

HINDU DHARMA ESSENTIALS

Compiled and Edited by
Abhaya Asthana
Sanjay Mehta

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Hindu Dharma - Essentials

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धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः

Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitaha

The one who protects Dharma is protected by Dharma

Blessings:

Smt. Chithra Chakrapani, President, Bharatiya Temple, Troy, Michigan

This is a great compendium of our sacred Vedic (Hindu) literature for the young Religious practitioner who would like to learn about our sacred teachings.

Shri Harilal L. Patel, Environmental Scientist, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Although, there are a few books on Hinduism for children, this one stands out as the most authentic literature children should be exposed to in the early stage of the life.

Shri Sree Aswath, Technocrat and Vedic scholar, Columbus, OH, USA

This booklet is very valuable to our children, especially those growing up in multi-cultural environments. They can be rightfully proud of their heritage and respond to the questions of their peers.

Juna Pithadhishwar Acharya Swami Avdheshanand Giri, Haryana, India

Children and parents will understand how Bhartiya culture and hindu way of life helps in spiritual progress. This book has many illustrations that will generate courage and pride in children.

Shri Ashok Singhal, Senior Social Worker and Ex-President VHP, India

In today's changing time such simple books will help children learn about their dharma and culture the way dada-dadi and nana-nani stories teach.

Pandit Vijay Shankar Mehta, Spiritual guide and writer, Ujjain, India

No single book can explain Hindu Dharma. A small book of this kind can provide a lead to the right knowledge – same as a small drop can give the taste of Ocean.

Introduction

There are several books written on Hindu Dharma by our gurus, thinkers, and scholars. Most of them are very well written and provide good insight into Hindu Dharma. This handbook is just a cursor to other brilliant publications that have explained Hindu Dharma in detail. World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) has been organizing youth camps, Bal Vihars and other youth events for more than 35 years in America. This handbook is a compilation based on the feedback from interactions with children ages 5 to 21, camp notes, discussion summaries, inputs from parents and other references. Our hope is that this handbook will help Hindu children answer basic questions about their identity, Dharma, and culture in their schools and in diverse groups.

Publisher

विश्वधर्म प्रकाशेन विश्वशान्ति प्रवर्तके ।
हिन्दुसंघटना कार्ये ध्येयनिष्ठा स्थिरास्तुनः ॥

Vishvadharm prakaashena vishwashanti pravartake |
Hindusanghtanaa kaarye dhyeyanishthaa sthiraastunah ||

With enlightenment from the Universal Dharma, in propagating peace throughout the world in the task of achieving Hindu unity, O Bhagwan, may our aim and deep faith remain resolute.

Acknowledgments

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Contents

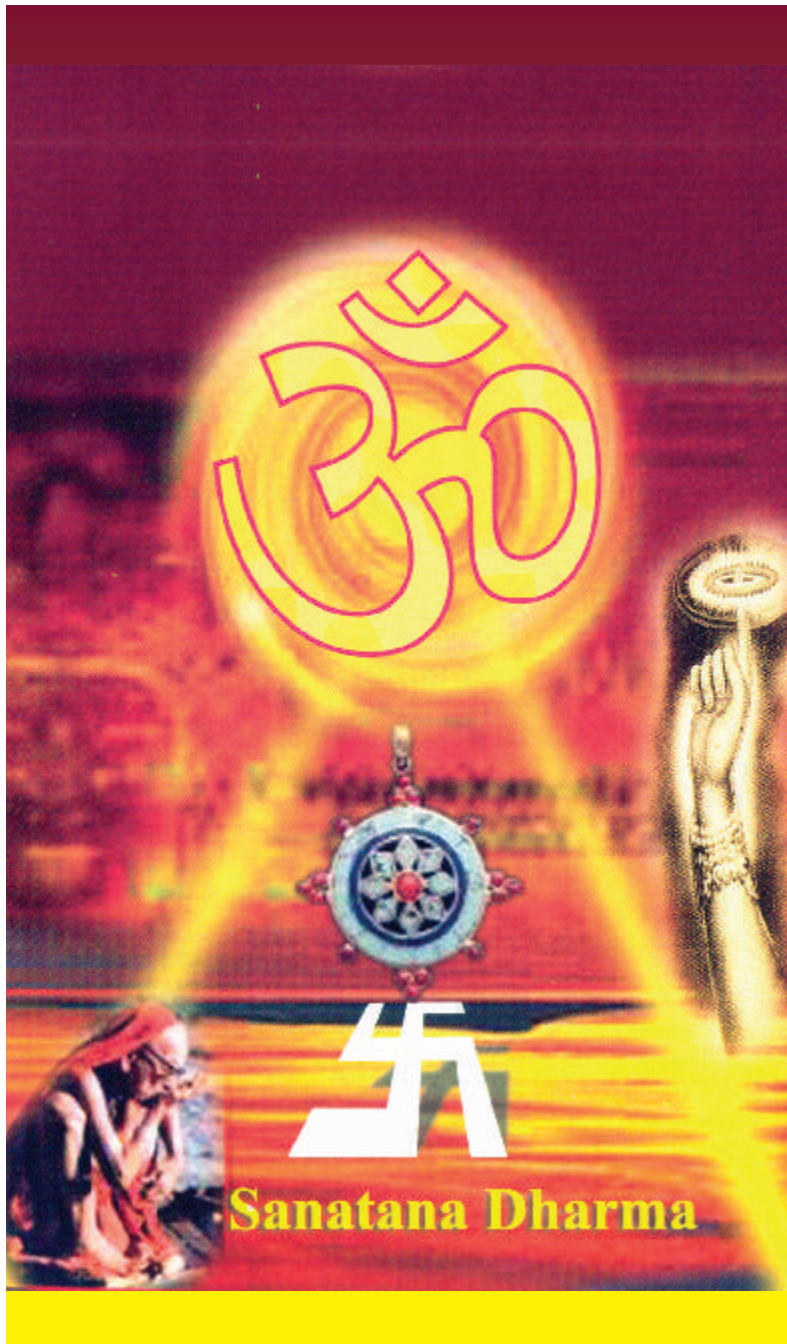
Introduction

1. Dharma (Hindu Dharma –Our Guiding Principle)	09
2. Itihaas (Hindu History)	25
3. Dharma-Granth (Spiritual Texts)	33
4. Rishis / Gurus / Great Personalities (Our Ancestors)	45
5. Tirth-Sthaan / Mandir (Spiritual Centers / Temples)	57
6. Seva (Principle of Sacrifice and Service)	67
7. Basic Principles and Symbols (Building Blocks of Our Glorious Heritage)	75
8. Upaasana (Way of Worship)	87
9. Sanskriti (Culture)	105
Nine Treatments	116
Synopsis by Numbers	118
Selected Prayers	122



Dharma

Hindu Dharma –
Our Guiding Principle



Dharma

Hindu Dharma – Our Guiding Principle

The Sanatana (eternal) values established by our Rishis (Sages) have the potential to guide all of humanity towards peace and prosperity.

