

The Great
Sages/Seers/Saints
of India.

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The Great Sages/Seers/Saints of India.

In this book we shall read about the life and works of some of the greatest sages, seers and saints of ancient India who have left an indelible mark on the sands of time and history. Eras have changed, the sand of time has shifted like the sand dunes of a desert, but the relevance of their teachings, the spiritual path shown by them, and the example of their exemplary lives are not only inspirational but also as pertinent today as they were centuries ago, and would be for centuries to come.

It is said in the Bhagwat-Gita, 4/7-8, that when true Dharma—which in essence is the eternal and truthful law governing the life of the human race as laid down by the ancient scriptures, and envisaged by wise and erudite ancient sages and seers as a path that would not only provide peace and harmony but also lead one to his final liberation and deliverance from the misery of birth and death so characteristic of this mortal and deluding world, the laws and codes of conduct that bring a man closer to God as the Lord represents all that is divine, righteous, auspicious, holy, noble and pious—is eclipsed and neglected by its followers who are overwhelmed by A-Dharma or villainy, the Lord God intervenes to restore the balance in favour of the Dharma. This task is accomplished by the Lord in two ways—either coming down to earth as an incarnation, or empowering some human being with the mystical powers of the Holy Spirit to do the job for the Lord God. We may call such men by many epithets—sages, seers, saints, prophets, teachers, preceptors, etc., but the intent and the aim is the same.

The following sages, seers and saints, numbering fifty, are included in this book:--

(1) Aaruni. (2) Angiras/Angira. (3) Atharva. (4) Arundhati. (5) Atri. (6) Agastya. (7) Bhargava. (8) Bharadwaj. (9) Bhrigu. (10) Bhusund. (11) Dattatreya. (12) Dadhichi. (13) Durvasa. (14) Dhanvantri. (15) Jada-bharat. (16) Janak (king). (17) Jamadagni. (18) Kapil. (19) Kashyap. (20) Maarkandeya. (21) Mudgal. (22) Marichi. (23) Narad. (24) Nachiketa. (25) Naamdev. (26) Pippalaad. (27) Prithu (king). (28) Paingal. (29) Ribhu and Nidagh. (30) Raivat (king). (31) Shukdeo. (32) Surdas. (33) Shaunak. (34) Shaakalya. (35) Sanat-kumar. (36) Sankriti. (37) Satyakaam. (38) Samvartak. (39) Shewtketu. (40) Shandilya. (41) Shankaracharya/Shankara. (42) Tukaram. (43) Veda Vyas. (44) Vashistha. (45) Vaamdeo. (46) Vaalkhilya. (47) Vishwakshen. (48) Valmiki. (49) Vishwamitra. (50) Yagyawalkya.

Now, let us read about them one by one.

(1) **Aaruni**—He was the son of sage Arun Anupveshi, and belonged to the kingdom of Panchaal. He is one of the more important sages mentioned in the Upanishads. He was the father of another great sage named Shwetketu and had taught his own son the profoundly esoteric secrets of that by knowing which all that is unknown becomes known. [Refer Chandogya Upanishad of the Sam Veda tradition, Canto 6.]

He was a disciple of the sage Dhaumya. He was such a faithful and obedient disciple that once when his teacher had asked him to stop the water that had breached the embankments of his field during a heavy downpour, Aaruni lay down on the ground himself to block the breach as all his other efforts to stop the leakage had failed. The Guru (teacher) Dhaumya was exceedingly pleased at his devotion to duty, his sincerity and obedience, and therefore he blessed him that he would acquire all knowledge even without studying them formally, that he would get immense renown, glory and majesty, and that he would be especially blessed by the Lord and accepted as his devotee. It is since then that Aaruni became famous as 'Uddyakak'—one who fastened or bound the embankment.

He had participated in the great metaphysical debate held in the court of the wise and enlightened king Janak of Videha in which sage Yagyavalkya had defeated all the assembled Brahmins. Aaruni had himself asked Yagyavalkya a question about who the Antaryaami (the one who resides in one's inner self and knows everything, even one's secret thoughts) was, and the latter replied this in a comprehensive manner. [Refer Brihad Aranyak Upanishad of the Shukla Yajur Veda tradition, Canto 3, Brahman 6.]

He was very humble and readily acknowledged his limited knowledge of the fathomless unknown. This is proved by the fact that he had no second thoughts in requesting king Pravaahan, the son of king Jaivali, to teach him the 'Panch Agni Vidya' or the metaphysical knowledge about the five holy Fires. [Refer—Chandogya Upanishad of the Sam Veda tradition, Canto 5, sections 3-10; Brihad Aranyak Upanishad of the Shukla Yajur Veda tradition, Canto 6, Brahman 2.]

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that he was one of the great souls who had acquired a spiritual stature equivalent to the Gods as a result of wearing the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice.

(2) **Angiras/Angira**— This sage was associated with the branch of ancient sages who adored and worshipped the sacred Fire as a manifestation of the Supreme Being. A number of Vedic hymns are attributed to him. He is the sage who first started the ancient tradition of 'fire worship', was the first sacrificer and the forefather of sacred rituals. He had achieved such great mastery of the fire element that he could replace the Fire God and take over his duties during rituals if the latter did not oblige the worshipper. The Purans describe him variously as being the mental-born son of Brahma, the creator, and as having sprung forth from the sacrificial fire of the Varun God (the Water God; also sometimes referred to as the Sun because the latter is responsible for rains).

He is believed to have four wives who were actually personified eclectic virtues that he possessed rather than any physical woman—Vasuddhaa (personified absolute purity), Shraddhaa (personified faith and conviction), Svadhaa (personified self realisation and self restraint) and Sati (personified chastity and immaculacy). Brishaspati, the moral preceptor of the Gods, was one of his sons. The Pittars (the Spirits of dead ancestors) are also believed to be his sons. His daughters are the following—Raka, Sinivaalli, Kuhu which are actually phases of the moon rather than any physical lass.

He is lauded as the great teacher of Brahm Vidya, the metaphysical knowledge of Brahm, the supreme transcendental cosmic Absolute. This explains why he is associated with such prime and incorruptible elements of Nature as fire and light—the former is the great universal purifier and the infuser of life in this creation, while the latter is

synonymous with truth, enlightenment, knowledge, erudition and wisdom. Being self-realised and a titan amongst the great sage of his time who initiated the tradition of worship of fire and light, he is regarded as an embodiment of illumination, and this is why he is visualised as being associated with illuminated objects in the dark sky, such as the planet Jupiter and a star in the constellation Ursa Major.

Being an exalted sage and seer, he is regarded as being one of the ‘Saptarishis’—the great seven Rishis of the first Manvantara (the age or era of Manu, the first Male of creation).

The disciples of Angira adopted his name as their surname or title, and hence came to be known as ‘Aangiras’—the descendants of Angira. They were Kshatriyas (the warrior class) by birth, but Brahmins by vocation and practice. They were said to be experts in sacerdotal laws, performance of occult practices such as magic and holding traditional rites.

Angira is credited with authoring the book of Law, called Angiras Smriti, and a book on Astronomy. The Angiras Smriti is a short book having 151 verses and deals mainly with repentance of sins.

Sage Angira was the younger brother of sage Atharva who was the eldest son of Brahma. Brahma had taught the great metaphysical knowledge called Brahm Vidya, the knowledge that enlightens the creature about the supreme Brahm who is the ultimate Absolute Truth, the Reality and pure conscious cosmic Soul of creation, first to Atharva, and then Atharva had taught it to his brother Angira—refer Mundak Upanishad of Atharva Veda, Mundak (Canto) 1, section 1, verse no. 2. These two brothers are credited with starting the practice of worship of the Fire God in the form of the sacred fire of the fire sacrifice as well as other forms of the fire as worshipped by different sections of the society.

Since he was the worshipper of the Fire God, it is natural for him to worship the Sun God as a manifestation not only of the supreme Brahm but also of the Fire God. The hymns dedicated to the Sun God as contained in the Surya Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, which is the seventh Upanishad of this Veda, is attributed jointly to sages Angira and Atharva. Refer verse no. 1 of Surya Upanishad.

(3) **Atharva**— Sage Atharva is the ancient sage who first revealed the fourth Veda called after his name, i.e. the Atharva Veda. He was the son of Brahma, the creator, according to Vedic mythology. He first brought down fire from the heaven to earth, and hence was the first sage to have propagated the worship of the sacred fire. The word ‘athar’ is the absolute word for the fire element, and hence this sage was named ‘Atharvan’ to commemorate this auspicious deed of his. He made the supreme Fire God, who is synonymous with the dynamic powers of the Supreme Being called Brahm, make this earth as his habitat, thereby paving the way for the forthcoming generations to utilise the stupendous powers and potentials of this fire element in practical terms here on earth itself. Since he brought the fire down on earth, he was also the first to initiate the process of worship of this element, both in its sublime form as the Fire God and its more tangible and gross form as the sacred fire worshipped during formal ritual of the fire sacrifice as well as in other informal forms as done by various sections of society in their daily lives. In fact, sage Atharva was considered as the Fire manifested, so pure and holy he was.

When he brought the Fire God in the form of the sacred fire from the heaven, he offered Soma (the extract of a herb called Som and used as a holy and sanctified liquid-offering meant to be offered to the Gods for their eternal life and sustenance) to him to please him and to show respect to this God who was now the guest of honour for Atharvan. In order to please him further while offering Soma to him, the sage chanted the hymns that he had learned from his father, the creator Brahma. This started the practice of offering of Soma to the sacred fire during the ritual of the fire sacrifice along with the chanting of hymns of the Atharva Veda.

According to the Purans, his earthly wife was Shanti, the daughter of Kardama Prajapati. He is regarded as a personification of the Fire God, and is often invoked in conjunction with another great sage named Angiras (who was another son of Brahma). In this form he is called 'Atharvangiras' (Atharvan + Angiras) and is regarded as the father of the Fire God to commemorate the fact that these two sages are responsible for the honour and exalted position that the Fire God occupies in the pantheon of Gods, and also the fact that they were responsible for propagating the worship of the fire as the most holy and the most sacred form of worship of the Supreme Being.

According to Mundakopanishad of Atharva Veda, Mundak 1, section 1, verse no. 1, Atharva is the eldest of the six mental-born sons of Brahma. Brahma had first taught him the best metaphysical knowledge called Brahm Vidya, and Atharva had later taught it to Angiras, his younger brother and first disciple (Mundakopanishad, 1/1/2). The descendents of Atharva came to be known as Atharvaan, and those of Angira as Aangiras. One of the many important sages preached by sage Atharva was Shandilya/Shandilya, son of sage Shandila, and this teaching is contained in an Upanishad called the 'Shandilya Upanishad' dedicated to sage Shandilya to commemorate this great occasion. This is the fourteenth Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition and deals with Yoga and Brahm-realisation.

