some *karma*, or joins the main universal *chaitanya* or *Brahman*.

Principle#4: That all species go through the cycles of birth and death but every organism has a right to be liberated from the cycle of births and deaths.

This principle has profound and far reaching effects. Every individual *chaitanya*, when it is not different from the universal *chaitanya* or Brahman, must have got separated from universal *chaitanya* at some stage or the other. This principle simply states that these individual *chaitanyas* have to go back to the universal *chaitanya*. However, it is not possible for all the organisms except the human beings to chart out the path for liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

In other words, every organism has to take human birth before it can be liberated and merge with Brahman. The human birth is therefore, said to be superior to any of the other beings.

As a corollary it can be stated that every organism will take human birth before it is liberated. There is another reason to say that the human birth is superior. There are designated demi-Gods such as Gandharva, Kinnara, Kimpurusha, Siddha, Saadhya etc., and Yaksha, Rakshasa, Naga who are different from humans. It is possible that for some good *karma* human beings may go to deva loka, the abode of demi-Gods to enjoy the fruits of their good *karma*. They are all known as kamarupas., which means that they can assume the body of any being at will. These also do not have a way to merge with Brahman directly; they have to take birth as human beings and then only try to merge with Brahman. Thus the human body is pivotal for attaining the supreme position of merger with Brahman and so it is taken as superior.

In Puranas, there are some legends where individuals of other species have said to have merged with Brahman such as snake, elephant and an insect in one and elephant and crocodile in the other are found. In these cases, they all were born in those species because of some curse or residual *karma*. The animal and the insect species have no knowledge of worship or prayer and they do not possess the capacity to think of Brahman.

These four principles are the four pillars of eternal ***Dharma*** which means that they are not bound by the limitation of the time. . The word ***Dharma*** has so much to do in terms of holding and sustaining. What all the Vedas give is not merely the principles, but the methods to sustain, hold and practice. These are called the ***Dharma*** propounded; explained and discussed in the Srutis (those which are to be heard) which are Vedas and their Upanishads.

The human beings who followed ***Dharma*** are the righteous and those who break any one of the principles of ***Dharma*** are called unrighteous. Obviously the righteous and unrighteous exist only in human beings. In all the ages there is a conflict between the righteous and the unrighteous and it is ultimately the righteous who win because the society cannot exist without order. In the Bhagavad-Gita the Lord said that He would take an avatar whenever there is a danger for ***Dharma*** in order to help the righteous and punish the unrighteous. In Kritayuga the ***Dharma*** was followed by all in all aspects, in Tretayuga, it was followed to 75 percent, in Dwaparayuga it was followed to the extent of 50 percent and in Kaliyuga the ***Dharma*** gets trampled and only 25 percent of ***Dharma*** is followed. The Original Sruti has lost so much that what remains is only a fraction of the original. It was Maharishi Vedavyas who edited the Vedas at the end of the Dwaparayuga but as Kaliyuga dawned the unrighteous gained over the righteous and so they have little need of the Vedas. Since all the degradation takes place only among human beings the avatar of the Brahman has to descend to set things right in human beings and bring ***Dharma*** to its former glory. Jagadguru Sankara made a remarkable effort to make the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagavad-Gita available to all in this Kaliyuga by writing excellent commentaries to arrest the tendency to ignore the eternal ***Dharma***. However, the human societies have to understand what is at stake if the eternal ***Dharma*** is ignored. The world,

not just Hindus should understand that the eternal ***Dharma*** is not only Hindus but to all the mankind. Already we see the change in environment because of the disregard for eternal ***Dharma***.

The Vedas, being the essence of the experiences of the intellectuals called Rishis in their mental vision during their meditations should be understood in their spirit and meaning by all those who are interested and eligible. For example the *Gayatri Mantra* which comes in Rig, Yajur and Samavedas is the most sought after mantra. This Mantra was visualized and experienced by the Brahmishi Viswamitra in all its splendor and has been preserved from ages and is given to the dwijas (twice born) at the time of Upanayana (investing of sacred thread). Since they are eternal, there is a chance of distortion over a period of time because of usages in language geographically or in the language itself. In order to protect this knowledge, the Vedangas were created so that Vedas do not lose either the spirit or meaning. The Vedangas are:

- 1 .Siksha : deals with phonetics
2. Vyakarana : Grammar for Vedas
3. Chandas : Vedic meter
4. Nirukta : Etymology
5. Jyothisha : Astrology and astronomy, and
6. Kalpa : Procedure for Vedic rituals.

These six vedangas, meaning the limbs of the Veda correctly specify every letter of Vedic Mantras without a chance for distortion.