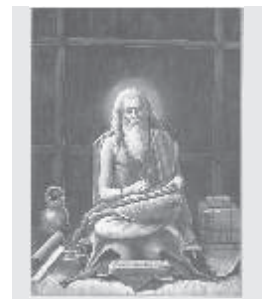
- The principles of Hindu Dharma have been tested time and again, and they have proven to be Sanatana (eternal). The name 'Sanatana Dharma' or 'Vedic Dharma' (based on teachings of Vedas) or 'Arya Dharma' (practiced by Noble people) is also used in place of Hindu Dharma.
- At different time periods and in different situations our Rishis and Gurus (wise sages) have defined and explained Dharma in various ways and words, but the central meaning has remained the same.

Let us see how dharma is explained in four different time periods:

1. Vedas and Upanishads period:

Rishis said:

"Dharnath dharma uchyate" – that which sustains (holds) everything (humans, animals, nature, etc.) in the universe and maintains harmony among things is **Dharma**.



Ved Vyasji

2. Manu Maharaj wrote in his Manu-Smriti (Hindu book of ethical conduct):



Manu Maharaj Ji

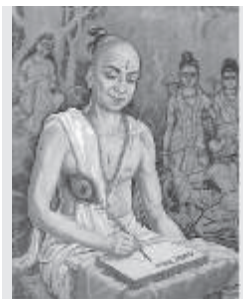
Ten characteristics of Dharma:

Dhriti	- (fortitude, patience)
Kshama	- (forgiveness)
Damah	- (self control)
Asteya	- (not stealing)
Shaucha	- (internal/external purity)
Indriya Nigraha	- (sense control)
Dhi	- (intellect)
Vidya	- (learning / knowledge)
Satya	- (truth)
Akrodha	- (absence of anger)

3. Sant Tulsidas Ji wrote in the Ramayana (500 years ago)

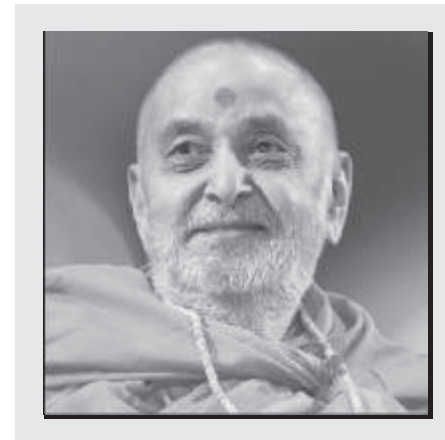
"Parahit saris Dharma nahi bhai"

Welfare of others (all living beings) is **Dharma**.



Tulsidas Ji

4. Pramukh Swami Maharaj of Swaminarayan sansthan says [20th century]:



"*Paraspar preeti prasarave aija Dharma*"
(Gujarati)

That which strengthens the bonds of love among people is **Dharma**.

If we analyze the four explanations above, we find that the central meaning remains the same: "Dharma is that which holds, integrates, and sustains. It elevates the inner personality/inner beauty to bring about: harmony, happiness, morality, good conduct, fearlessness, selfless love, honesty....".

Any action or deed of ours that results in enhancing the inner beauty of the self and brings harmony in the universe at a particular time is our **Dharma**. All words or actions that do not are **Adharma**.

Brahman / Ishwar / Bhagwan
(The closest English word is "God")

- The essence of everything is Brahman; the source and sum of everything in this universe.
- There is ONLY Brahman and nothing else. He is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of this universe.
- He is Sat-Chit-Anand (absolute existence, absolute consciousness, and absolute bliss).
- Out of devotion and love, devotees may call him Brahman, Ishwar, or Bhagwan.
- The flowing rivers, the sun, moon, forests, blue sky, mountains, flowers and everything that we see around us is created and sustained by Ishwar (his aishwarya / grace).
- Brahman is one and only one, but devotees call him by different names and see him in different forms.
- Our rishis have thought of Brahman as the "**Divine mother (Devi Shakti)**".
- The word "Brahman" is not to be mistaken with Brahma (as in Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh) or Brahmin (a learned person who seeks Brahman).

While Swami Chinmayananda Ji was visiting USA, someone jokingly asked "It is said that Hindus have many Gods," Swami Ji diligently replied, "We have ONLY God." No question of many gods, everything is God.



Vidhyarthi Dharma (Student's Duty)



Putra Dharma (Caring for Parents)



Manava Dharma (Service to Humanity)

ॐ / OM or Omkaar

- OM is the basic cosmic sound or vibration from which all other sounds and vibrations are produced. OM is indeed Brahman.
- OM is also called Pranava: of all the mantras, Om is the most powerful.
- By knowing OM one attains the ultimate joy (all that is desired by humans).
- Chanting OM helps in meditation. To get the most benefit recite OM three times with the duration of 'O' longer than 'M'.
- In Bhagavad Geeta, Bhagwan Shri Krishna said, "I am **Omkaar** in all the sounds".
- Though a Hindu symbol, it is widely respected and used by many non-Hindus all over the world.



Tridev



Brahma

Vishnu

Mahesh

Names and Forms of Brahman

One Ishwar,
but devotees call him by different names

Brahma

- He is the 'creator' of the universe. Devi Saraswati is the inspiration for all 'creativity'.

Vishnu

- Also worshipped as Narayana. He is all pervading and preserves/sustains the whole creation.
- He holds Shankha (conch shell), Chakra (discus), Gada (mace), and Padma (lotus). He is also known as Chaturbhuj, the four armed.
- Chanting his name removes (har) ignorance, so devotees call him Hari.

Mahesh (Shiva)

- Also worshipped as Rudra. He dissolves the universe at the end of the cycle of creation.
- Chanting his name removes fear from devotees' minds.