Since sage Atharva had started the practice of worship of the Fire God in the form of the sacred fire of the fire sacrifice and had used the initial Mantras taught to him by his father Brahma, the Mantra of this Veda came to be known after him as 'Atharvaa', and since his brother Angira had carried forward this practice started by his older brother by actually invoking these Mantras during formal sacrifices held from time to time after the first exercise, the Mantras came to be known after both the brothers 'Atharvaangiras'.

The Mantras of the Atharva Veda which were initially pronounced by sage Atharva came to be known after him as 'Atharvaa', and those by the two brothers jointly as 'Atharvaangiras'.

According to Mahabharat, the great epic related to Lord Krishna penned by sage Veda Vyas, Atharva had searched out the fire concealed in the ocean (Mahabharat, Vanparva, 222).

Some of the Upanishads taught by sage Atharva are the following—Atharva Veda's Prashna Upanishad, Mundak Upanishad, Atharva Shikha Upanishad and Shandilya Upanishad—all belonging to the Atharva Veda tradition.

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(4) **Arundhati**— Arundhati was also known as Akshamala and Urjaa. She was the most erudite, sagacious and wise wife of sage Vashistha, the moral preceptor, guide and teacher for the line of kings of Ayodhya in which Lord Vishnu manifested himself as the famous incarnated divinity known as Lord Ram around whom the well known epic Ramayan is built. She was the daughter of Prajapati Kardama and his wife Devahuti. Sage Atri's wife Anusuiya was her sister, and sage Kapil was her brother. Her famous son was sage Shakti. She was a preacher and a well known scholar of the scriptures in her own right, and was no less enlightened than her husband Vashistha.

Her glory and virtues have been immortalized by believing that one of the distant stars is her manifestation, and this star is named after her as 'Arundhati Nakshatra'. It is the star called Alcor belonging to the Great Bear group. It is a very dim star and rarely visible, but its importance lies in the fact that all newly wed Hindu couples are obliged to view it as it is considered auspicious and a bestower of good fortunes to them. Since it is poorly visible to the uninitiated, the couple's priest gradually guides them to it by first pointing to the brighter stars nearby and then gradually guiding them to this star. This process is called 'Arundhati Darshan Nyaaya'. It has great symbolic value—because it implies going from the gross to the subtle, from something that is very evident and appears to be the real thing but isn't to something that is not so evident but is indeed the real thing, from the known to the unknown. In philosophy it implies arriving at a definite conclusion and reaching one's sought-after goal by using logic, intelligent deductions and analysis of all available information.

Ancient scholars honoured Arundhati and acknowledged her superiority in wisdom, knowledge and erudition by calling her Saraswati, the patron Goddess of wisdom, erudition, speech and knowledge. In other words, she was a living image of all the virtues that this Goddess Saraswati was famous for; she personified Saraswati. The Yog Kundali Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda, in its Canto 1, verse no. 9 mentions this fact.

(5) **Atri**— Sage Atri is an ancient sage credited with the composition of the 5th Mandal of the Rig Veda Samhita. His name appears in other places in the Rig Veda Samhita also (10/137/4 for instance). His disciples assumed his name as their surname and came to be known as Aatreyas.

Sage Atri is classified as a 'Maharishi' because he was one of the senior and the most exalted sages of his time. He is listed as a member of the Sapta-rishis, the cluster of seven celestial sages. Therefore, according to mythology, he is also a member of the Sapta Rishi Mandal, or the cluster of seven stars known as the Great Bear.

He is said to be one of the ten Manas-putras or mental born sons of the creator Brahma. Therefore, he was one of the Prajapatis or progenitors of mankind also. He is said to have given protection to the Sun God against the demon Svarbhaanu who caused the solar eclipse by composing a 'fourth' hymn against the curse of the eclipse, the other three being the usual liturgy of prayers offered during the eclipse to save the Sun God from this curse. He is said to be chief priest of the five ancient tribes of Vedic period settlers called the Panch-janas. When he was tortured by the demons, he was rescued by the Ashwini-kumars.

Atri's wife was the famous hermitress named Anusuiya (meaning one who has no jealousy against anyone). She was the daughter of Kardama Prajapati and a stellar instance of chastity and virtuousness as a wife and a hermitress. According to mythological accounts, sage Atri and his chaste wife Anusuyia were childless, and having a desire to have a son they prayed and did severe penance. All the three gods of the Hindu Trinity, i.e. Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer, and Shiva the concluder appeared before the couple and requested them to ask for a boon. Upon the couple's request, all the three Gods became their sons. Brahma became the sage known as Chandra representing the Moon God, Vishnu became the wise and enlightened sage Dattatreya, and Shiva became the angry sage Durvasa.

During his forest sojourn, Lord Ram had visited him in the Dandakaaranya forest where the sage preached him the nuances of Dharma (Ramanya by Valmiki, Aranyakand, 117). He was an authority on Dharma (tenets of righteousness, probity and propriety) and has been quoted in the Manusmriti (3/16) and the epic Mahabharata (in its Anushaashan Parva, 65/1).

A separate text called the 'Atreya Dharma Shastra' is attributed to him. It has nine chapters that deal with Daan (charitable donations and gifts), Japa (prayers) and Tapa (austerity and penances). Other texts attributed to him are the 'Atri Smriti' and the 'Atri Samhita'. The latter has roughly 400 verses and deals with the principles of Dharma.

The Ram Uttar Tapini Upanishad, Canto 4 was revealed as an answer that sage Yagyavalkya gave to sage Atri when the latter approached the former to enquire about the secrets of the Atma. Incorporated in this answer is the importance of Kashi (Varanasi) as the Avimukta Kshetra—i.e. the place on earth that provides spiritual Mukti to the dying person.

(6) **Agastya**— Sage Agastya is a renowned sage who had composed several of the hymns of the Rig Veda, e.g. Rig Veda Sanhita, 1/166-191. He is known as a 'Brahm-rishi' or a celestial sage tracing his origin to the creator Brahma.

He was born to sage Pulastya and his wife Havirbhuk. During this birth, his other brother was sage Visrawaa. It is also believed that in the Swayambhu Manvantar (age of Manu named Swambhu), he was born as the son of sage Pulastya, but in that birth he was named Dattoli.

According to another version, he was the son of Mitra and Varuna. In this version, he was born in a jar or pitcher known as 'Kumbha'. Hence, he is also known as Kumbhaja (born out of a Kumbha), Kumbhodbhava (rising out of a Kumbha), Kalasi-suta (son born from a Kalas or a pitcher or jar). During this birth, his twin brother was sage Vashistha, the great sage who was the court priest of the kingdom of Ayodhya where Lord Ram was the king.

His wife was a princess of the kingdom of Vidharva, and her name was Lopaamudraa, also known as Kaaveri. The sage had a son whose name was Drudhaasya, also known as Idhmavaaha.

His chief disciple was Agniveshya.

Sage Agastya did severe Tapa and had vast knowledge. He is said to have destroyed the two demons named Ilvala and Vaataapi. The sage had stunted the growth of Mt. Vindhya which was growing and expanding endlessly so much so as to obstruct the light of the sun.

Once, when Indra had killed the demon Vrittaasur, other demons named 'Kaaleya' managed to escape and they hid themselves under the water of the ocean. From there they began terrorizing the sages and seers. They stayed under water during daytime and came out at night to torment and devour these sages, and generally cause nuisance and havoc all around. These demons had not spared even such renowned sages of the time as Vashistha, Chyavan and Bharadwaj, because the demons attacked their hermitages and killed the sages and seers who lived there. It was then that the Gods, led by their king Indra, requested sage Agastya to somehow expose the demons. At this, the sage had scooped up the water of the ocean in a cup made by joining the two palms of his hands and had drunk the water of the ocean in one gulp so as to expose the demons. The Gods were then able to destroy them. Some of the demons however managed to escape and hid themselves in the nether world. This is how the demon race survived then. However, when the ocean was completely dried up it created another problem for the world because countless marine creatures begin to suffer and die. Besides this, the ocean was the largest natural reservoir of water on earth. So the Gods requested sage Agastya to refill it. The sage replied that the water has been digested in his stomach, but he can oblige the Gods by reproducing the ocean in the form of urine. That is the reason, according to this legendary story of the Purans, why the ocean is salty and sour—because it is the urine of sage Agastya.

This fact, that the ocean is sour and salty because it is the urine of sage Agastya, is explicitly narrated in the *Anand Ramayan* (purported to have been written by sage Valmiki), in its Vilaas Kand (Chapter), ninth Sarga (Canto), verse nos. 18-24 where Sita explains to Lopaamudraa, the wife of sage Agastya, why Sri Ram had constructed the bridge in order to cross the ocean to reach Lanka. She explained that the Lord did not ask the sage to dry up the ocean once again by drinking its water because it would be unthinkable to ask the sage to drink his own urine. Even if the sage had actually drunk the water, the Lord would be heaped with the ignominy of being so selfish that he made a Brahmin drink his own urine so that his purpose is served. The Lord did not swim across the ocean because it would be insulting and extremely demeaning for the Lord to swim in urine, and it would also be improper for him to step across a Brahmin's urine because it is to be regarded as holy as the urine of a cow.

There is a legendary story how once sage Agastya had converted king Nahush as a serpent. The story goes that once Indra, the king of Gods, was demoted from his exalted stature due to the curse of killing some Brahmins, and king Nahush had taken his place. Nahush lustfully eyed the consort of Indra, named Indrani. To punish him, Brihaspati, the moral preceptor of Gods, devised a stratagem by which Indrani requested Nahush to come to her riding a palanquin that was never used by anyone earlier. Overcome and blinded by passions, Nahush forgot everything about propriety and probity, and he summoned all the great sages and seers of the time to act as carriers or bearers of his palanquin. Humble sages and seers did not mind because Nahush was now elevated to the stature of Indra, the king of Gods. Nahush was so eager to reach heaven as quickly as possible that he kept prodding these sages to walk faster. Enraged, astonished and peeved at this nonsense being perpetrated by the haughty king, sage Agastya had then cursed him to become a great and poisonous snake.

He lived in the Dandakaaranya forest when Lord Ram met him. The sage had then given some invincible divine weapons to the Lord which stood him in good stead during

the epic war of Lanka, as well as in overcoming the demons whom the Lord encountered and destroyed during his sojourn in the formidable forest.

The sage is said to have brought about reconciliation between Indra, the king of Gods, and Maruts, the Wind Gods.

A whole class of people came to be known after him, and in due course the term 'Agastya' became a title and sort of honour given to learned sages and seers who were experts in the philosophy and knowledge that sage Agastya was an expert in and had preached during his lifetime. The sage has been made immortal by finding a place amongst the brightest stars in the sky. He is identified with Canopus, which is the brightest star in the sky of south India. The Canopus has been named after this sage as 'Agastya', and seeing this star in the sky when the sun is in the middle of Virgo (Kanyaa) sign of the zodiac and worshipping him at night is regarded as an auspicious deed. This is a symbolic way of honouring the sage by elevating him to an exalted stature of a 'bright star' and recognizing his stellar qualities.