. The four principles of eternal ***Dharma*** support the entire life (transcendental) of a human being. They do not just remain as axioms but they sustain the humanity through the procedures to implement in totality. These are done in several steps. The Rig-Veda is a compendium of Mantras on various aspects of the Brahman by designating them by the word God. Lord Vishnu, who is all pervading, sustains the entire body of organisms. The word Vishnu etymologically means one that is all pervading. Lord Brahma is responsible for creation. Lord Siva is responsible for laya(the word laya is ordinarily used for destruction but it is destruction of life cycles to be able to merge with the ultimate). Lakshmi is designated for all types of wealth, Saraswati for all types of knowledge and Parvati for the Energy. It is significant to notice that the three consorts are unified with their husbands in inseparable ways- Lakshmi on Vishnu's chest, Saraswati on Brahma's tongue and Parvati as left half of Siva. Similarly the pantheon of demi-Gods has each a portfolio, making the entire structure a universal Government. The Supreme Brahman took several forms to administer his own authority

The Rig Veda is the collection of Mantras invoking different Gods as they appeared to different Rishis. This is the part of infrastructure for implementation of the principles. The basic elements-Ether, Air, Water, Fire and Earth are needed and so the Mantras of Rig Veda are invocation of the specific authority headed by a demi-God for help. In other words it is propitiating the authority, not out of fear but treating with courtesy. The Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda is an example of the lofty ideas put in a condensed form. Because of its brevity and also of its symbolic nature people tend to misread and try criticizing the *Dharma*. Those who want to criticize should first understand the text along its complete meaning; besides they should also go through the relevant collateral literature. The word sukta means a good saying.. There are several suktas in Rig Veda meant to be used in different occasions. Mantras are those which are expected to be repeated again and again. By repetition, the person responsible for repetition gets the capacity to send waves of influence to the particular agency. This could be easily verified by any interested to verify. It is common knowledge that repeated approaches to the authority for day to day matters in the human life get favorable results.

The Yajur Veda is the knowledge of procedures to be adopted for homa, yagna and other rituals associated with Vedic Mantras. The homa and yagna rituals are carried with fire occupying important place where different materials such as sandalwood, rice, nuts and ghee are offered in the fire with the accompaniment of suitable Vedic mantras.. The effect, it could be observed on the environment is tremendous. The waste and toxic vapors released into the atmosphere get dissolved in the gas released from the homa. Of course! The industrial waste releasing carbon monoxide in such great quantities could only be dissolved by homa of a great magnitude. As per the original practice, every Brahmin has to do homa everyday as a matter of a fundamental duty. The others were expected to participate in community rituals which included homa and yagna.

The Sama Veda is those set of mantras set to Vedic music meter and was sang during the rituals. The music is so soothing that not only the human beings but the animals and birds were attracted.

The Atharvana Veda is mostly useful for the human life, for it contains information regarding medicine and control of evil spirits among others.

So far the four vedas were shown to have laid ground rules for support of life in general and the life of the human beings and life on this planet. As per the principle #4, all the organisms go through the cycle of births and deaths and have a right to merge with the Parabrahman. The fundamental question that arises in this context is "Is there a necessity for individual life to merge with the Parabrahman?" The life of any individual involves 1 .Birth 2 Growth and procreation, 3 .Old age 4.Disease and suffering and 5. Death (leaving the body). All these stages have very little happiness compared to the pain and unhappiness involved at the time of birth, old age and the diseases The cycle of births and deaths indefinitely cause misery in each birth Besides the individual life has to merge with the Universal life at some stage because 1. It

has got separated from it and 2. Fragmented life cannot have any existence without a body since life in any form is one and the same. In fact, when everything is Brahman the individual live being not different from Brahman has to merge with Brahman only. The human being experiences all the above 5 stages during the life span and would be glad not to go through these again and again.

From all that has been seen, the only reason the human being is different from others should be to be not like others of the creation but to furrow a different path in life. This path is to find salvation (Moksha) or to be one with universal Brahman.

Thus the duty of every human being is make efforts to merge with Brahman in order to escape the misery of cycles of birth and death and reach a state of bliss.

It was already mentioned earlier that the cycle of birth and death is due to the *karma* of an individual. In other organisms other than humans independent action is not possible. Therefore they have to go through that life as ordained. Even in the case of human beings, the human birth is ordained as Prarabdha *Karma* and one has to live the life. However, the human beings have a choice of living the life like the other organisms or to promote him/her to a superior position, the superior position being merging with the Brahman. Logically the human being cannot attain merger with the Brahman unless the balance of *Karma* gets reduced to zero. Here we have to know that merger with the Brahman may not be immediately possible in this life, but a beginning can be made to try reducing the *Karma* and hope to reach the goal after some births for, life is transcendental.

Karma has a peculiarity. The activity of a human being may be righteous or unrighteous .Both the *Karma* (Righteous and unrighteous) have to be experienced by the individual in the normal course. It is possible to annihilate *Karma* completely when we KNOW. What does this Know Means? Great Rishies and Gurus have been trying their best to make the masses KNOW. Some people interpret it as knowing Veda while some others interpret as knowing the Brahman. Once Veda is completely understood and followed, we know the Brahman. Once we know the Brahman, we have understood the Veda. One can approach this Know from either of them.