Ganesh



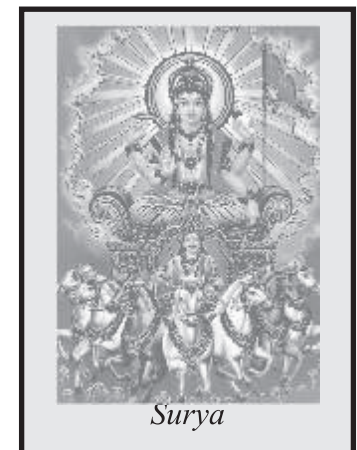
Vishnu



Shiva



Shakti



Surya

In most Hindu homes the following Panch Devas (Five deities) are worshipped:

1. Ganesh

- Son of Shiva and Parvati, the first to be worshipped on all auspicious occasions.
- He is remover of all the obstacles.
- There are many stories of Ganesh, which inspire devotees, especially children.
- *Ganesh has become a universal symbol for Hindus outside of Bharat.*

2. Vishnu

3. Shiva

4. Shakti

- The Divine energy of the creator, preserver, and dissolver of this universe.
- The mother goddess takes different forms to bestow her blessings on devotees and to remove harmful forces from time to time.
- We worship her as Durga, Saraswati, and Lakshmi.

5. Surya (Sun)

- Sun is the source of energy, and remover of darkness (ignorance).
- It is a symbol of selfless service and constant action.
- Out of respect we worship sun as Surya Narayana.



1. MATSYA AVATAR



2. VARAH AVATAR



VISHNU BHAGWAN



3. KURMA AVATAR



4. NARSIMHA AVATAR



5. VAMAN AVATAR

Dashaavatar

Bhagwan incarnates to uplift Dharma

On 24 occasions Bhagwan Vishnu, the sustainer of this universe, assumed different forms to protect his devotees and reestablish Dharma. Ten of his incarnations are well known. These are called DashaAvatars (Dash = 10 and Avatar = incarnation) of Vishnu.

1. Matsya (Fish) Avatar: To save earth at the time of annihilation.
2. Varah (Boar) Avatar: To save earth from Daitya king Hiranyaksha.
3. Kurma (Tortoise) Avatar: Held the Mandarachal mountain on his back to help Devatas churn the ocean to extract "Amrita (nectar)" and other precious objects.
4. Narsimha (Half-male-half-lion) Avatar: Took half-male-half-lion form to save a child devotee Prahalad from atrocities of Daitya king Hirankashyapu.
5. Vaman (Dwarf) Avatar: Took dwarf form to humble king Bali of his false pride.
6. Parashuram Avatar: To free this earth from arrogant kings and tyrannical rulers.
7. Rama Avatar: To free this earth from the misdeeds of Rakshas such as Ravan, Kumbhkaran and others.



6. PARSHURAM AVATAR



7. RAMA AVATAR



8. KRISHNA AVATAR



9. BUDDHA AVATAR



10. KALAKI AVATAR

8. Krishna Avatar: To free this earth from oppressors such as Kamsa, Pootana and Narkasura. He delighted devotees with his charming personality and delivered the most philosophical lecture in the form of 'Geeta'.
9. Buddha Avatar: Through his teachings Buddha showed a path that causes the extinction of sufferings and leads to Nirvana (liberation from sufferings).
10. Kalaki Avatar: Bhagwan will come in Kalaki form to uplift Dharma in Kaliyug (current era).



Itihaas (Hindu History)

Our Glorious Past



Itihaas (Hindu History)

Our Glorious Past

Rest of the world identifies Bharat with a selected few individuals, books, places and temples. We list below a 'selected few' as representatives of all those who contributed to the glorious Hindu history:

- Individuals: Shri Ram, Shri Krishna, Shiva and Shakti, Rishi Patanjali (founder of yoga), Tiruvalluvar, Mahaveer Swami, Buddha, Guru Nanak, Swami Chinmayananda, Mahatma Gandhi.
- Books: Vedas, Upanishads, Yoga sutras, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagwad Geeta.
- Places/Temples: Himalayas (abode of Rishis) and sacred river Ganga, Rishikesh, Vaishnavdevi, Tirupati Balaji, Jain Temples of Mt. Abu, Golden Temple, Akshar Dham and many ashrams all across India where devotees from all over the world come and stay for spiritual gains.

Obviously, our heritage has been affected by more than the handful listed here, but to fully explain every aspect of Hinduism would require volumes of writings.

These individuals, books and temples connect us to our glorious Itihaas. Respect for Itihaas, following traditions and making sacrifices (some times sacrificing ones own life) for the society have been the characteristic of Hindus for generations.

Why are we called Hindus and Bharat called India?
 In Vedas, Bharat was referred to as the land of Sapta (seven) Sindhu (rivers). In Vedic Sanskrit, 'sa' was pronounced as 'ha', therefore 'Sapta Sindhu' was pronounced as 'Hapta Hindu'. People living on that land are called Hindus, as pronounced by the first Muslim invaders. Later, some foreigners, for the ease of pronunciation, dropped letter 'H' and pronounced Hindus as 'Indus'. Indus later became India.

Chronology

Based on our literature, recorded facts, Vedic teachings and cultural practices, the history of Bharat (Hindu history) may be divided into three periods:

1. Before Raja Rishi Vaivasvata Manu: This period is mostly undated history. The society was centered on the banks of Saraswati river (present Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Punjab area). Vedic culture extended all the way from the Himalayas in the north to the southern tip of Bharat.
2. From Manu through Shri Ram of Ayodhya up to Mahabharata war 3102 years before C.E.: Galaxy of kings and states extended up to Gandhara (present Afghanistan) and beyond to Central Asia as documented in the Mahabharata. The peak of the so called 'Indus valley civilization' coincides with the Mahabharata period. The compilation of Puraanas and Itihaas was done by Veda Vyasa during this time.
3. Post-Mahabharata age covering the times of Kalhana, Gautam Buddha, Mahaveer, Patanjali, Aryabhatta, Adi Shankara to the present times.

* C.E. – Current Era

Milestones in history

Though the age of history is full of events and actions. Some events, which directly benefited society, are mentioned below:

- **Times of Veda Mantras - Undated**

Vedic Mantras (Truths) were discovered (directly understood) independently during a state of *samadhi* by various Rishis. The contents of the Vedas are discussed in a subsequent chapter.

- **Philosophy (Darshan) Re-affirmation**

Around the period of 750 C.E. a great sanyasi (saint) Shankar (later known as Adi Guru Shankaracharya), born in Kerala (south India), traveled all over India to spread the teachings of Vedanta (Hindu philosophy based on Vedas) and to unite Hindus.

- **Bhakti Movement**

During this period many saints spread the message of devotion (bhakti) to Ishwar. The emphasis was on realization of Truth and attainment of happiness by chanting and singing Ishwar's glory. Alvars, Ramanuja, Tulsidas, Kabir, Tukaram, Gyaneshwar, Guru Nanak, Mira bai, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabhacharya, and many other spiritual leaders led this movement.