He is regarded as the one who had created the Tamil language of South India. He is accredited as being the author of several treatises on medicine, mysticism and magic. One of his books is the 'Agastya Sanhita' which elaborately deals with ritualistic forms of worship.

It is said that once sage Agastya and the noble king named Shankha had a divine vision of Lord Vishnu at the banks of river Swami-pushkarni.

(7) **Bhargava**— Sage Bhargava finds mention first in the Rig Veda as a great sage who was an expert in doing fire sacrifices using 'Som' or the nectar of bliss and happiness called ambrosia. That is why he is also known as 'Somahuti Bhargav', i.e. one who makes an offering of Som to the fire sacrifice as an oblation to the Gods (Rig Veda, 2/4/7). He is referred to in Yajur Veda, 11/70 and 12/43, and Sam Veda 94. Since this sage was born in the lineage of sage Bhrigu, he is also known as 'Bhargava', literally meaning one belonging to the line of Bhrigu or one who descended from sage Bhrigu. Sage Parashuram, who was born to mother Renuka and father Jamdagni, is especially referred to in the Purans as Bhargava, though all the sages who descended from Bhrigu are entitled to this title, which is a surname.

(8) **Bharadwaj**— Sage Bharadwaj is regarded as one of the seven celestial sages known as Sapta Rishis. Ironically, we find many ancient sages with this name, and therefore it is clear that this word was used more as a surname or title rather than the name of an individual sage or seer. Bharadwaj is regarded as a Vedic sage after whom a lineage of sages and seers of the highest order was established. His disciples assumed their teacher's name as their title, and came to be known as Bharadwajs.

Sage Bharadwaj Baarhasptya is the seer of several hymns of the Rig Veda, Mandal no. 6. He is the son of Brihaspati, the moral preceptor of the Gods. He was the father of Dronacharya of the Mahabharata who has taught Arjun the science of archery.

The epic Ramayana mentions one Bharadwaj who was the disciple of sage Valmiki and lived near the banks of river Ganges in Prayag, the pilgrim city known as Allahabad in modern India. It was at his advice that Lord Ram stayed at Chitrakoot during the first phase of his forest exile.

Sage Bharadwaj is credited with two great works—viz. Bharadwaj Shrauta-Sutras consisting of ten sections, and Bharadwaj Griha-Sutras.

The profound philosophy pertaining to the divine nature of Lord Ram and him being the Tarak Brahm himself personified is preached to sage Bharadwaj by sage Yagyavalkya in Ram Uttar Tapini Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, Canto nos. 2-3.

(9) **Bhrigu**— Sage Bhrigu is a well known sage and seer who appears in a number of Vedic and Purnaic works. His name ‘Bhrigu’ is derived from the root word ‘Bhrij’ or ‘Bhraaj’ which literally means to roast or burn, and therefore it could mean the sage, who was a fire sacrifice priest, had some mystical powers which allowed him to kindle the altar fire. According to mythological history, the patron God of lightening, Lord Maatarishwan, brought the celestial lightening down to earth and taught three priests the art of kindling the sacred altar fire using the Aranis (‘the fire sticks’ used to kindle fire by vigorous rubbing together). These three priests were the Bhrigu, the Angiras, and the Atharvan.

Sage Bhrigu has been described as the ‘Manas Putra’ of Brahma, the creator. [That is, Bhrigu was born as the son of Brahma because the latter wished in his mind and heart, the ‘Mana’, to have a son, a ‘Putra’, rather than the usual process by which a son is born, i.e. the physical process of procreation by intercourse.]

He is also stated elsewhere as being the son of Indra (the king of Gods). The Taittiriya Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda tradition, in its Valli 3, Anuvak 1 describes him as ‘Bhrgu Vaaruni’, i.e. the son of Varun (the Water God). He was the father of Laxmi, the divine consort of Vishnu the sustainer and protector of creation. That is why Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is also known as Bhargavi, the daughter of Bhargava, or Bhrigu. In other births he is regarded as the father of Shukracharya, the moral preceptor of the Demons. He is also said to be the father of sages like Chavana.

He was one of the ancient sages after whom a lineage was established—and his descendents assumed his name as their surname or title. It is ‘Bhargava’ or ‘Bhrigu’. Some well known names of sages who followed him in this lineage are sages Jamdagni and Parashuram.

He once tested the Trinity Gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) and determined that Vishnu is the best amongst them and alone deserves worship. He is one of the four sages (the others being Marichi, Atri and Kashyap) who had elaborately described the Vakhaanas Aagam followed by some Vaishnav sects (followers of Vishnu worship).

He performed severe austerity and penance at a place called Bhrigu Kaccha located on the banks of river Narmada where it merges with the Arabian Sea. It is situated in the Broach area of Gujrat state of western India.

He is credited with composing the tome of astrology and horoscopes known as ‘Bhrigu Sanhita’. It is said to contain a data base of all possible horoscopes that can be created by considering all possible permutations and combinations of the nine planets and twelve zodiac signs.

The third chapter, called Valli no. 3, of the famous Taittiriya Upanishad of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition is revealed by Varun to Bhrigu when the latter approached his father Varun to ask him the method by which Brahm can be realised.

(10) **Bhusund/Kaagbhusund**— He was a great devotee of Lord Ram in the form of a crow. His life is presented in the epic Ramcharit Manas written by the great poet-sage Goswami Tulsidas, in its 7th Kanda (Chapter), from Doha no. 105 to 125.

Earlier in his previous lives he was a human being. He used to stay in Ayodhya, the capital city of Lord Ram and was a great devotee of the Lord. But time became unfavourable for him and due to misfortunes that befell him he went to Ujjain, a famous pilgrim site. There he used to worship Lord Shiva and was given the Lord's Mantra by some Brahmin. Bhusund used to repeat this Mantra of Lord Shiva in a temple. Once, the Guru summoned him and advised that the reward of worshipping Lord Shiva is to have steady and unflinching devotion for Lord Ram, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This did not go down well with Bhusund who thought that the Guru is misleading him and causing an insult to Shiva. So, once when his Guru arrived in the temple where Bhusund was meditating upon Shiva with the relevant Mantra, he did not show due respect to the Guru. This audacity and irreverence annoyed Lord Shiva and he cursed him to go to the worst type of hell and be born as a reptile (a serpent). The merciful Guru intervened on behalf of Bhusund and pleaded with Shiva to forgive him. At his intercession, Shiva blessed Bhusund that though he would have to be born as low forms of life to suffer for his misdeed, he would always be wise and enlightened amongst all such life forms; Gyan would always stand him in good stead, and as a result he would be elevated to a higher birth each time he was born again to progress rapidly in the evolutionary hierarchy to finally become a human once again. As a human he would become a Brahmin, the highest stature in this form.

As a result of this incident Bhusund became a serpent, and subsequently had to take birth in many low life forms. Finally he became a Brahmin. He was so much inherently devoted to Lord Ram that even as a child he used to enact incidents from the Lord's life on earth. The learned father's repeated attempts to teach him in the traditional method of education that was in vogue for learned Brahmins failed to enthuse the child Bhusund, and when the parents died he went to the forest as a mendicant. He roamed in the numerous hermitages of sages and seers, seeking knowledge of devotion for the Lord because he was charged with a strong longing to find his Lord Ram. By and by, he came to the hermitage of sage Lomas who used to live on the top of Mt. Meru. The sage, like so many previous sages, attempted to teach metaphysics and philosophy to the young Bhusund, but again the latter had scant attention for such things. While sage Lomas persistently espoused the cause of formless Divinity or the Nirguna Brahm, Bhusund persisted with his quest for the formed or Saguna Divinity in the person of Lord Ram, the form which was very dear and close to his heart. His persistence peeved the sage and he cursed him to be born as a crow, the scavenging bird. Bhusund took this not as a curse but as a blessing of his Lord Ram. The sage too repented at his anger and was very moved by the innocence of Bhusund. He relented and reassured Bhusund that though he would have to become a crow as result of the curse but he would be the wisest bird in creation. The sage gave him the Mantra of Lord Ram. He kept Bhusund in his hermitage for some time and taught him the story of Ram, called the Ramayan. The sage divulged the secret that this divine story was revealed to him by Lord Shiva himself. He also blessed Bhusund that he would live as long as he wished, and death would not affect him; he would die only when he wished. The hermitage where Bhusund would establish himself would be glorified and no ignorance would ever come within one Yojan (roughly

equal to 8 or 16 miles according to different measures) of it. Immediately there was a voice from the heaven which endorsed the sage's blessing and confirmed that Bhusund was indeed a great devotee of the Lord.

Then Bhusund went to Mt. Neel in the northern Himalayan ranges and established his hermitage there. It is here that once Garud, the legendary vehicle of Lord Vishnu, had gone for enlightenment on the advice of none other but Lord Shiva himself when he was overcome with delusions about the true nature of Lord Ram. At that time, Bhusund had already spent seven hundred and twenty Kalpas¹ worshipping and meditating upon Lord Ram. Whenever Lord Ram took birth as a human in each Treta Yug of the celestial cycle of four Yugs, Bhusund would go and visit the Lord to play with the child Ram.

The Brahmins 1-6 of the *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition is revealed as a result of sage Bhusund asking Lord Kalagnirudra (one of the divine forms of Lord Shiva) about the secrets of the sacred ash called Bhasma, and about the knowledge that would give Mukti or spiritual liberation and deliverance to the creature.

[Note—¹1 *Kalpa* is equivalent to 1 day in the creator Brahma's total life span of 100 years. Each Kalpa consists of 1000 four-Yug cycles, called the 'Chatur Yugs'. The visible creation's one life-span consisting of this four-Yog cycle called the 'Chatur Yugs' is this one day of Brahma. At the end of this Chatur Yug, there would be dissolution or the so-called 'dooms-day' when everything would be submerged in water. Then the next phase of life consisting of the next four-Yug cycle would start.]

There is another sage Bhusund known by the name of *Jabal Bhusund*—According to *Bhasma Jabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, Canto 1, paragraph no. 1 opening lines, Bhusund is also known as 'Jabal Bhusund' because he was a disciple of the great sage Jabal/Jaabaal and took up the name of his Guru (moral preceptor, teacher and guide) as his surname. In this Upanishad named after him, the sage Jabal Bhusund approached Lord Shiva and asked the latter to fully enlighten him about the 'Bhasma' (the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice), what are its usage, along with the complete metaphysical and spiritual importance and significance of Bhasma which enables the wearer to obtain Mukti (liberation and deliverance).

(11) **Dattatreya**— Lord Dattatreya is a fractional incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the supreme Lord of creation in his cosmic form as the Viraat Purush from whom the rest of the creation, including the creator Brahma himself, was created.

The word 'Dattatreya' means 'one who was given to Atri'. It also means 'the form of the Trinity Gods which gives or bestows or grants boons to his devotees'.