Knowing Veda implies that one should master it and then implement the principles of Veda or the eternal ***Dharma*** for, eternal ***Dharma*** and Veda means one and the same. To master Veda, one should be a Dwija and then study Veda for a period of at least 12 years at a Guru- Guru is one who is a Brahmagnani and has the first hand information of the Brahman- following the strict regimen prescribed. For others who are not Dwijas, the Guru must be satisfied that the aspirant has that spark of intellect, sincerity purpose and above all truthfulness. This is exemplified by the Upanishad story of Satyakama Jabaala. Whatever may be the way one enters the hermitage, it is an arduous penance for at least 12 years and besides, one must be able to get a Guru.

There is a story to illustrate the penance involved. In one hermitage an aspirant was studying. Along with others he was served food by the wife of the teacher every day. One day, while taking the food, the aspirant turned round to the teacher's wife and said, "mother! you served castor oil in place of ghee, perhaps by mistake". The teacher's wife said "son, to day you completed your study because you noticed what was served to you. All the time you have been here, every day I have been serving only castor oil and you never noticed. During the study the aspirant was not bothered what he was eating and it was nothing but penance.

All these problems show that only a handful can go through this process.

Veda, the eternal **Dharma** cannot be silent at this situation because it has to sustain equality of opportunity for every individual for merging with the Brahman. Therefore, it again said that the KNOW can be understood when one is able to know that the body is not the unperishable and the '*Chaitanya* or Atma' is the unperishable. When the problem continued to be a problem even after this explanation, The Veda said the KNOW means that the aspirant finds himself in everything. He finds satisfaction when a dog's hunger is sated. An example may clearly indicate what the statement means. Once Ramakrishna Paramahansa was suffering and he could not eat. His disciples urged him to cure himself so that he could eat.. The he said "am I not eating through everybody?"

The great sage Vyasa saw deterioration of values everywhere due to several difficulties in knowing the eternal **Dharma**. To name a few: 1.the competent Guru was not available for everybody, 2.People began thinking that happiness means happiness in this life time with material things and 3. A few powerful kings started usurping the basic tenets of **Dharma** for their personal pleasure. The Lord had to take an avatar in Lord Krishna to destroy the evil but to set matters right there was a need for a way to think of Parabrahman and to reach it strictly adhering to the eternal **Dharma** and accessible to everybody without the condition of the eligibility. The Puranas were written by Maharshi Vyasa to meet this need.. Lord Krishna gave Bhagavad-Gita which was again recorded by Maharshi Vyasa in his great Epic Mahabharata.

In the present age, Jagadguru Sankara gave Prasthan Trayi comprising of Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad-Gita through his commentaries making the eternal **Dharma** available for everybody indicating different paths to reach the Brahman and catering to the capacity of individual human being without discrimination.

In all the efforts during the above process of making eternal **Dharma** available, only one thing was wanted from the aspirant namely SRADDHA meaning diligence in practicing the **Dharma**. Whether it is Gnana yoga, Karma yoga or Bhakti yoga, results as predicted would be experienced by the aspirant if only the aspirant starts practicing. The most surprising thing is that no alternate method is possible to be devised other than what was said in the Prasthan Trayi despite the efforts of great thinkers and philosophers after Jagadguru Sankara. Since life is transcendental, a beginning made immediately will take the aspirant on the journey and the time

to reach the goal depends on the diligence of the aspirant. It could be in this life also. Whatever may be the time, once the practice starts, the aspirant will notice the effect of his endeavor. When the aspirant matures for the ultimate, a Guru will emerge and guide the aspirant.

The human life is stressed to be important for the purpose of attaining the ultimate goal. The human life is time bound. In order to inculcate discipline during this limited period of time, a set of guide lines or rules are necessary at each stage of the finite life time; and they should be within the framework of the eternal **Dharma**. For this Manvantara, Manu or Vaivaswata Manu gave such guide lines which go by the name “Smriti”. The word Smriti means to remember. Every human being is supposed to remember the smriti or the set of guide lines at every moment of the life. In other words, the guide lines are so framed that one can get direction at each stage of the life. This smriti is time dependent and changes from time to time in the terrestrial time frame. The intellect of the ancient Indian sages (Maharshis and Munis) had thought of integrating the smriti with Sruti so that there does not arise any conflict in the achievement of the final goal on one hand and have a happy, conflict free live as a human on the other. The Manu, who gave smriti had undergone penance to have a deep understanding all the things of the human society before preparing the guide lines for the benefit of all sections of human beings. One point is to be remembered. A person responsible for teaching moral rules and moral values must follow them to the letter because the taught always follow the teacher. Thus a person teaching values of eternal **Dharma** (Sruti or Veda) shall have to be truthful to the **Dharma**. So, the Manu first practices the principles of the Veda before he prepared the guide lines or smriti.

If the human beings are to be organized into a society, the following conditions have to be taken into consideration.

- Every individual of any age group must have a comfortable physical life;
- The basic services must be available to everybody, and
- .There is security for the individual and also to the community as a whole.