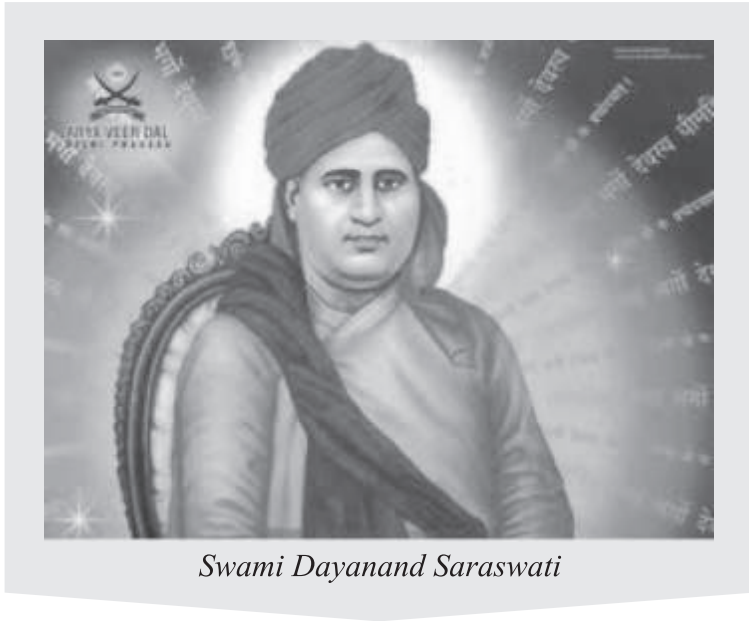
Even today we listen to the music / bhajans / songs composed during this time.

- **Recent Social Reforms**

While we had great saints, there were a few unfortunate traditions established in the society due to selfishness and ignorance of some people. To get rid of these unfortunate traditions, spiritual leaders gave priority to social reforms. They brought positive changes during time of need. Some of these leaders were: Swami Dayananda Saraswasti, Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo, Raman Maharshi and Dr. Hedgewar.

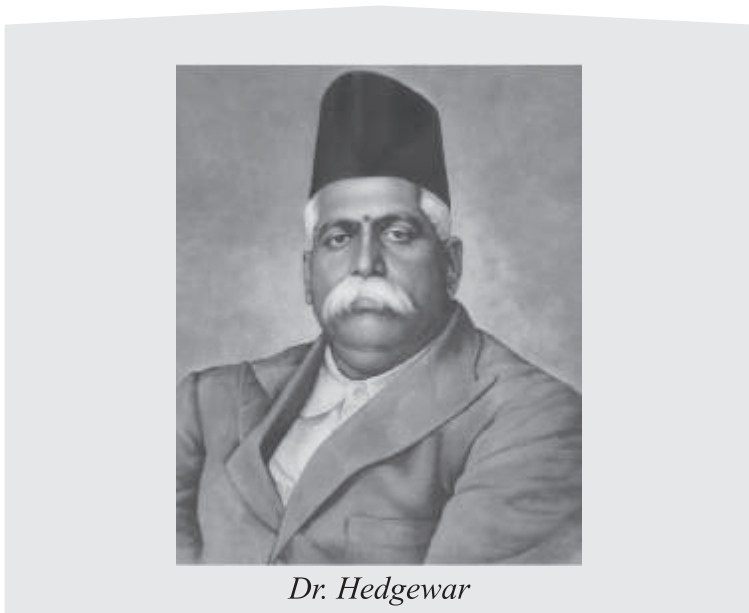
There lived a princess, who was never interested in her studies (learning royal habits). Many tutors used various methods to inspire her, but failed. Lastly an old and experienced teacher was given a chance. Instead of teaching her different subjects, the teacher everyday showed her the picture of her royal ancestors and told her stories of their achievements and bravery. One day in her solitude, the princess realized that she belonged to such great family and felt proud of her heritage. That moment of pride changed her life. She decided to learn and do whatever is required to become a good ruler.

Reading history, spiritual texts, and listening to the stories of great people will ignite in us a pride for Hindu Identity and Heritage.