According to mythological accounts, sage Atri and his chaste wife Anusuyia were childless, and having a desire to have a son they prayed and did severe penance. All the three gods of the Hindu Trinity, i.e. Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer, and Shiva the concluder appeared before the couple and requested them to ask for a boon. Upon the couple's request, all the three Gods became their sons. Brahma became the sage known as Chandra representing the Moon God, Vishnu became the wise and enlightened sage Dattatreya, and Shiva became the angry sage Durvasa.

The word 'Dattatreya' has two parts—'Datta' and 'Treya'. The first half 'Datta' refers to the Lord who gives boons, and the second part 'Treya' refers to something that has three dimensions.

This latter part ‘Treyā’ again has the following meanings—(1) It refers to Lord Shiva who has three eyes, and hence called ‘Trineta’, because Shiva is also known as ‘Maheshwar’, the great Lord by which epithet the Supreme Being is honoured (refer Canto 3, section 2, verse no. 5-6 of Shandilya Upanishad). (ii) It refers to the supreme transcendental Brahm which has three forms known as Sakal, Nishkal and Sakal-Nishkal which incorporates in their ambit the entire creation, both the visible and the non-visible, the gross and the subtle (refer Canto 3, section 1, verse nos. 2-6 of Shandilya Upanishad).

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that Dattatreya was one of the great ascetics who were known as ‘Paramhans’, showing that he was extremely wise, erudite, enlightened, self-realised and Brahm-realised besides being exemplarily detached and dispassionate towards this world and its material objects. He was renunciation personified.

The *Shandilya Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition endorses this episode with a slight change in its Canto 3, section 2, verse nos. 7-8 wherein it is said that the Supreme Being himself revealed in the form of sage Atri. Now let us see what it says—

“Verse no. 7 = [Sage Shandilya asked—] ‘Why is it (Brahm) known as Lord Dattatreya?’ [Refer last stanzas of verse no. 6 of section 1 of Canto 3 of this Upanishad.] (7).

“Verse no. 8= [Sage Atharvaa replied—] ‘It is because sage Atri did very severe Tapa (austerity and penance) to wish for a son. Pleased by his sincerity and devotion, the splendorous and self-illuminated ‘Bhagwan’ (Lord God; the Supreme Being) blessed the sage and offered himself as his son. Thereafter, the Lord himself revealed as a son to sage Atri and his wife Anusuiya. In this way he (the Lord) became famous as Lord Dattatreya (8).”

According to another version of this story, the three Gods decided to check the chastity vows of the wife of Atri and came disguised to cheat on her. Anusuiya was no ordinary lady, and realizing their ill intentions she transformed them into her son with three heads and six arms, each head standing for one of the Gods.

Dattatreya is counted amongst the seven celestial sages called the Sapta Rishis. He is said to have created the Soma Plant whose juice, called the ‘Som Rasa’, is used during fire sacrifices as an offering to Gods.

Iconographically, Dattatreya is shown with three heads and six arms holding the emblems of the three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, viz. a water pot, a conch and a discus, and a trident respectively. In fact, this great sage is regarded as a combined revelation of the Trinity Gods, i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, in as much as he possessed the virtues of them all.

A bull representing Dharma (righteousness) is depicted as his mount. Four dogs representing the four Vedas are his constant companion.

The concept of Dattatreya is an attempt by ancient sages and seers to harmonize the three cults of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva that had created an artificial and unwarranted rift in the edifice of religious unity amongst the Hindus.

An entire Upanishad titled ‘Dattatreya Upanishad’ is dedicated to this great sage, and it appears in the Atharva Veda tradition as its 30th Upanishad.

Dattatreya is also credited with expounding the great characteristics of Avadhut Sanyas in Avadhut Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda tradition when he taught them to sage Sankriti.

The Jabal Darshan Upanishad of the Sam Veda tradition is also credited to Lord Dattatreya in which he has preached in detail the 8-fold path of Yoga, called the Ashtang Yoga, to Sankriti, his disciple.

He had also preached Prahalad, the great devotee of Lord Vishnu, about the eclectic state of Avadhut Sanyasi in the form of a huge python. He had taught King Alarka about Tattva Gyan (the fundamental knowledge of spiritual Truth and the quintessential philosophy of metaphysics).

Being a great Sanyasi himself, he was endowed with stupendous mystical powers called Siddhis. One of the sects of Siddhas regard him as their patron sage.

Sage Dattatreya had made twenty four Gurus or teachers. The remarkable thing is that none of these twenty four Gurus was a human being—he had learnt even from the elements (earth, water, fire, air, sky), animals (elephant, deer), birds (pigeon, hawk), reptiles (snake, worm), insects (moth, bee, spider), a fish, the moon and the sun, a child, a girl, a prostitute, an arrow-smith etc. These are very interesting episodes, and are being briefly summarized here.

The following are Lord Dattatreya's *twenty four Gurus (teachers)* and what he had learnt from them. (1) Earth—the earth sustain all sorts of life and nourishes each creature, even those who virtually eat into her bosom by mercilessly and ruthlessly exploit her. The human race is the greatest exploiter of the earth by digging into her bowls and extracting whatever it can to satisfy its selfish vested interests without bothering for the future of earth much like a vulture digging its beak and extracting last bit of flesh from a cadaver. The earth is very magnanimous and forgiving. It goes on giving and giving without expecting any thing in return, and does not complain like a loving mother who would rather prefer to die than deny her child whatever she can afford. The greatness is that still she does not complain! (2) Air—the wind moves everywhere, visits all kinds of places but never gets attached to any place or thing. The air is free from all attachments, relations and bonding though it touches all and pervades everywhere. It purifies everything and gives life to all in the form of 'Pran' or breath without any discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, race, creed etc. It gives life to a friend as much as it gives life to one's enemy. The air taught him to be totally detached in his dealings with the world inspite of living in it and helping it by infusing fresh breath of knowledge and hope to the best of his ability. (3) Sky or Akash—the space of the sky accommodates everything and everyone in its vast bosom. This taught him to accept and accommodate all in life, but remain uninvolved in or unattached with them just like the sky which harbours uncountable number of things in its vast bosom but remains totally indifferent to them and unaffected by them. (4) Water—it is refreshing and cool and nourishing. No life is possible without water, and it is regarded as the only universal elixir of life. This taught him to sustain all and be soothing, comforting and refreshing for all the creatures. Like the inherent quality of water to act as the universal soother and lubricant of this creation, to cool down the heat and provide solace and succour to tormented creature, a true saint should also act as the one whose company gives happiness and joys to all, whose company provides the much-needed spiritual solace and succour to all. (5) Fire—it gives light, heat and energy. It is upwardly mobile—as is evident from the direction the flame of a raging fire takes. It is all-purifying on the one hand, and burns to ashes whatever impurity is put into it on the other hand. This taught him to welcome everything like the fire does, but purify them before finally accepting anything, and to reduce to ashes all

that is impure and tainting that would affect the purity of the Atma. (6) Moon—it appears to wax and wane, but really it remains the same. This taught him the fact that the world and the body undergo innumerable changes but the true ‘self’ always remains unchanging, steady, uniform and immutable. (7) Sun—it is the ‘eye’ of the world and gives the latter light, heat and energy in a selfless and unbiased manner. The sun illuminates all but does not need anything to illuminate its own self, and neither does it get tainted by the dark and gloomy things it illuminates. On the contrary, the darkness of all things vanishes as soon as the brilliant light of the sun falls upon them. The glory of the sun is so overwhelming that no form of gloom and darkness can ever survive in its presence. This taught him to illuminate the world and remove its darkness of ignorance by the light of knowledge and wisdom while remaining immune himself to the darkening and spiritually denigrating affects that are caused by this deluding and corrupt world. (8) Pigeon—this is the typical story of a householder’s life. The parent pigeons went out in search of food for their young one day when a bird-catcher spread his nets and caught the offspring. When the parents returned, the mother pigeon saw the plight of the young one and jumped into the net. Then the male pigeon too jumps into the net because he cannot live without the family. The bird-catcher was overjoyed. This taught him that worldly attachments only lead to one’s ruin and downfall. (9) Python—it stays at one place and swallows any creature that happens to pass that way. He would not forage for food but wait for it to come to him. This taught him to be contented with whatever comes his way. (10) Ocean—The ocean is a vast and fathomless reservoir of water but it continues to continuously receive waters from all the rivers that incessantly pour their contents into it. In spite of this, the ocean never overflows with water, and it never breaks self-imposed restrictions of not submerging the earth. This taught the sage that no matter how much knowledge and wisdom one possesses or thinks that he has, he must keep on learning throughout his life; he must have an open and receptive mind that welcomes all sorts of knowledge. Again, as all the waters being poured into the ocean from different rivers having their sources in myriad of places becoming one and homogenous with the water of the ocean, the wise and enlightened man should accept knowledge from all sources but extract their essence and convert them all into one uniform body of knowledge that would not act as a distraction or a cause of perplexity for him but would only add to his profound knowledge and wisdom. Like the ocean remaining within its boundaries, the wise man is one who never shows off his knowledge, or becomes haughty and arrogant because of his mystical powers and knowledge. The ocean harbours a complete marine eco-system in spite of its harsh salty waters—this taught the sage to be benevolent, compassionate, magnanimous and kind towards all in spite of the harsh conditions in which he might be forced to live; he must give shelter to all who come seeking refuge with him, and take care of his dependants to the best of his ability. Like the ocean, he too must be self-contented and aloof from the world, because the ocean never expects any water from the rivers, and is unconcerned with what is happening on land. (11) Moth—it gets attracted to the fire, and as a result of his infatuation with the fire and its light it gets caught and burnt. This taught him not to be tempted by the beauty and charm, the fascinating colours and magnificent forms of this artificial world of sense objects, for they would trap him and eventually drain him of all his energy and vitality, leading to his destruction. Any sort of worldly attachments would sear and scorch his soul and rob it of its peace and bliss. The attractions of the world are like the trap that would scorch his