Then, the principles on which such an organization is to be built were considered and the wise people found that 1. **Dharma** 2. Artha, 3, Kama and 4. Moksha are the four important guiding principles on which the smriti should be built. By placing **Dharma** as the first principle, they were indicating that everything shall be within the frame work of eternal **Dharma** and with **Dharma** the Artha and Kama were the things on which the human beings would spend their life time and ultimately the **Dharma** alone would take them Moksha. Here Artha does not mean only money but all the things needed for life and Kama means all the desires including sexual desires. The idea was that the human beings shall earn Artha as per the **Dharma** and the Kama shall be regulated again on the **Dharma**. Obviously, what they meant was that life of a human being shall be guided by **Dharma** throughout leading the human being to Moksha thereby fulfilling the purpose for which the human birth was meant to be used. In the absence of **Dharma**, if the human being is left in the pursuit of Artha and Kama only, disaster results;-again the human

being may go into the cycle of births and deaths. The sages were of the opinion that human life should be lived as long as possible in order to pursue **Dharma** but not become slave to Artha and Kama.

Since human nature and behavior differs from individual to individual, all the people in the society are not handling all the affairs. Therefore the human society was viewed to consist of four distinct types of people.

- Those who are intelligent but not good at physical work involving exertion and strength.
- Those who have strength, endurance and are capable of providing leadership and take care of security,
- Those who are capable of creating material wealth in terms of food production and other materials needed for human life. And lastly
- Those who do not have any of the abilities of the above three categories but are good at carrying out the wishes of the leader.

These four divisions were classified as Varnas, the first category being Brahmin, the second Kshatriya, the third Vysya and the last Sudra., which latter on crystalized into castes .further generating other castes.

When it was still probed into the reasons for the behavioral pattern in the human beings, the wise people found that three gunas -Satwa, Rajo and Tamo are responsible. Satwa guna is responsible for compassion, fortitude, empathy and control over anger. Rajo guna is responsible for valor, physical prowess and commanding nature. Tamo guna is responsible for laziness, dullness. Every individual is a mixture of three gunas and the higher proportion of satwamade one a Brahmin, higher proportion of Rajo guna made one a Kshatriya, Rajo guna and Tamo guna together made a Vysya and high proportion of Tamo guna made one a Sudra.

These four divisions of human beings should not be looked or construed as a conspiracy of the smriti giver, Manu. The eternal **Dharma** clearly states that the Pararabdha *Karma* is responsible for the birth of an individual as a human and everybody has equal opportunity to be born as one of the four Varnas and no human could be held responsible for birth in a particular Varna.

These three gunas are said to be prevailing in the creation and they all come from the same Parabrahman. In the pursuit of an aspirant for merger with Parabrahman, it is found necessary that the individual should get rid of Rajo and Tamo gunas completely. So the necessary condition for merger with Parabrahman is that the aspirant is Satwic (Possessor of Satwa guna only).

The Moksha or merger with Parabrahman is possible only when the entire *Karma* of the aspirant becomes zero or KNOW – that the aspirant must realize the existence of the *chaitanya* in all the organisms, the universal *Chaitanya* (Parabrahman) and the *chaitanya* in the self are the same. The great sages of the 20th century, Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda Paramacharya of Kanchi, Sibaba of Shirdi are among those who were the realized souls and about whom we have recorded evidence given by the contemporaries.

There is yet another division among human beings, in fact a very important division that of gender. This division is very significant because two human beings of the opposite sex always come together due to the biological urges. Obviously, any order in the society would be meaningful only when the relationship between the two individuals of opposite sex is properly defined and regulated.

In the animal world we notice 1. That mating takes place only for procreation and 2. That the mother animal takes care of the offspring till it can stand on its own; beyond this point the mother animal and its offspring are total strangers to each other. Only in the case of lions, there seems to be a semblance of family and even in that once the babies grow to maturity, they leave the family.

These behavioral patterns are not totally the same as the animals in the human beings. We observe that in matters of sex, the individuals have unrestricted liberty and in the care of the off springs both the parents take the responsibility, the mother taking more and this responsibility does not cease when the offspring had matured.. There is a third problem peculiar to the human society, that of the old and sick.

Considering the above factors, the smriti had come up with guide lines. For these guide lines one cannot take all the human beings because there are distinct age groups among human beings whose needs and capabilities are distinct. The age groups are 1. Baalya (Childhood) 2. Yavvana (Adult), 3. Kaumara (Mature person) and 4. Vriddh (Old person). Every human being can now be placed in one of the four groups depending on age. Keeping in mind the eternal **Dharma**, Smriti came up with four asramas among human beings for activity depending on the age factor and not forgetting the ultimate goal. The four asramas are: 1. Brahmacharya, 2. Grihasta, 3. Vanaprastha and 4. Sanyasa.

the time when human beings are made to undergo disciplined life at a teacher's place and study the Sruti and Smriti in case of eligible candidates. Those who are not eligible to the study of grihasta asrama has been given an important place in the entire life of a human being. Smriti has now brought out the **SWADHARMA** when it defined the **Dharma** of each asram. It did not stop at that. It went of giving **Dharma** to be followed by each Varna. They are:

1, Brahmin: They should perform yagna , homa and the other rituals prescribed by the sruti and teach and aid the performance of these rituals by the other varnas.