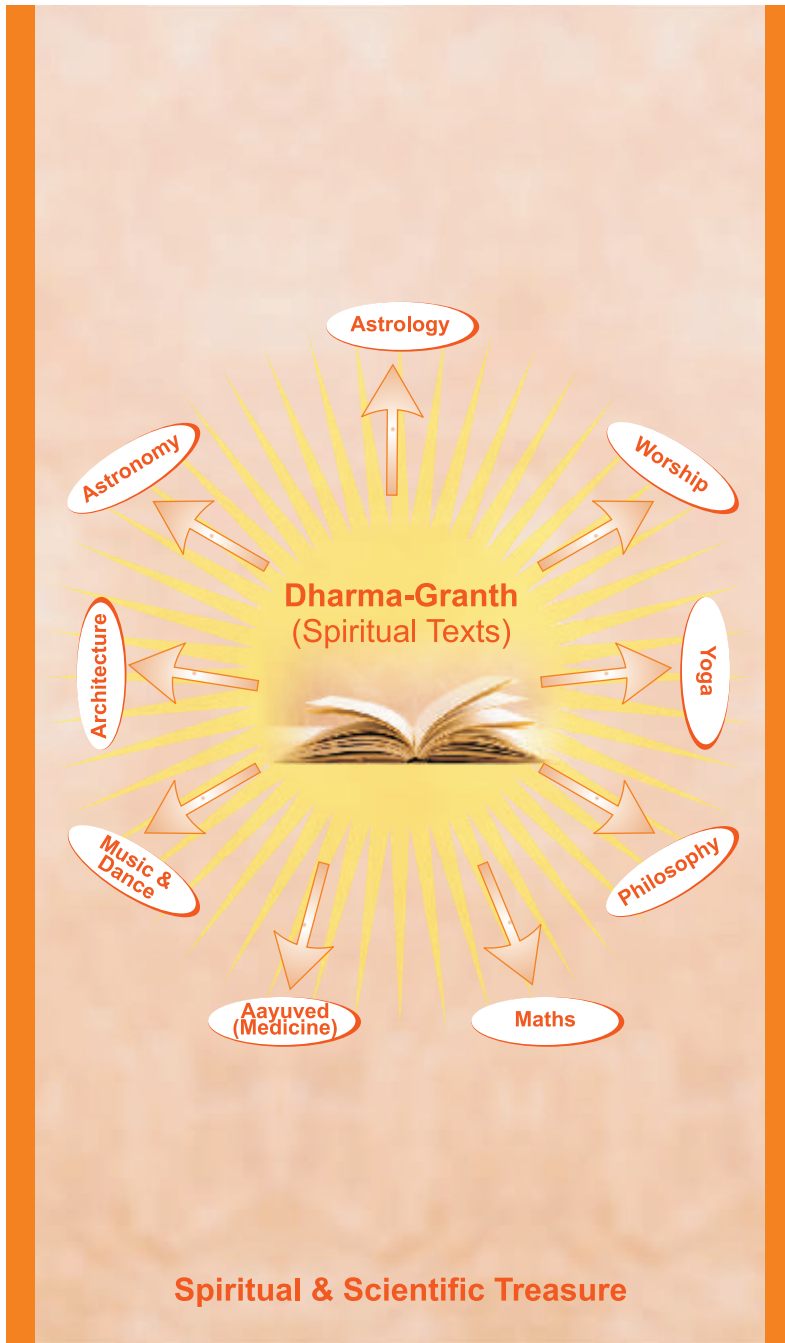


Dharma-Granth

(Spiritual Texts)



**Spiritual Treasure
and Sources of Wisdom**



Dharma-Granth (Spiritual Texts)

Spiritual Treasure and Sources of Wisdom

Dharma: The law of our being that guides us from within.

Granth: Compilation of wise and enlightening principles.

What is Dharma-Granth?

- For thousands of years our ancestors (Rishis, Gurus) have meditated on Ishwar and prayed for the welfare of all living beings. While meditating, lots of good thoughts developed in their minds.
- Rishis or their disciples compiled these thoughts and their experiences in the form of books.
- These sacred books are called Dharma-Granths: be it collection of Vedic mantras or a simple bhajan or aarti.

Why do we need these Dharma-Granths?

- These Dharma-Granths tell us the ways to live happily and share that happiness with others through various ways of worship.

The following are some widely referred granths:

1. *Shrutis - That which was "heard"*

Vedas – Total 4

- Rig Veda: Deals with general knowledge and verses in the praise of Ishwar's manifestations. (10,552 Mantras)
- Yajur Veda: Deals with the knowledge of karma (action), yagna / rituals. (1,975 Mantras)
- Sama Veda: Deals with knowledge of devotion (upaasana / bhakti). Mantras set to Ragas for various ceremonies. Origin of classical Indian music. (1,875 Mantras)
- Atharva Veda: Deals with the knowledge of physical science. (5,987 Mantras)

Upanishads – Total 11

- Upa–ni–shad meaning “Near–Below–Sit”. It denotes the flow of knowledge from the Guru to the Sishyas (student).
- Upanishads are the “Essence of Vedas”. They are also referred to as the “Vedanta”, the meaning, and “end” of the Vedas.
- They deal with the relationship of creation (including humans) with Ishwar, how to attain permanent happiness. Also talks about nature of the world, re-incarnation and other such subjects.
- Out of 108 total Upanishads these 10 are considered as the principal Upanishads: Ishavasya, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandookya, Taittiriya, Chhandogya, Aitareya, Brihad–Aranyaka.

2. Smritis - that which was “remembered”

- Deals with characteristics of Dharma. Defines the duties of a king/leader, the administration of civil and criminal law, social and economic systems.
- Principal Smritis are: Manu Smriti, Parashar Smriti, Yagnavalka Smriti.

3. Puraanas – Total 18

- Puraan means 'though old, is new', when read with proper understanding or with a Guru it is a bridge between present and the past.
- Puraanas were created to explain teachings of Vedas as narratives / story forms. For example: Satyanarayan katha is taken from Skanda Puraan.
- Principal Puraanas are: Vishnu Puraan, Shiv Puraan, Bhagvata Puraan.

4. Darshan (Philosophy based on Vedas)

- Out of six schools of philosophy, two are listed here:
 1. Yoga: *This Hindu philosophy system is benefiting millions of people world wide.* Rishi Patanjali is the compiler of Yoga.
 2. Vedanta: Teaches that Brahman pervades in all things, and we are part of Brahman.

Ramayana



Mahabharata



Bhagavad Geeta

5. *Itihaas (History)*

Ramayana

- The Ramayana is our Itihaasa (history) book, not an Epic poem nor a mythology.
- It is the life story of Shri Ram. It is a combination of two words Ram and ayana (journey). Ramayana means journey of Shri Ram.
- This was composed by Rishi Valmiki in 24,000 Shlokas and divided into 7 chapters.

Mahabharata

- It is the largest historical record in poetry form in the world. It contains 100,000 Shlokas and divided into 18 chapters.
- This great book covers the life history of Pandavas, Kauravas, and Shri Krishna.
- It depicts challenges of human life: clash (battle) of Dharma and Adharma.

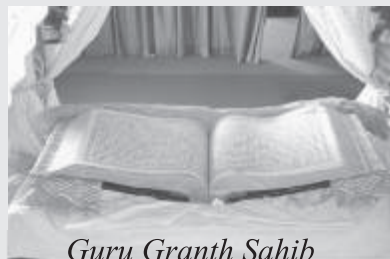
Other inspiring books which guide us in life:

Bhagavad Geeta (Part of Mahabharata)

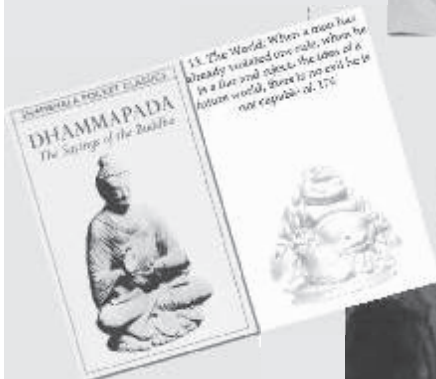
- The Bhagavad-Geeta is a conversation between Bhagwan Shri Krishna (Guru) and the great warrior Arjun (Shishya - Student).
- Deals with the psychology of a common person. Shows him/her three ways to achieve fulfillment in life: Gyan (knowledge), Karma (action), and Bhakti (devotion) yoga.
- During the course of 18 chapters (700 shlokas), Bhagwan Shri Krishna explained to Arjun why / how? he should do his duty by following the path of Dharma without getting distracted.



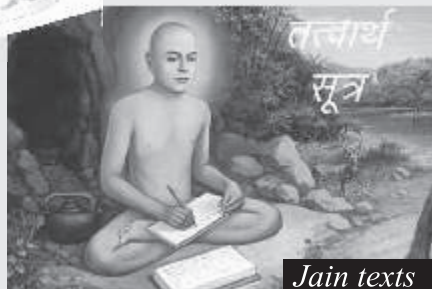
Hanuman Chalisa



Guru Granth Sahib



Dhammapadam



Jain texts

Many great people like Mahatma Gandhi regarded Geeta as the 'mother'.