spirit by forcing it to lead a lifetime pursuing the sense objects of the world which keep on burning him with desires and expectations that are never fully fulfilled. Jealousy, hatred, frustration, animosity, malice and greed are its natural attendants. After having spent a lifetime in realizing the material objects of the world, a day would finally come when his worn out and descript body would die. Like the fire of the flame burning the moth, the attachments with this world and desire for it would also burn the man. (12) Honey Bee—it collects nectar from numerous flowers and converts them into one homogenous honey. This taught him to imbibe knowledge from whatever source available, and then convert it into one body of knowledge that is ‘truthful’. A wise man is one who draws the essence, the nectar, from all sources of knowledge, and then deduces the ‘truth’ from it which would of any value for him like the ‘honey’ produced from the nectar drawn by the bee from various flowers. It also taught him that a mendicant should also collect a little bit of food from different households instead of relying on one house. (13) Elephant—it is notorious for the sense of touch. During the mating season they rub against each other. This weakness is exploited by hunters to catch them. This weakness taught the sage that he should be wary of the pleasures obtained by touching sensual things in this world. (15) Honey Gatherer—he stealthily takes away all the honey so painstakingly collected by the honey-bee over a long period of time involving immense labour. This taught him two things—it is useless to hoard things as one day death would snatch everything away, and second it is futile to hoard without sharing things with others because one day they are bound to be snatched away from us. (15) Deer—it is by nature attracted to music, a weakness exploited by the hunter to trap it. So, one should be wary of pleasant and sweet sounds emanating from this world because poison is more often than not laced with sugar. (16) Fish—it is attracted to the hook and got caught due to its desire to eat the bait. So, the fish taught him to have control over the taste buds of his tongue. (17) Pingala—she was a prostitute. One day the saint, during his wanderings, came to take rest under the tree on a street where she lived. He watched her eagerly waiting for a customer who never turned up. She finally gave up and went to sleep with the realization that if she had spent so much time invoking the Lord present in her own bosom, she would not have to wait for the Lord so long. This taught the saint that disappointments come to us when we expect something from this world and then hope that it would provide it to us. It is therefore an exercise in futility to expect the world to give real comfort and joy to anyone. The real happiness lies inside. (18) The Kurara Bird (a species of Hawk; an Osprey)—the bird had a small piece of flesh in its beak. Seeing it, other larger and stronger birds pounced on the unsuspecting poor Kurara bird. Distraught, the Kurara suddenly realised that the cause of its torments is the piece of meat, and so it dropped it instantly from its beak. The other birds swooped on the meat and stopped pursuing the Kurara. This incident taught the saint that if one clings on to material things in this world, no matter how desirable they are, they would never let him live in peace. It is better to drop them at the earliest; it is better to drop all worldly attachments, and instead devote time in the search of the Truth of life. (19) Child—a child becomes so engrossed in his playthings that he forgets hunger and other bodily needs. Children fight with each other during the course of playing, but soon forget everything. This taught him to remain engrossed in contemplation and meditation on the ‘self’ and enjoy this state of existence like a child remaining engrossed in its playthings and being oblivious to anything else around him in this world. A wise ascetic should also be as deeply

submerged in meditation as this child playing with his toys so much so that he becomes totally oblivious of the surrounding world around him. He should be immune to the world as well as even to one's own bodily problems. A wise man must be innocent like a child—he might get angry at others but never takes anything to heart. The child plays with toys, but suddenly throws them away and wants something new. Likewise, the wise man enjoys the world, but he never gets hooked to it at the emotional and sentimental plane. (20) A Girl—some people had come to see the girl with a proposal of marriage. She went inside the house to prepare food for them. In the course of grinding spices her bangles clashed with each other and made a disturbing noise. She removed them one by one until one remained—then there was no noise. This taught him that when the mind is distracted by so many things, the man never finds peace. So the best way to concentrate the mind is to remove all extraneous distractions in the form of numerous paths and philosophies, and instead focus on one path that would lead him to the ultimate Truth preached by the Upanishads, the Truth that is absolute, uniform and immutable. (21) An Arrow-smith—he was so engrossed in his single-pointed devotion to his work of preparing the arrows and giving them the right contours, aerodynamic shape and sharpness to their tip that he was unaware that the king's entourage was passing by. This taught the saint the importance of single-minded pursuit of one's goal. (22) Snake—it never makes its own hole and lives in holes made by nature or other animals. A true saint should realise that the Atma has no body of its own but lives on borrowed bodies during its sojourn in this world. Again, the snake effortlessly leaves its dead cuticle, and this taught the sage that the Atma would similarly leave this body one day at the time of the body's death, without any effort, pain or attachment to the older body, to find a new abode for its self. Hence, one should not be unduly concerned about the gross body which is bound to be abandoned one day. Another thing that the sage learnt was that the body is not one's true identity as the 'truthful self'; it is merely a temporary habitat for the 'self'. This 'self' is the pure consciousness known as the Atma that would move to another body when the latter becomes too old and useless for it just like the snake leaving its dead cuticle and moving out into a new skin. (23) Spider—it creates a web from its own body, moves around it, and then swallows it. Similarly, the supreme Lord has created this world, sustains it, and finally retracts it into himself. Further, the spider creates the web and remains trapped in it much like the creature who creates this artificial world by his mind and then remains trapped in it for life. And finally (24) Worm—a wasp caught hold of a worm and kept it in a hole. The wasp kept humming around this worm that was so terrified of the wasp and continuously subjected to this humming that ultimately it became wasp-like itself. Similarly, when a man concentrates upon something continuously, whether willingly or unwillingly, he would become one like the subject on which he contemplates. If he contemplates upon the world, he would become one like other mortal ignorant creatures, and if he contemplates upon something that is sublime and divine, he would become sublime and divine himself.

(12) **Dadhichi**— Sage Dadhichi was an ancient sage who willingly sacrificed his life to help the Gods win over the Demons. He was the son of sage Atharvan, the progenitor of the Atharva Veda and the first sage who initiated the tradition of Fire worship, and his wife Shanti. The well known sage Pippalaad was his son. Dadhichi is a synonym for the highest ideals of self-sacrifice for the general good.

It so happened that once the Gods deposited all their weapons with him for safe keeping, promising to return at some fixed time. When they failed to show up and upon observing that the weapons had begun to rust, Dadhichi dissolved them in water and drank the solution. The ingredients of the weapons got deposited in his bones, especially the back bone. Thus, his bones became extremely strong. When the Gods came asking for their weapons, the sage told them what he had done, whereupon the Gods requested him to give them his backbone from which an invincible weapon can be crafted by which their formidable enemy, the demon king Vrittaasur, could be slayed. Dadhichi conceded and gave them his backbone from which was made Indra's invincible weapon called the Vajra (thunder-bolt).

He did not die, but used the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice to remain alive in his hermitage. This fact is established in the *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, Brahman 6, verse no. 4.

(13) **Durvasa**— The word 'Druvasa' literally means one who is difficult to live with or cope with. He had a great propensity for cursing at the least annoyance, and was an embodiment of anger and wrath. On the other hand, when he was pleased, he could bestow the greatest of boons.

He is said to be one of the twenty four Rishis of the famous Gayatri Mantra.

According to Gopal Uttar Tapini Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition, verse no. 2, sage Durvasa is regarded as an incarnation of Lord Rudra, the angry form of Lord Shiva. In spite of this one blight on his character as being ruthlessly short-tempered, he was nevertheless a highly enlightened, erudite, self-and-Brahm-realised sage of the highest and the greatest order. In fact, he is credited with expounding the profound metaphysical concepts that form the backbone of the teachings of the Upanishads in the form of his discourse given to the Gopis, or the milkmaids who accompanied Lord Krishna during his childhood days in Vrindavan, in the Gopal Uttar Tapini Upanishad which is the 27th Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition.

The Brihajjabal Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that he was one of the great ascetics who were honoured by the title of being 'Paramhans'—i.e. an ascetic who was highly self-realised, enlightened and wise as well as one who was totally detached from all things concerning this mundane world and life.

He was the third son of sage Atri and his devout wife Anusuiya, born as a fraction or part incarnation of Rudra, the angry form of Lord Shiva. This was the probable reason of his inheriting the genes of vehement anger. He is regarded as a human incarnation of Shiva's arrow by which he had destroyed the three cities called the Tripuras which belonged to the demon sons of Taarakaasur.

Some of the well known incidents related to him are briefly the following—(i) He was so pleased with Kunti, the daughter of king Kuntibhoja, for her devoted service that he gave a most powerful and potent Mantra or a secret formula by which she could invite any God she wished and get a son from him. It is believed that the five Pandavas and the hundred Kaurvas around whom the great epic story of Mahabharat is built were begotten by her as a result of this boon she had got. (ii) On the advice of sage Durvasa, Lord Krishna had smeared his own body, except the feet, with the left-over of the sweet pudding eaten by the sage. As a result of this, Krishna's entire body, except the feet, had become impenetrable by any weapon, and this proved to be a great boon during the epic

war of Mahabharat. (iii) He completed the half done sacrifice of king Shvetaki and enabled him to ascend to heaven. (iv) Being of a legendary short temper, once he had shown unwarranted anger against king Ambarisha which back-fired on him and he had to run for cover when the Sudershan Chakra, the discus weapon of Lord Vishnu, pursued him in retribution. Ultimately, it was the generous king who himself had to rescue him from this curse. (v) According to the legendary story of the epic Ramayan, sage Durvasa was responsible for Lord Ram abandoning his brother Laxman and the latter's ultimate demise which resulted in the final curtains being drawn on the story of Ramayana when Lord Ram, unable to bear the pain of his separation from his beloved brother who was so devoted, obedient and faithful to him, left this world by taking Mahasamadhi on the banks of the river Saryu. He was followed by the rest of his family members and the subject of the kingdom of Ayodhya who decided to accompany the Lord as it was too much an ordeal for them all to live in this mortal world in the absence of their beloved Lord Sri Ram. Hence, Durvasa got the infamous reputation of being the cause of unnecessary agony and pain to so many innocent souls in this world.

(14) **Dhanvantri**— He was the Medicine Man of Gods and the one who discovered the curative powers of herbs. He is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu to provide the cure in the form of herbal remedies from the innumerable diseases that the creatures would suffer from in this world. In his role as the sustainer, protector and nourisher of this creation, this role of Vishnu was very vital as otherwise the creatures would suffer and die of so many natural diseases that the agenda of the Supreme Being to make the creation self-sustained and self-propagating would be defeated.

He emerged from the ocean when it was churned at the beginning of creation in the search for Amrit (or the elixir of life) along with other wealth or assets that are necessary to sustain and develop a pleasurable and comfortable life on earth. The pot of Amrit was held by him towards the end of this churning. Since he was a fractional incarnation of Lord Vishnu, he too had four arms and a glowing complexion that was dark with the bluish tinge of the sky.

The kings of Gods, Indra, appointed him as the celestial physician of Gods.

Once, severe disease swept through earth. Then Indra requested Dhanvantari to manifest himself to eliminate the suffering of the creature. Dhanvantari was thus born as Divodas, the king of Kashi (Varanasi in the present day India). He was a great botanist and a naturalist, and compiled a Materia Medica of herbs. The science of healing with plants and shrubs is called Aurveda, and is given a status of a minor Veda. The etymology of the word 'Ayurveda' means 'the knowledge (Veda) that makes life enjoyable, disease free and enhances its span and utility (Ayu)'.

There are other names of Dhanvantari—viz. Bhishak and Vaidya. While Dhanvanatri is an expert in 300 medicines, Bhishak is in 200, and Vaidya in only 100 medicines.

The medical treatises attributed to Dhanvantari are the following—Chikitsa Dipika, Baal-Chikitsa (medicines of children), Dhanvantari-Nighantu, Vaidya-Bhaskarodaye, and Ayurveda Saravali (the key note or essential principles of the science of Ayurveda).