They should devote their life in the study of sruti and smriti and teach the same to the eligible aspirants. They are entitled to receive donation (Dana) and also give donations(Dana)

Brahmins have not been show any way of earning their livelihood, but are permitted to receive donations. For all that is expected of Brahmins in the service of the community, the community is expected to support the Brahmins. However, it was ordained that 1/6 the parts of the fruits of the good *Karma* performed by the Brahmins go automatically to those who support their living and protect them.

2. Kshatriya: They should take the leadership in organization of the safety of the community. Where ever there is *ADharma*, it should be set right by the Kshatriya and they should fight for *Dharma* if necessary. They should perform yagna and homa and the other rituals with the help of Bramins. Give donations(Dana)

The maintenance of the Kshatriyas is through the taxes levied on the community.

.3. Vysya: Produces and distributes the agricultural produce, engage in financial activity, trade and commerce as per the *Dharma*. They should perform yagna,homa and other rituals with the help of Brahmins. Give donations (Dana).

4. Sudra: Engage in activities involving physical labor and earn through the physical work. Engage in rituals with the help of Brahmins. Give donations(Dana)

All these *Dharmas* are the stpulations of smrithi and are bound by the time. Consequently, depending on con.ditions they may be suitably revised but strictly according to the eternal *Dharma* (Sruti).

Individually each person should determine what his *Dharma* is depending on 1.The Varna to which he or she belongs, 2. The asrama of the person, and 3. the time and the problem for which this decision is needed. This decision depends upon smriti subject to the eternal *Dharma*, Sruti. It is always not possible to determine the *Dharma*, but knowingly one should not take an unrighteous decision. Naturally, any deviation from *Dharma* or breaking of one or more rules of *Dharma* would invite penalty if not in this life but in another life.

In Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna proclaimed that abandoning or deviation from *SwaDharma* is heinous. What he meant was that the adherence to swa*Dharma*, even though inconvenient sometimes brings happiness in the long run and the society stands firm on the principles of *Dharma*. On the other hand, if swa*Dharma* is ignored for a temporary benefit or pleasure, it will create ripples in the life and has the cascading effect on the society for, the human life is very limited and it is infinitesimal compared to its transcendental life. What one should really think is that this human life which is a very precious part of the transcendental life

should be used for greater rewards (permanent bliss which is the result of Moksha) than disturbing it for temporary questionable benefit.

As mentioned earlier, the Grihasta Asrama was given great importance compared to the other asramas. One becomes a grihasta or householder after marriage. Therefore the institution of marriage assumes paramount importance in the society. Every society, however primitive it may be has some form of marriage or other because of the biological urge of human beings and for procreation. Manu, the smriti-giver found that this institution of marriage can be exploited to become the main strength of human life. The first step was that he made marriage sacrosanct; by bringing it under the purview of sruti. Marriage as viewed by sruti is for life. The problems of the society such as care of old people, sick people were sought to be solved by the union of two people of opposite sex through a sacred marriage. First and foremost thing was that Manu brought every type of union of two people of opposite sex under marriage. He institutionalized 8 types of union under marriage. They are: 1. Brahmana, 2. Deva, 3. Arsha, 4. Prajapathi, 5. Asura, 6. Gandharva, 7. Rakshasa and 8. Paisachika. Of these marriages, the first four types are considered the best and the four types are accepted by Manu for the purpose of seeing to it that no child is born outside marriage. Widow Remarriage was frowned upon equating it to a type of prostitution. Divorce is something which was not given any place and was totally removed from Manu's dictionary.

Of the 8 types of marriages, the last four, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisachika were considered as marriages because of the conditions prevailed in order to see that no child is born outside wedlock. Gandharva Marriage was agreed to by the smriti only in case of Kshatriya man and woman. The first four types of marriages, Brahma, Deva, Arsha and Prajapati were stipulated by smriti to be consummated between two individuals of same varna. The reason is very obvious. In order to live together as one soul, the important thing to be looked into is the compatibility between the spouses and that is largely possible only between people of the same guna. Marriage is the one institution in the society that was looked upon as a stabilizing factor and not a union of two people for the sake of sex. Any relaxation of marriage rules will lead to adverse effects in the society and also in the transcendental lives of the individuals. Even after making the rules, unfortunate results do occur due to emotional factors of individuals. In some cases marriages consummated between men of higher varna and women of the lower varna take place, making the off- springs of the couple to belong to the lower varna and the marriage itself is called Anuloma. If the marriage consummated between a man of lower varna with a woman of higher varna, then the marriage is called Pratiloma and the off- springs create a new caste. In these two types of union, they are allowed to be called marriages only to see that the children born are brought under the system.