“The Geeta is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. When I'm saddened, I go back to the mother Geeta.” – Mahatma Gandhi.

Hanuman Chalisa:

- One of the favorites of devotees, especially young ones. Tulsidas Ji sang the glory of Hanuman Ji in 40 verses.
- Hanuman Ji is the repository of strength, wisdom, and devotion.
- Chanting Hanuman Chalisa frees us from fear and bondage.

Guru Granth Sahib

- Granth Sahib (Esteemed Book) is living Guru of the devotees.
- It is a collection of teachings of many saints mainly Guru Nanak Dev.
- It comprises over 5,000 Shabads or hymns.
- Granth Sahib has the essence of Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and many other scriptures.

Jain texts

- Jain Acharya Kundkond was a distinguished scholar. One of his writings is a text known as Samayasaar.
- It explains essentials of Spiritualism in very straightforward ways: Person with right attitude is free from fear, therefore, free from doubts. All of his actions are pure (without the sense of ownership or I-ness), a pure person gets tainted only when influenced by impurities/bad habits.

Dhammapada

- Dhammapada is a book that contains teachings of Bhagwan Buddha.
- Through his teachings Bhagwan Buddha showed a path that leads to the extinction of sufferings.

Some great sayings (Mahavakyas) from our Dharma-Granth:

“Aham Brahmasmi” (I am Brahman): This states the identification of the innermost consciousness of the individual with Brahman.

-- Rig-Ved

“Prajnanam Brahma” (Intelligence is Brahman): It indicates that the Divine intelligence is present within us and has the power to return us to the Divine.

“Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma “ (The Universe is Brahman): The entire universe is Divine.

-- Upanishad

“Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah”: One who protects Dharma is protected by Dharma.

-- Mahabharata

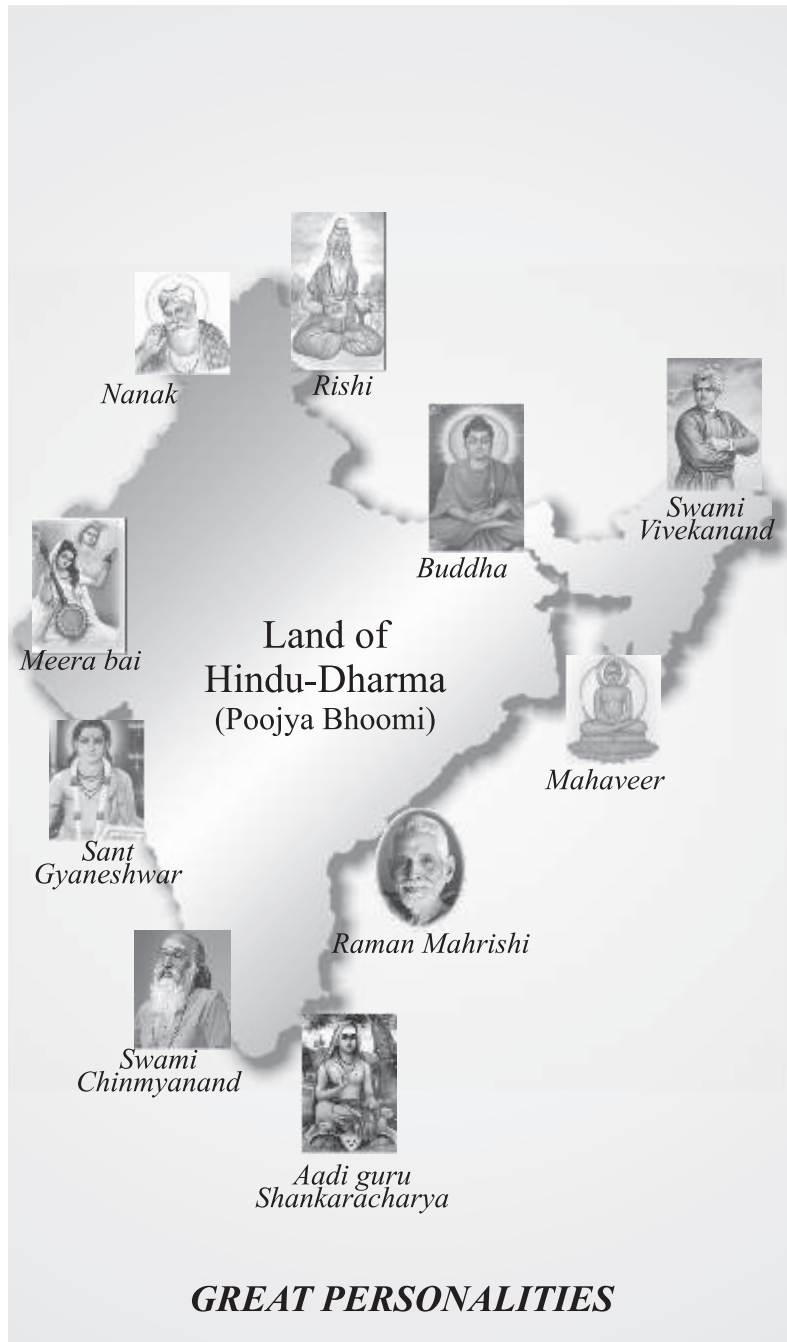
“Swayameva Mrigendrataa” (We achieve by our own efforts): There is no crowning ceremony for the lion in the forest. Lion is declared the king of all the animals by virtue of its own strength.

– Panchatantra

There was a boy named Ashtaa-vakra (eight-bends), he was the son of rishi Kaholaka. Ashtaa-vakra had a deformed body (body had eight bends). Ashtavakra was a very intelligent child. He had memorized and understood all scriptures. Once his father went to debate with well-known scholars in the palace of King Janak. Ashtavakra went to see his father in King Janak's assembly. As he entered the hall, seeing his deformed body all scholars laughed. Young Ashtavakra was a fearless boy, he confidently said to king Janak, “I heard you invited scholars in this assembly, but I see only skin dealers (people in the business of skin), not any scholars”. Everyone including Janak was shocked, Janak asked, “Young man, why do you say so, don't you see scholars sitting here?”. Ashtavakra replied, “They laughed seeing my ugly body, they can't see Ishwar in me, they can't see my knowledge, they can not be Gyanis (scholars), a Gyani does not judge the body, skin or color, an ignorant does”. King Janak could see great wisdom in the boy. Later king Janak discussed all kinds of knowledge with Ashtavakra and treated him as his guru.