(15) **Jada-bharat**— There was an ancient king named Bharat who was very devout, valorous, influential and renowned. India is also known as ‘Bhaarat’ after him. Towards the end of his life, he became infatuated with a fawn, as a result of which he had to take a birth again as a deer. Upon death, he was re-born in a Brahmin’s household as ‘Jadbharat’. His father was a learned man who read the Vedas and belonged to the clan of seers named after the great ancient sage Aangiras. [Aangiras was the sage who first started the ancient tradition of ‘fire worship’, was the first sacrificer and the forefather of sacred rituals. He had achieved such great mastery of the fire element that he could replace the Fire God and take over his duties during rituals if the latter did not oblige the worshipper. The Purans describe him variously as being the mental-born son of Brahma, the creator, and as having sprung forth from the sacrificial fire of the Varun God (the Water God; also sometimes referred to as the Sun because the latter is responsible for rains).]

Jadbharat had remembered his past life and how attachment to a fawn had resulted in his demotion to being born as a deer in the next life. So in this new life as a human he was extra cautious and remained aloof from and dispassionate towards the temptations of all charming things of this material world and its sense objects to avoid falling in the trap of Moha (attachments) once again. To avoid the world he intentionally pretended to be crazy, insane, intoxicated, wild and possessed by some spirit, appearing to be blind and deaf, and remaining moody, unpredictable and disinterested in everything. This helped him to avoid any contact with society as people avoided him like the plague, and this allowed him to roam alone like a mendicant who is out of his mind. In fact, the term ‘Jada’ means one who is utterly stupid, foolish and insane.

His learned father tried his best to teach him the Mantras and the Vedas, but in spite of his best of efforts he did not succeed in teaching Jadbharat even the basic Gayatri Mantra. In due course of time, his father died, and his mother handed him and his sister over to his step-mother for custody before she died herself. After his father’s death, his step-brothers did not care for him. Jadbharat continued to pretend to be crazy, answering people in most uncivilized manner whenever they taunted him for his stupidity or illiterate behaviour. He did whatever people told him to do, without bothering for the consequences, and ate whatever was available without paying heed to whether it was worthy of eating or not. He never ate for taste or satisfaction of the body. He was equally immune to praise and insult, to comfort and suffering—because he had understood, as the result of divine grace, without being formally taught on the subject, that his ‘true self’ is not the body but the pure conscious Atma that is eternally blissful and contented, that is immune to insults and praises, and that never suffers, enjoys, takes a birth and dies.

He always remained naked whether it was hot, cold, rainy or windy; this made his body strong, resilient, stern and robust; it became immune to the affects of weathers and seasons. He neither took a bath nor scrubbed his body; this made him sport a most unconventional, dirty and unkempt look.

When his half brothers found him absolutely useless, and to prevent him from working in other people’s fields for free for food in return, they assigned him the task of looking after the embankments in their own field to avoid embarrassment. Unaffected and unconcerned, Jadbharat did whatever he was told to do, and ate whatever was given to him to eat, without giving a second thought to it, without complaining or fussing.

A miraculous incident is related to his life. Once it so happened that a chieftain of some tribe wished to make a human sacrifice to please some deity to beget a son. The man who was to be sacrificed escaped, and so his assistants caught hold of Jadbharat when they were searching for a replacement man. They found him standing in the dead of night on one leg, protecting the field against wild animals. They took him away without any resistance, then bathed, dressed, fed and prepared him for being sacrificed before the idol of the deity. But as soon as the priest raised the sword to swoop down upon him, the deity revealed itself and snatched the weapon from his hand, and cut off the heads of all the people who had wished to sacrifice Jadbharat!

There is a story which describes his high wisdom and level of enlightenment. Once, king Rahugana of the kingdom of Sindhu-sauvir was going to sage Kapil for hearing discourses. On the banks of river Ikshumati, the palanquin bearers needed a man to help them carry the weight, and they engaged Jadbharat because of his strong body. But as they walked, Jadbharat avoided stepping upon any insect on the way, resulting in his steps mismatching those of the other bearers. This resulted in the carriage swaying or rocking violently from side to side. Naturally, this annoyed the king who severely admonished the palanquin bearers. They told him that the cause of the rocking of the palanquin and the resultant inconvenience to the king was due to Jadbharat, at which the latter was at the receiving end of the king's wrath. Jadbharat listened to the king with exemplary patience, and in return answered the king in such a way that the latter realised that he was no ordinary human but some highly self-realised and enlightened sage in that disguise. So the king immediately knelt down in front of him, and received the sage's blessings along with his teachings on subjects pertaining to spiritualism and metaphysics.

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that he was one of the great souls who had acquired a spiritual stature equivalent to the Gods as a result of wearing the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice.

(16) **Janak (king)**—King Janak was regarded as the most enlightened and a self-realised dispassionate king of his times who was well-versed in and had a deep knowledge of metaphysics and principles of the Upanishads. He used to hold regular conclaves or assemblies where great sages and seers of the time were invited to discuss, debate and preach on spiritual and metaphysical subjects. Huge prizes were given to the winner. The Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, Canto 3, Brahman 1-9 of the Shukla Yajur Veda tradition mention one such great congregation where great sages and seers had participated, and where sage Yagyawalkya was finally declared the undisputed winner, while Canto 4, Brahman 1-4 describe how Janak had accepted Yagyawalkya as his teacher and asked the latter to preach him.

Another place where sage Yagyawalkya teaches king Janak is the Brihajjabal Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition. In its Brahman (Canto) 7, verse nos. 1-4, the king is taught on the spiritual importance of the sacred ash known as the Bhasma. Verse no. 5 of this Brahman 7 says that king Janak accompanied sage Pippallaad to the divine abode of Prajapati Brahma, the creator, to learn more about the Bhasma. This shows that Janak was a contemporary of sage Pippallaad.

The level of Janak's learning and erudition is evident from another incident when sage Shukdeo, the enlightened son of sage Veda Vyas who had classified the Vedas, compiled the Upanishads, and written the voluminous Purans, was advised by his learned

father to go to king Janak to learn profound principles of metaphysics and spiritualism. Janak had tested Shukdeo's eligibility, aptitude and competence by making him wait for prolonged time before even giving him a hearing. The entire episode along with the profound teachings of Janak forms the subject matter of the text of Canto 2 of the Mahopanishad of the Sam Veda tradition.

In the Ithihas-Purans, especially the one dealing with Lord Ram such as the epic Ramayana, he is shown as being the father of Sita, the divine consort of Lord Ram. He is called 'Videha' because he was so highly enlightened and self-realised that he knew the truth of the teaching of the Upanishads that the 'self' is not the gross body but the pure consciousness Atma, the soul, the spirit. This led him to be totally detached and disinterested in his body and what it does. He was so unconcerned about the body that for all practical purposes the body did not exist for him—i.e. he was 'one without a body', or a 'Videha'.

(17) **Jamadagni**—Sage Jamadagni/Jamdagni was one of the seven celestial sages known as the Sapta-rishis. The line of sages who followed him adopted his name as their surname, i.e. they were known as 'Jamdagni' also. He was the son of sage Richika, and his mother was princess Satyavati.

His wife was Renuka, the daughter of king Prasenjit. He had five sons, out of whom sage Parashuram is the most famous and is considered a partial incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Parashuram was his youngest son and most favoured by him. The story goes that once he doubted the infidelity of his wife Renuka and therefore asked his sons to behead her. The four sons refused and were cursed by him, but Parashuram did as told. The father was pleased and asked Parashuram to request for a boon, upon which the latter requested that his mother be revived, his brothers be pardoned, and Jamdagni should discard his angry temperament. The father agreed to all.

Jamdagni was killed by Shursena, the son of Kaartavirya-Arjuna, because the sage had refused to hand over the celestial cow known as Kapila to him. Extremely peeved by the Kshatriya race to which this king belonged, Parashuram vowed to eliminate the entire race from the surface of the earth as a revenge for the killing of his father. This was the reason why Parashuram had fought and killed thousands of Kshatriya to avenge the killing of his father by Kaartavirya-Arjuna.

(18) **Kapil**— He was the celebrated sage who is regarded as the fifth incarnation of Lord Vishnu (Bhagavata, 1/3; 3/24). He is compared to Lord Krishna in Bhagavata (10/26). He was the brother-in-law of sage Vashistha, being the brother of his wife Arundhati, and the only son of sage Kardama and his wife Devahuti. He taught even his mother spiritual wisdom in Bhagavata, and hence this part of this scripture is called 'Kapil Gita' in which the sage has expounded upon the philosophies of Sankhya Shastra, Ashtanga Yoga (the eight-fold path of Yoga) and Bhakti-yoga (the path of devotion for and submission to the Lord) (3/25-33).

Sage Kapil is however renowned for one of the six schools of Indian philosophies known as Sankhya Shastra.

(19) **Kashyap**— Sage Kashyap has been mentioned in the Rig Veda (9/114/2) as well as in Valmiki Ramayan (Baal Kand, cantos 70 and 75), Mahabharat (Adiparva, 63), Vishnu Puran (1/15 and 1/21), and Bhaagvata (4/1).

Kashyap was the grandson of the creator Brahma, and the son of sage Marichi, one of the mental-born sons of the creator Brahma. His mother was Kalaa who was the daughter of sage Kardama and his wife Devahuti.

Kashyap had married the thirteen daughters of Prajapati Daksha. Their names and progenies are listed in Vishnu Puran, Chapter 1, Canto 15, verse nos. 124-142, and Canto 21, verse nos. 4-28.

The names of his wives are Aditi, Diti, Danu, Arishtaa, Sursaa, Khasaa, Surbhi, Vintaa, Taamraa, Krodhvashaa, Eeraa, Kadru and Muni.

Hence, Kashyap became the father of the entire living world that eventually populated the earth, the heavens and the subterranean worlds. He was the father of the Gods (Devas) through his wife Aditi, the Asuras (demons) through his wife Diti, the Daityas and Daanavas (cruel ogres, giants) from his wife Danu, the Birds from his wife Tamraa's six daughters, Siddhas (mystics and demi-gods having magical powers), Gandharvas (celestial musicians) through his wife Arishtaa, Yakshas (a semi-god who guards the treasury of Kuber, the treasurer of Gods) through his wife Khashaa, the Nagas (literally the serpents representing the reptiles, but meaning all the animals or those humans who worshipped such creatures) from his wife Kadru, the Dragons who could fly from his wife Sursaa, the Pishaachs (blood drinking vampires; evil spirits which eat excreta; the devil, the fiend, the Satan) from his wife Krodhvashaa, the Apsaras (celestial damsels) from his wife Muni—in short, the whole living world. In other words, the entire living species on earth can trace its lineage to sage Kashyap.

He is one of the four sages (the others being Marichi, Atri and Bhrigu) who had elaborately described the Vakhaanas Aagam followed by some Vaishnav sects (followers of Vishnu worship).