The marriage between Devayani daughter of Guru Sukracharya and Chakravarti Yayati was a pratiloma marriage between a Brahmin woman and a Kshatriya man. This was shown to have taken place due to the curse of Kacha, son of Deva Guru Brihaspati to Devayani when she wanted Kacha to marry her. Kacha said that the marriage between him and Devayani was not

according to *Dharma* because she was the daughter of his Guru and consequently equal to a sister. But the marriage between Devayani and Yayati did not make the children of Devayani succeed the father to the throne, again because of a curse and ultimately, the throne went to the children of Yayati with Sarmishta, a Kshatriya woman and of the same varna as that of Yayati.

The marriage vows for the dwijas were totally subject to the Vedic principles which included a homa, The way the marriage ritual was designed gave and still gives the feeling of sacred and heavenly blessings being bestowed on the man and women involved and also the people who attend. The very mind set of those married and those to be married tuned to the concept that marriage ceremony was a purification ritual.

In case of Sudras, the marriage vows were designed according to Puranic principles as approved by smriti and sruti and they are as strong as those of dwijas. However, the rigidity marriage vows are more pronounced in dwijas.,

The stringent rules and principles of marriage provided and provides if followed great strength and stability to the human society. The marriage was viewed as a method to bring the union between a man and a woman to become one soul though different in bodies. Of course! The union of two people of opposite sexes coming together is again governed by the Prarabdha *Karma* of the individuals concerned. With marriage, the importance of woman as a partner in life gets supreme more in terms of companionship for life, friendship, management of the house and inseparability against sexual union, which was viewed as means for procreation as per *Dharma*. No ritual can be performed without the participation of the wife concerned. Equality was never the question between the sexes as there is no equality between two individuals of the same sex. It is the experience that though the husband is considered the leader of the team in the beginning of the marriage, the wife takes over and progressively as the time passes. When two people come together, differences are bound to be there and more so in the case of marriage and they would be thrashed out and resolved through compromise, accommodative spirit, particularly when the marriage is known to be for life. These qualities of compromise accommodative spirit in an individual are helpful to reduce friction in the society in general. The critics who cry hoarse that the women are kept under the thumb of a man should appreciate the fact that they cannot guarantee hundred percent successes even if the law is changed-- now the law is changed- to give equal rights. Manu must have been aware of this situation for, he brought marriage under the *Dharma*, the smriti.

The marriage rules were made very strict for the dwijas because these are the people who have to set an example to the others. When those who teach and advice practice what they teach, there will be greater acceptability from the taught or followers. The marriages as devised by the smriti have proved to be very successful to a large extent over thousands of years. It is not t to say that all marriages contracted under smriti were able to bring happiness to all concerned, but

the situation would be no better, surely much worse from the experiences of the societies in the west. The divorce rate, the problem of single parent families, the percentage of children born outside the wedlock and the consequent mental problems speak volumes in these societies. Ultimately, these problems destabilize the society.

The sruti did not stop with formulating rules for an enduring marriage, but went ahead to define and stipulate the duties (called **Dharma** as per smriti) of the householder. They are extensive but to give the important of them is very relevant to show how comprehensive the thinking of Manu was about the human society .They are:

- The householder is responsible to take adequate care of the family in respect of the needs such as food, shelter, schooling, health and security.
- He is expected to take care of the old people, particularly the parents.
- Join the wife in performing the rituals of his Varna as specified by the smriti.
- Give food to every guest invited or uninvited to according to his means
- Feed the hungry and disabled..
- Visit holy places and holy men
- Spend time in satsang (good company) to remember the Parabrahman either in nirgun or sagun form.
- Donate to the needy and deserving as much as his purse permits.

Looking at the rules through which a householder was guided, one makes to wonder the far sightedness of Manu, particularly so when they are called the **SwaDharma** of the householder. Every individual in the society was provided enough space to live comfortably if not happily for, lasting happiness was possible only by individual effort. Even for the lasting happiness, a well laid path was shown.

Examining the **SwaDharma** by individuals and the society had become important because change in times changes the outlook of the individuals and the society. But whatever changes are contemplated should better the life of an individual and the society without disturbing the ultimate goal of the human being and repercussions in the long run. Mahabharata, the great epic is a gold mine of examples to determine the **SwaDharma** at each point of life of an individual of a particular varna. It opens up with the *Karma* principle and goes on discussing with lucidity what every character in Mahabharata thought about **SwaDharma**, how the character behaved in happiness and also in adversity. The culmination is the great Bhagavad—Gita in which Lord Krishna himself gives a discourse on **Dharma** and **SwaDharma**.

Arjuna, the great Pandava Warrior was ready to fight the war termed as *Dharma* Yuddha(righteous war) and he requested the charioteer, Lord Krishna to place the chariot between the warring parties .When he looked around, he found that armies aligned to both the sides have warriors closely related to him. In war people die on both the sides. Arjuna suddenly realized that his kith and kin on either side face imminent death and all that because of him. He felt that killing people who are his own relatives, even in war is a sin and thought that he should withdraw against such unrighteousness on his part. We know killing is unrighteousness, and killing one's own relatives is much more a unrighteous. When he expressed his anguish to the Lord Krishna, the Lord was amused at the empathy of Arjuna and explained to him the intricacies of *Dharma*.