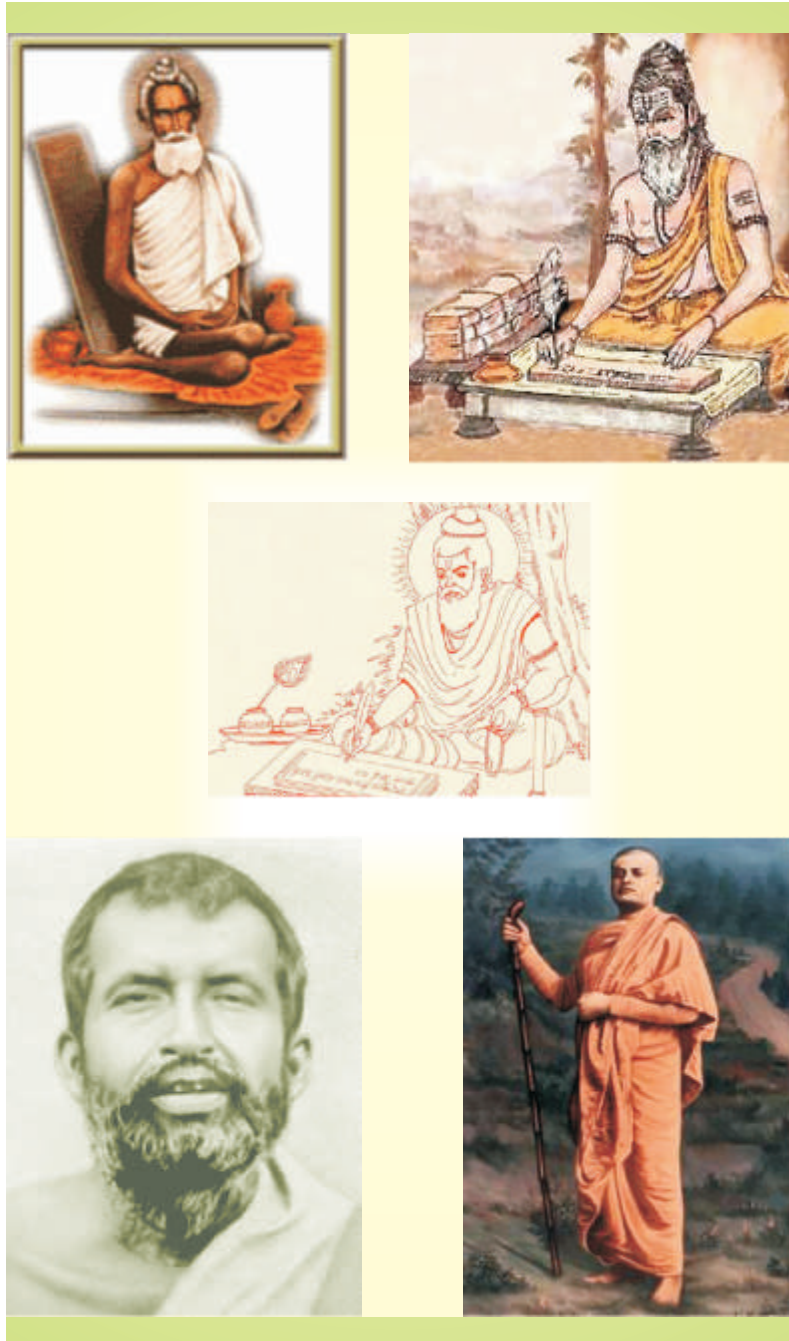
Dharma-Granth (Spiritual Texts) are not just a store of information, they impart wisdom by teaching us; how to live, see Ishwar (god) in all beings.

**They connect us to our
ancestral land Bharat.**



Rishis/ Gurus/ Great Personalities (Our Ancestors)

Architects of
Hindu Dharma



Rishis / Gurus / Great Personalities

(Our Ancestors)

Architects of Hindu Dharma

The rich and fertile soil of Hindu thought has yielded flowers so fragrant and fruits so sweet that they have satisfied spiritually eager souls, season after season and generation after generation.

Whatever we have today, are the fruits of the sacrifices, labor and genius of our ancestors.

We are fortunate to be descendents of great Rishis, Gurus, Sanyasis, and revolutionary leaders.

- **Rishi:** Means 'seer', the one who has understood Ishwar (the physical and the metaphysical) and our relationship to Him, by meditation. Rishi may have lived thousands of years ago or may be living today.

Rishis are teachers, thinkers and philosophers through whom we are able to know Ishwar - the supreme being.

There were women rishikas also, to name some: Gargi, Sulabha, Madalasa, and Maitrayee.



Veda Vyas



- **Son of Satyavati and Rishi Parashar, born in the Mahabharata period.**
- **Born at a time when ignorance and lack of human values was rising.**
- **Therefore, people were unable to understand the Vedas (knowledge imparted by Rishis) and use them in their daily lives.**

- **Sanyasi:** The one who is in the fourth stage of life (four ashrams).

Sanyasis expand their thoughts and actions to cover all of creation, going beyond the bounds of the immediate community. They wear saffron (symbolizing renunciation) cloths.

Sometimes we call them Muni or Swami.

- **Guru:** The one who shows the right path and is the remover of ignorance.

Guru helps us understand what is described in the sacred writings. Guru can be a Rishi, Sanyasi, or a Grihastha (householder). Sometimes we call them Achaarya.

Though we will discuss the life of only some of the great personalities (our ancestors), they represent all those known and un-known to us.

To name some: Rishi Bharadwaaja, Vyasa, Valmeeki, Kapil, Patanjali, Kanaada, Charaka, Buddha, Mahaveer, Shankaracharya, Aryabhatta, Gyaneshwar, Tukaram, Thiruvalluvar, Madhavacharya, Meera bai, Raman Maharshi, Ram Krishna paramhansa, Goswami Tulsi Das, Guru Nanak, Jija bai, Dayananda Sarawasati.

Vyasdeva's work:

- For the benefit of society in Kaliyuga, Veda Vyas organized Vedas in the form of four books.
- By the grace of Bhagwan Narayana he compiled Mahabharata (which includes Bhagavad-Geeta), Bhagvatam and other 17 Puraanas (see Dharma Granth chapter 3).
- Hindu society is indebted to Sage Vyas for providing a simple way to worship Ishwar through his writings.