Vaalkhilyas once helped sage Kashyap perform his fire sacrifice successfully, but became tired. When Indra, the king of Gods, saw them weary, he laughed at them, thereby incurring their wrath who cursed him that he would be punished for his impertinence and arrogance by Garud, the legendary vehicle of Lord Vishnu.

Sage Kashyap and his eldest and senior wife Aditi did severe penance to have Lord Vishnu as their son, and this resulted in their being re-born as king Dasrath and his queen Kaushlaya in the Treta Yug when Lord Vishnu incarnated as Lord Ram to become their son. The same couple became Vasudev and Devaki to whom Lord Vishnu was born as Lord Krishna in the Dwapar Yug.

Sage Kashyap wrote the 'Kashyap Sanhita', a treatise on the usual topics of Dharma—such as daily duties, offering of oblations and rituals to Spirits, ceremonial impurities, repentance for sins etc.

Another book titled 'Kashyap Smriti' is the law book on Dharma, and lists the duties of a householder, expiation for polluting public places like temples, wells and ponds, rules for mourning for dead ones, purification rites etc.

(20) **Maarkandeya**— Sage Maarkandey was the son of sage Maarkandu. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva, the patron God of death, so much so that when death approached him personified as Kaal when the sage was yet quite young because destiny had it that he

would die still when young, he clung to the Shiva Lingam (the image of Shiva) with the greatest of devotion, surrender and urgency that comes with one facing certain death. Lord Shiva appeared and prevented Yam, the God of death from tying him in his snare and taking him away. This incident is referred to in Sharva Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, verse no. 15. The Lord blessed him with a virtual eternal life, blessing him that he would live for another 14 Kalpas (1 Kalpa = 1 day of Brahma or roughly 4.32 billion human years).

His magnum opus is the ‘Maarkandey Puran’. He had also edited and abridged the Manusmriti, the code of life and conduct as laid by the first human named Manu to regulate society and act as a constitution and manual for ready reference for the forthcoming human race, into eight thousand verses, and passed it to sage Bhargava. His reference comes in the Mahabharat epic when he approaches the Pandavas and taught them the principles of Dharma (code of righteousness, auspiciousness, probity, propriety and nobility). He was the one who had enlightened Yudisthira that Krishna was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu (Vanapurva, 189). In the same Mahabharat, he preaches the celestial sage Narad the laws of Dharma (Anushaasan-purva, 50-62).

(21) **Mudgal**— Sage Mudgal is the sage who had pronounced the Rig Veda Sukta 10/102. His wife was known as Mudgalaani. He was a great devotee sage of Lord Vishnu and his incarnation Lord Ram. He had practiced severe Tapa (austerity and penance) at the holy cite known as Kurukshetra. He was the father of Ahilya, the wife of sage Gautam, and of King Divodas. He was a great host and served his guests well. He understood the importance of Moksha, the final emancipation and salvation of the soul, so much so that he had once spurned an offer of the Gods to go to heaven. This is because those who went to heaven had to return to this world once the good affects of their good deeds wore off; it was not complete deliverance.

He had performed a great sacrifice near the bridge built across the ocean by Lord Ram in order to reach Lanka where the Lord had slayed the demon king Ravana and liberated Sita from his captivity. The epic war fought there is narrated in the ancient classic known as Ramayana. Lord Vishnu was so pleased at this performance of the sacrifice by the sage that he created a huge pond of pure milk secreted by the cow of Gods, known as the Kamdhenu cow, for the purpose of offering oblations in this sacrifice. This pond is known as Kshir-tirtha or a pilgrim site which has the celestial milk in its pond in a symbolic manner.

One of the sub-Purans or Up-purans, known as ‘Mudgal-puran’, is named after him. It is dedicated chiefly to the narration of the nine main incarnations of Lord Ganapati, or Lord Ganesh who is the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati, and is the chief deity who is worshipped first during any religious ceremony or auspicious activity. This Up-puran was probably written between 900-1100 A.D. The nine incarnations of Ganapati mentioned in this sub-Puran are the following—Vakradanta, Ekdanta, Mahodar, Gajaanana, Lambodar, Vikat, Vighna-raaja, Dhumra-varna, and Yoga. Besides these nine incarnations, it also lists 23 more forms of Lord Ganesh.

The Mudgal Upanishad belonging to the Rig Veda tradition is also ascribed to this great sage. It is like a brief commentary on the ‘Purush Sukta’ of the Rig Veda, 10/7/90/1-16.

According to the Ram Rahasya Upanishad, Canto 1, verse no. 1 of the Atharva Veda tradition, he was one of the sages who had approached Hanuman, the wisest, the highly enlightened and the most dedicated devotee of Lord Ram, to enquire about the profound metaphysical philosophy related to the Lord.

(22) **Marichi**— Sage Marichi was one of the mental-born sons, called the ‘Manas-putras’, of the creator Brahma. That is, the creator simply decided that he wants to create him, and he just came into existence, without the natural biological process involved in birth of the rest of the members of this creation.

He is regarded as one of the Prajapatis, the progenitors of the human race. He is also one of the seven celestial sages known as the ‘Sapta-rishis’.

His wife was Kalaa, the daughter of sage Kardama who was also one of the Prajapatis. The famed sage Kashyap was Marichi’s son.

He is credited with writing one of the Smritis (law book; jurisprudence) in which he has laid down codes for daily routine to be observed by a Dwija (Brahmin), what constitutes Asaucha (ceremonial impurity), how to perform Shraadh (offerings to dead ancestors and Spirits), Prayaschitta (repentance for sins and their annulation), Vyavahaara (behaviour in secular life), laws governing property transaction etc.—which are universally respected and observed.

(23) **Narad**— The celestial sage Narad is said to be a manifestation of the Supreme Being’s Mana (mind and its thoughts, intentions, hopes, desires and wishes, as well as the heart and its emotions and sentiments). The Supreme Being implements his wishes and expresses his intentions and wishes by making Narad his spokesperson. Purans list uncountable instances when Narad has approached people—both the good and righteous as well as the demonic and unrighteous ones—to tell them the path best suited to them, and the wise ones treated this advise as the Lord’s wish while the unwise ones still benefited from it because Narad’s intention was always to turn a living being away from his sinful ways and lead him towards the good.

Since he is a personified Mana, he is as fickle, unstable and transient as the Mana—never staying at one place for more than a fleeting moment, always roaming here and there in the entire creation, having nothing to stop his path as he could go anywhere he wished. And the remarkable thing is that he was never unwelcome anywhere—even the demons welcomed him with the same respect as did the Gods.

It is believed that he is born in each Kalpa to carry out the wishes of the Supreme Being. [1 Kalpa is equivalent to 4.32 billion human years.] He was a Gandharva (a semi-God who is a celestial musician) named Upbarhan in the previous Kalpa. He was physically very charming and an expert musician. Once he showed his amorous intentions towards Urvashi, a celestial dancer, in the presence of Brahma the creator where he was supposed to show exemplary restraint, and this overt show of lust resulted in his being cursed by Brahma that he would become fallen and take birth in the mortal world as a Shudra (a low caste). So, he was born from a maid servant of low caste working as a devoted servant of a learned Brahmin. Under the constant companion of this great Brahmin, Narad developed noble and auspicious virtues in him even though he was a mere child of five years. He was very modest, devoted, pious, noble hearted and diligent.

Since he had the Lord's genes in him, his inclinations were more inclined towards the Spirit than the worldly charms of material sense objects which he detested from childhood. As luck would have it, once some wondering mendicants came to spend the four-month period of the rainy season in the hermitage of this Brahmin. Narad served them with great devotion. Impressed by his service and having some inner vision of his high spiritual stature and the spark of divinity that was lying hidden in him waiting for an opportune moment to leap up and shine through, they blessed him, taught him meditation and contemplation, besides initiating the child into the path of the Lord.

Thus, the dormant fire of renunciation and spiritual awareness was immediately ignited in Narad's little heart and he wished to take to Sanyas (a renunciate's life marked by constant wandering as a mendicant in search of the supreme bliss and Truth), but he did not wish to hurt his mother's emotions. But the Lord had other plans for him, and soon his wish was fulfilled when his loving mother died of snake bite while milking a cow. Instead of grieving at such a loss in human terms, the child Narad felt happy as if the last fetter was broken and he was liberated from worldly obligations.

He immediately headed north towards the mighty Himalaya Mountains to do severe Tapa (penance and austerity) to attain access to the Supreme Being. The little one walked on and on, and finally he was so tired and exhausted that when he saw a cool lake he drank water, ate fruits that he found there, and sat under the shadow of a tree and became lost in meditation. Lord Vishnu revealed himself in his four-arm form in his heart, but Narad was so thrilled and excited with this divine vision that he wished to see the Lord in practical terms with his physical eyes rather than the subtle eyes while he was in deep meditation. But as soon as he opened the eyes, the Lord vanished. Most sorry and overwhelmed with this loss, the child began to cry bitterly. Then a cosmic formless reverberating voice said—'Oh son! Your penance is accepted, and I do love you. Though I bless you with an eternal life and that your memory of me would never be erased, but you would not be able to see me with physical eyes in this world. So go back to the world and carry out my divine mandate for me. Become my messenger and go preach the path of my devotion and holy name to this world so that other unfortunate creatures also can get liberation and deliverance from the fetters in which they have bound themselves with no one to show them an easy and practical way out of their predicaments. Go and preach my message to such people in every corner of the earth; go and preach my devotion and let them have faith in my holy name. Your salvation would come naturally and automatically to you as an unasked reward.'

Narad turned back with this divine mandate of the Lord to be carried out just like the great Apostles of Lord Jesus Christ had went, on the Lord's instructions, to spread his message to the people on this earth. Henceforth, he wandered in the entire creation like a mendicant, with an Indian lute upon which he sang the Lord's glories and his divine name, spreading the divine message of the Lord's mercy, compassion, benevolence and love everywhere, attempting to turn everyone towards the Lord and away from this sinful and mortal world so that each individual creature could get his spiritual liberation and deliverance. Such are the ways of great and holy saints that instead of being selfish to seek his own liberation and deliverance from the Lord as the grant of a boon and letting the rest of the world go to hell, Narad chose to sacrifice his own life, liberation and deliverance at the altar of larger good of creation and to fulfill the wish of the Lord. Of course there is another twist to this tale—the Lord does not select everyone to carry on

his own divine agenda, and a soul who the Lord designates for this purpose is indeed the most favoured and lucky one—because the Emperor chooses only those upon whom he has utmost confidence to carry out his personal task. It is just like Jesus choosing his disciples and ordaining them the task of spreading his glorious Gospel of love and salvation.

Therefore, Narad, the apostle of the Supreme Being, is the most loved disciple of the Lord, and it is evidenced by the fact that he is the only saint who has unrestricted access to the abode of the Trinity Gods (Lord Vishnu the sustainer and protector of creation, Brahma the creator and Shiva the concluder of this creation) besides every nook and corner of creation without hindrance and even without seeking any previous permission and appointment from anyone, be it a God or a Demon or anybody else. Narad's visit was always for the host's long term good, so he was always welcome and revered.