He said 'you are a Kshatriya and so your *Dharma* demands you to fight unrighteousness. I would now explain to you how unrighteous the Kauravas headed by Duryodhana are. Duryodhana, while still a student along with all of you at the hermitage of Guru Dronacharya, tried to kill Bhimasena, your elder brother by poisoning him and also throwing him with hands and feet tied into the River Ganga. As a young man he plotted burning all of you Pandavas along with your mother Kunti in Varanaavrata by setting fire to the house where you were living. These two acts make Duryodhana a criminal of homicide. Besides ordering Duhssasana to disrobe Draupati, your wife and a queen in the court of Kauravas where all the people including Bhishma, Drona and Kripa were watching is a heinous crime. If such a person were to rule a kingdom, where is security for common citizens and particularly women? If you say that Bhishma is your grandfather revered by everybody and a righteous warrior, he chose to fight the war in the cause of the unrighteous Duryodhana. By deciding to fight for an unrighteous, he has become unrighteous himself. So is Drona and Kripa. Drona Acharya, being a Brahmin forsakes his *Dharma* for power and riches. Kripa Acharya also was also a Brahmin but took the life of a warrior form the sake of Kauravas as he was brought by the royal family of Karavas. All the warriors fighting for Duryodhana, though your cousins and relatives are fighting for unrighteousness. Your Swadharnma, as a Kshatriya demands that you fight this war. In fighting a righteous war, those who die are lucky and so you should not grieve for them'.

Here, Lord Krishna was giving His clarification to Arjuna what is more important. He said that his *Dharma* to avoid killing is subservient to the *Dharma* of his varna which makes him the instrument of righteous to wage war on a criminal and destroy him with his supports to save the society from the criminal's rule. One should understand that Arjuna did violate his *Dharma* in killing his kinsmen and took the punishment when he was relegated to hell (Yamapuri). For that matter, Lord Krishna himself suffered punishment in the hands of Gandhari through her curse that Lord Krishna along with all Hsis relatives and clan people will meet their end in the same manner all the Kauravas did for ,Gandhari blamed Lord Krishana for not stopping the war between Kauravas and Pandavas, though He could. Why did Lord Krishna submit Himself to the curse of Gandhari? It is only to show that *Dharma* is supreme and everybody is equal before it.

How was Gandhari able to curse Lord Krishna? The answer is again **SwaDharma**. Gandhari, though jealous with the children of Kunti was a dutiful wife to Dhritarashtra in thought, word and deed. She went to the extent of blindfolding herself declaring that she would not care to see when her husband could not see.

There is another story of Mahabharata which is meant to show the **SwaDharma** in each case. The story runs as follows:

‘A Brahmin brahmachari decided to seek parabrahma and so leaves his home and old parents to pursue his goal. He chose a spot under a shady tree on a river bank and close to a village. Every day, after the morning rituals he would sit on meditation taking a break only to beg for food at mid-day at one or two houses in the village. Again after taking the food he would continue his meditation. This became his daily routine. After a long period of meditation, one day, as usual he was getting ready to go begging for food. At that moment a crow, sitting on a branch of the tree directly above his head dropped the excreta. It fell on the brahmachari’s head. He was greatly annoyed and stared at the crow above. Instantly, it fell down dead. The Brahmachari was now convinced that that his meditation is fruitful. After cleaning himself, he left for the village for begging food. He went to a house where he was getting the food regularly and accosted “Mother, please give me food”. The house wife immediately replied that she was bringing the food and requested him to wait. Meanwhile, the husband entered the house. The house wife attended on her husband and after he was served his meals, the house wife took the food for the waiting brahmachari. The brahmachari had to wait for a long time and he felt that the lady of the house neglected her **Dharma** of giving food to a brahmachari, particularly when she asked him to wait. This made him very angry and stared at the lady with his red eyes. The lady of the house remarked,” Sir, I am very sorry for the delay and I am not that crow to die at your stare. My husband came home meanwhile and it was my duty to first attend to him before I do anything. That caused the delay in giving food to you”. The brahmachari was astonished at what she said and fell at her feet requesting her to teach the means through which she gained such a power to see what happened earlier on the river bank. The lady laughed and said she has nothing to teach him because she was following **SwaDharma** in thought, word and deed. The power she gained, she said was because she was following that **Dharma**. She further said that he may go to one **Dharma** Vyadha in the next village and learn the way to attain Parabrahman from him as he was the fit person to be his Guru.