Adi Guru Shankaracharya



- Birth name Shankar.
- Born at Kaladi, Kerala (South), India in 788 AD.
- Sanyasa (renouncing material world) at age of 16.
- Attained moksha in 820 AD at the age of 32.

Shankaracharya's work:

- Traveled all over India to spread the teachings of Vedanta (essence of Vedas) and uniting Hindus.
- Established four major religious centers (peeth): Sharada peeth, Karnataka (South), Jyotir peeth, Badrinath, Uttar Pradesh (North), Kalika peeth, Dwaraka, Gujarat (West), Govardhan peeth, Puri, Orissa (East)

Even today these centers (peeths) guide, inspire, and bind Hindus in Bharat and outside Bharat. The tradition behind the peeths is that a priest from the southern part of India leads the northern peeth, and so on.

Mahavir Swami



- Birth name Vardhaman.
- Born in 599 B.C. in the state of Bihar, India.
- He was son of a king, but at the age of thirty he gave up worldly possessions, and became a monk.
- Bhagwan Mahaveer was the twenty fourth and last Jain Tirthankara.

- At the age of 72 (527 B.C.) Bhagwan Mahaveer attained nirvana on Deepavali day.

Mahavir Swami's work:

- Mahavir swami spent more than thirty years traveling bare foot around India preaching to the people the eternal truth he realized.
- Through his simple ways he showed how one could attain total freedom from the sufferings and cycle of birth and death.
- Mahavir Swami preached right faith (samyak-darshana), right knowledge (samyak-jnana), and right conduct (samyak-charitra).

Swami Chinmayananda



- **Birth name Balakrishna Menon.**
- **Born in 1916 in the state of Kerala, India.**
- **Studied Sanskrit, English and Malayalam.**
- **Participated in Indian Freedom Movement.**
- **Sanyasa (renouncing material world) at the age of 33.**

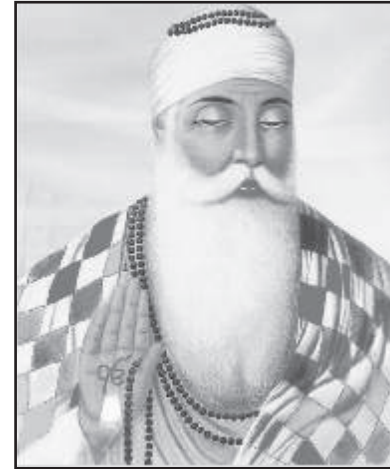
- **Left body in the year 1993 in San Diego, USA.**

Swami Chinmayananda's work:

- Traveled across Bharat, America, and other countries to share the wealth of Hinduism by giving lectures at temples and universities.
- His vibrant thoughts of bringing spirituality to national and social activities inspired organizations like Chinamaya Mission and Vishwa Hindu Parishad.
- His fearless character, clarity of thoughts, and simple explanations of scriptures inspired millions of Hindus and non-Hindus. He was also known for his punctuality.

He was a modern Rishi.

Guru Nanak Dev



- **Born in 1469 AD in the state of Punjab, India.**
- **At early age he learned many languages and spiritual texts.**
- **At the age of thirty he left home as a hermit to spread message of spiritual texts to common man.**

- **Guru Nanak dev was founder of Sikh Panth (tradition).**
- **In the year 1539 he left his body.**

Guru Nanak Dev's work:

- During the barbaric acts of Mughal invader Babar, Guru Nanak Dev's teachings about Dharma inspired a large number of people all across Bharat.
- He traveled to Iran, Arabia, Shri Lanka and some other countries to spread the message of Dharma: One universal creator: God, his name is Truth.
- Guru Nanak Dev's teachings have the essence of Vedas, Upanishads and other texts, and are major part of Granth Sahib (Esteemed Book).

Meera Bai



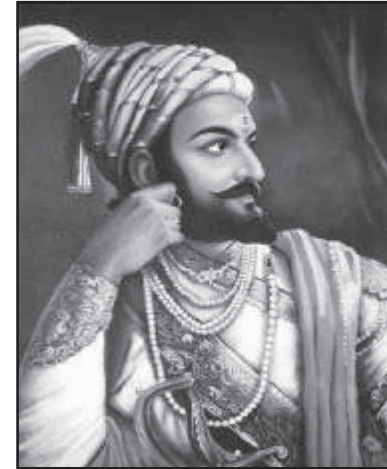
- Born in 1504 AD in the state of Rajasthan, India.
- Meera was born in a royal family, she became a Shri Krishna devotee from her childhood.
- At young age she was initiated by her guru on the path of Shri Krishna consciousness.

• In spite of objections from family members she continued her Shri Krishna bhakti, left physical body in 1550 and her soul merged with Krishna.

Meera bai's work:

- She was one of the greatest Shri Krishna devotees. Meera has become a synonym for Shri Krishna bhakti.
- She expressed her love for Shri Krishna in simple poems/bhajans. Even today these bhajans help devotees to get a glimpse of the Glories of Shri Krishna.
- Meera demonstrated that bhakti is beyond gender, birth, family status, and social hardships.

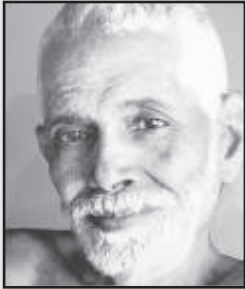
King Shivaji



- Shivaji was born in 1627 AD near Pune, India.
- At the age of 14 he started establishing his kingdom around Pune.
- He successfully resisted the tyranny of Mughals in 17th century and founded Independent Hindu Empire in India.

Shivaji's work:

- Those were dark days in India. Mughal invaders, established in North India, were sending their forces to capture other parts of India.
- With his valor, intelligence and diplomacy Shivaji fought the Mughals and established an independent Hindu empire that was a source of inspiration to all Hindus.
- Religious gurus proclaimed him “Chhatrapati”, the supreme ruler. Saint Samartha Ramdas sang in praise of Shivaji's rule: 'The land and its Dharma have been uplifted. A kingdom of bliss has arisen.’”



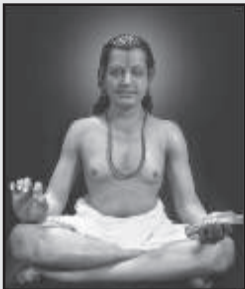
RAMAN MAHIRSHI



SWAMI RAMKRISHANA



SWAMI VIVEKANAND



SANT GYANESHWAR



SANT TUKARAM

5

Tirth-Sthaan / Mandir (Spiritual Centers/ Temples)

The Places of
Paramount Peace
and Centers of Learning