Kausika for, that is the name of the brahmachari thanked the lady and immediately set out for the next village. After reaching the village, he enquired for the address of **Dharma** Vyadha and got it easily. He then went to the address and to his surprise found himself at the shop of a meat vendor. The meat vendor looked at Kausika and said, “Sir, the lady in the other village has sent you to me. I am **Dharma** Vyadha. . Kindly wait for some time so that I finish my transaction and attend to you.” Kausika was speechless. Here was a butcher who had the power to tell how he came there. He, a Brahmin was to learn Brahma gnana , as directed by the lady from a butcher! With the experience he had at the house of the lady, he patiently waited for **Dharma**

Vyadha to finish his transaction. After a short while, **Dharma** Vyadha closed the shop, came to Kausika and asked him to follow. Then **Dharma** Vyadha took Kausika home and again asked him to wait till he attended on his old parents. After attending on his parents, **Dharma** Vyadha came to Kausika and said, "Sir, I am very sorry to keep you waiting. But **Dharma** makes me to attend to the needs of my aged parents first". Then **Dharma** Vyadha told Kausika, "O! brahmachari, in my past life I was a Brahmin practicing my **Dharma** meticulously. But, I took part in hunting along with my Kshatriya friend because I somehow developed a desire for hunting. Because, I swerved from my **Dharma** I had to take the birth of a butcher. Still I retain the knowledge of my past birth because of my adherence to my **Dharma** in that life. In this life my **Dharma** is to be butcher, and as a house holder to take care of my aged parents. In your case you left your aged parents at home in the pursuit of Brahman which is deviation from your **Dharma**. You better go home, get married, and do your duties as a house holder including the care of your parents. By following your **Dharma** you would automatically reach your goal" Kausika, then realized what his mistake was and did as he was told by **Dharma** Vyadha,

This story stresses the importance of **SwaDharma**. **Dharma** Vyadha, in his past birth swerved from his **SwaDharma** by participating in the hunt of animals. The punishment was twofold. 1. He had to take the birth of a butcher and 2. His march towards the final goal of merging with Brahman was delayed. The other message we get from the story is that whatever is done in accordance with the **SwaDharma** will not go waste for a mistake but allows one to continue the endeavor after atoning for the mistake. The Guru for Kausika turns out to be a butcher to lead in the path of liberation. Because Kausika was sincere in his pursuit, a Guru was sent to him to guide to the final destination.

These stories were only illustrations to pinpoint the principle involved, **SwaDharma**. There are many more stories in Mahabharata to guide for every possible doubt one may get in determining the duty at any time. Some of the characters in Mahabharata give answers to the critics of Manu **Dharma**, if only they have time and patience to go through the epic.

It is possible that the critics say that Mahabharata is only a story that was written by the perpetrators of Manu **Dharma**. Mahabharata is written by a person who was also a participant and important person in the epic. Veda Vyasa said that he recorded the story as it happened along with the thinking of each person at each situation. Any person can definitely verify the authenticity of the time of epic by looking at the astronomical data provided in the epic.

The rationality with which the sruti and smriti were handed over to the humanity is astounding. The eternal truths defined for the happiness of an individual human being, collection of human beings and all the organisms, both movable and static in the creation has been shown to have a purpose. They both direct the human being and every other organism through human beings toward the place from which they separated for it is shown to be the human birth alone that can help liberation from the cycle of births and death. The smriti, therefore intended to provide strict guide lines for making human life happy and meaningful; besides the important

idea behind the rules of smriti is that the human life being precious and very hard to gain should be used to reach the ultimate according to sruti rather than frit away the opportunity and revert back to non-human life. When progress and regress are both possible in the cycle of births, the intelligent, having got progress should not fall to regress; the human being is the most intelligent of all the species.

How far the laws of Manu (smriti) are relevant to the modern day world and even to India? The concept of **SwaDharma** has undergone change beyond recognition in India partly because the four Varnas are now replaced by several castes and partly because people have come to believe that smriti was an imposition on the majority of the population by a minority. The result is that the **Dharma** (Smriti) is replaced by laws made by the majority. As long as the human being believes inherently that whatever laws the government makes can be changed through the ballot, there is bound to be turmoil in the society. The laws must be changed if they bring better conditions and more happiness to all individuals and all sections than what were there initially without losing sight of the ultimate. But if the laws are changed without looking into long range effects in the society then not only the harmony in the people is lost but the path to progress gets closed.

Even then **SwaDharma** has meaning for every individual at all stages of life. If a student refuses to study, if the parents refuse to look after the children, if the children refuse to care for their aged parents, what would be the impact on the society? In the absence of bonding between people in the society, it is a wild group of individuals. The only way to bring happiness to an individual and the group of individuals that form society is to bring in **SwaDharma** as a moral responsibility rather than a structure to see them through the finite life. One should not forget the fundamental responsibility of a human being; is to think of the Parabrahman and the way to merge with the Brahman. Both the Sruti and the Smriti stress on Sraddha(diligence) on the part of an individual. If sraddha is integrated with moral responsibility, then it becomes **SwaDharma**. The concept laid down by the smriti in terms of **swaDharma** exactly stresses the same. **SwaDharma** can never be irrelevant.

Dharmo rakshati rakshitaha- It simply means that if we practice the accepted duty with diligence, then it saves us and supports us.

¹These are some Demi-Gods residing in the lokas like Bhuvar and Suvar in the form of luminous objects.