When the time came and the age of the physical body ended, he left the mortal coil like a serpent leaves its cuticle and went to heaven to sing the Lord's holy and divine name in the presence of Brahma, the old patriarch of creation. At the end of the Kalpa, at the time of Doomsday, he merged and became one with Brahma, the creator.

When the new cycle of creation came into being, he was born again from the Mana (mind) of Brahma the creator after the Sankadi sages were born. That is why, in the present Kalpa, Narad is called the 'Manas Putra' of Brahma, i.e. the son born out of Brahma's mental powers or his wishes. With this heritage and gene running in his blood, it is natural that he is highly respected and regarded as one of the greatest devotees of Lord Vishnu who is the Supreme Being personified. It is from the navel of Lord Vishnu that Brahma, the creator of the visible world, was born atop a divine Lotus that emerged from it while he was reclining on the bed made of the coiled body of the legendary serpent named Seshnath who floated on the surface of the celestial ocean of milk called Kshirsagar.

Narad preached renunciation of this material world and an extreme sense of faith in and complete devotion for Lord Hari (Narayan, Vishnu, the Supreme Being). But this was against the process of creation, because if everyone followed the path preached by Narad and renounced the material world then the process of propagation of the world and its inhabitant creatures along with its development would come to a naught. So, when Narad preached renunciation and detachment from this material world of sense objects that was mortal, transient and never a giver of peace and happiness to the ten thousand mental sons who were created by Daksha Prajapati (the first male from whom the rest of the human race was born and who was assigned the task by Brahma to propagate creation) in order to propagate this human race, Narad obviously annoyed him. These sons were preached by Narad and they all became mendicants, renouncing their attachment with this life and all charms of the material world along with the desire to enjoy it, gratify their sense organs and remain entangled in affairs of this world. Daksha Prajapati was exasperated and he created another set of ten thousand sons. But when Narad again played spoil-sport, Daksha cursed him that Narad would have to remain on the move always and he would not be able to stay at one place for more than two 'Gharis'. [1 Ghari = 24 minutes. In practice the term means a very short period of time; a fleeting moment as small as batting an eyelid.] As a result of this curse, Narad became an ever-wandering mendicant. But this suited the divine mandate of the Lord—for now

Narad was forced to keep on the move and reach newer corners of the worldly and celestial realm to preach the Lord's message amongst the mortal creatures on earth and the Gods and Spirits in the heaven.

It is believed that Narad is immortal and is symbolic of the stupendous powers of a man's mind. The mind is ever-wandering like Narad, and the subtle message in the entire lore is that one should tame this restless mind and train it to turn away from this mortal engrossing material world and instead turn towards the Lord for finding permanent liberation and deliverance from this world. A wise mind would teach (preach) the aspirant about the futility of pursuing this artificial world, and instead seek ways of finding the Truth that gives eternity and brings to an end the endless litany of miseries and horrors, perplexities and confusions, restlessness and agitations that are invariably associated with un-truth, delusions and ignorance.

Narad was the most erudite and scholarly devotee of the Lord. No other sage or saint could match him in his scholarly acumen and profundity of wisdom (ref. Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 7, section 1, verse no. 2). Narad is also credited with the composition of the great Sutra (formula or key) called 'Narad Bhakti Sutra' which defines the eclectic principles and characteristics of the spiritual practice called Bhakti which is to have a profound and exemplary degree of devotion for and surrender to the Supreme Being. Narad himself epitomizes Bhakti at its most refined and developed form.

In Atharva Veda's *Narad Parivrajak Upanishad*, sage Narad has taught an assembly of sages the grand philosophy as well as the eclectic tenets of Sanyas, the life of total renunciation, detachment and dispassion, leading to one's spiritual liberation and deliverance.

The Atharva Veda's *Hayagriva Upanishad* has been revealed to sage Narad by Brahma the creator when the sage approached the latter with his quest for Brahm-Vidya, the knowledge of Brahm.

In *Garud Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, the creator Brahma has taught Narad the esoteric knowledge known as the 'Garud Vidya' which describes the secret Mantras pertaining to Garud, the divine mount of Lord Vishnu, as well as the Mantras which can help to counter the evil effects of all types of poisons arising from snake bites.

It was sage Narad who had told Valmiki the story of the Lord Ram which the latter penned down in the form of the epic *Ramayan* by sage Valmiki.

(24) **Nachiketa**— Nachiketa was the wise grandson of sage Vaajsrawa. The word 'Vaajsrawa' has two components—viz. 'Vaaj' meaning 'food', and 'Srawa' meaning 'fame spread by word of mouth'. Therefore, the name refers to a man whose fame had spread far and wide as someone who gave huge amounts of food as donation during fire sacrifices, or a man who has acquired great fame and glory as a result of donating food and feeding people during such ceremonies. He was also known by the name of Aaruni, and he belonged to the line of great sages coming down from the legendary sage Gautam.

His son was Uddyalak, and the grandson was Nachiketa who is the protagonist of the Katho-panishad belonging to the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition.

The word 'Nachiketa' meanwhile means one who is free from or untouched by all worldly delusions, ostentations and deceits. He had no attachments with the charms offered by the material world and its sense objects. So it was an appropriate name for the son because, as compared to his father, he was a wise, self-realised and enlightened

person from his birth much like the enlightened line of sages to which he belonged. His father, Uddyalak, was a miserly man who did a fire sacrifice and gave away old cows as donation, an event greatly resented by Nachiketa. Upon objection, Nachiketa was scolded by his father and disinherited. So he went to the Yam God, the god of death, and had a great metaphysical discussion with him which forms the basis of the famous Upanishad called Katho-panishad.

(25) **Naamdev**— Saint Namdev (1270-1320 A.D.) was one of the great poet-saints of India who propagated the doctrine of Bhakti through their devotional songs and poetry. He was also a musician which enabled him to sing the hymns that he composed. He was a native of the state of Maharashtra (like saint Tukaram), and a contemporary of saint Gyaneshwar (1275-1296 A.D.).

He was a firm believer and a practitioner of the path of Bhakti (devotion and love for the Lord God) as a means of spiritual liberation and enlightenment.

He was born on the 11th day of the bright lunar half of the month of Kaartika according to the Hindu calendar, also known as Prabodhini Ekadasi, which falls roughly in the month of November. He was the son of Daamaashet, a tailor, and his wife Gonnaai Bai.

His favoured deity was Lord Paduranga Vitthal, one of the forms of Lord Krishna most popular in Maharashtra. The depth and intensity of his devotion for the Lord can be judged by an incident from his early childhood. One day he was asked by his parents to take some milk to be offered to the nearby temple. Namdev was a mere child, and he did not understand that stone idols do not drink milk in the physical world; it is merely a symbolic gesture of offering to the Lord. So, when he found that the stone idol wasn't drinking milk from his hands, he banged his head against the pedestal of the statue to show his frustration. The Lord was extremely pleased at his sincerity and devotion, and so revealed himself before him and drank the milk.

Initially the parents thought that it was a prank, but when they witnessed the Lord actually drinking milk from the hands of Namdev, they gave him absolute freedom to pursue the path of devotion as he deems fit. Thus, Namdev chose to sing and pray to the Lord from an early life.

He went to stay in the holy town of Pandharpur where the temple of Lord Vitthal is located, and spent his time composing and singing devotional songs called Abhangas.

He was initiated by a saint named Visobaa Khechar. His mystical powers were revealed on more than one occasion. Once, while on a pilgrimage, he made the water of a deep well rise to the surface, and on another occasion he made the Shiva Lingam turn in the direction of his group which was singing some devotional songs at the back of the temple because the orthodox priests refused to allow them to sing the songs in front of the temple.

Like all other contemporary saints of his period, he advocated the path of Bhakti over the path of Gyan (knowledge) for obtaining spiritual enlightenment and bliss as well as liberation and deliverance. Eighty of his verses in the Abhangas are included in the Sikh holy book known as the Adi Granth.

(26) **Pippalaad**— Sage Pippalaad perhaps got his name because he might have been used to eating a lot of Pipal, the fruit of the Pipal tree (the Indian Fig—*ficus religiosa*) or a

kind of long pepper called by this name. He was a great teacher of metaphysics, a master of the doctrine of the Upanishads, and one of the greatest exponents of their philosophy. He has taught many sages and seers of the period, such as Skaakalya, in Panch Brahm Upanishad of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition wherein he describes the fundamental unity of creation and affirms that the five forms in which the Divinity exists are basically the revelation of the same Lord, and to the six sages Sukeshaa, Satyakam, Saurayayani, Kausalya, Bhargava and Kabandhi in the Prashna Upanishad of Atharva Veda tradition wherein he answers their six questions to their satisfaction. He was taught about the spiritual wisdom pertaining to the spiritual aspect of life after death by Nachiketa who had himself got this knowledge from Yam, the God of death, as narrated in Katha Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda. Pippalaad was present on the bed of arrows on which Bhishma, the legendary patriarch of the epic Mahabharat period, lay prior to his death when he taught wisdom to Yudhisthir. [Refer Mahabharat, Shanti Parva, 47/9.] This shows that Pippalaad was a contemporary sage of the Mahabharat period.

When the two facts—one, that the Panch Brahm Upanishad was preached by him to Shaakalya who had died in the court of king Janak during a debate with the great sage Yagyavalkya when the latter cursed him for being arrogant and haughty of his knowledge and showing irreverence and impertinence as narrated in Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, Canto 3, Brahmin 9, verse no. 26 of the Shukla Yajur Veda tradition, and Yagyavalkya's annoyance with him as is evident in the preceding verses—3/9/18, 25, and second, that Pippalaada was present in the Mahabharat war period that occurred in the later half of the third era called Dwapar, the era of Lord Krishna, it is easy to conclude that this sage had a very long life, easily straddling at least two eras, i.e. the Treta (Ram's era) and Dwapar (Krishna's era) if not three, i.e. Sat Yuga which was the first era, till Dwapar Yuga which was the third era.

It is believed that he was the son of Dadhichi and his wife Suvarka. The wife of Pippalaad was called Padmavati. His son was known after him as Pippalaadi, and he was taught by the great sage Jabal which forms the text of the Jabal Upanishad of the Sam Veda tradition. It is a legend that he had ordained Shani, the malefic God who casts evil eye, to spare children below 12 years.

The Padma Puran describes another sage with this name who had become very arrogant because of special powers that he had acquired due to Tapa (severe austerity and penance), but later he was chastised by the creator Brahma. [Refer Padma Puran, Chapters 60-62.]

It is narrated in the Brihajjabal Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 5, that he had accompanied the learned king Janak to the abode of Prajapati Brahma, the creator of this world inhabited by living beings, to learn about the importance of wearing the Tripundra, the three lines made from a paste of the sacred ash taken from the pit of the fire sacrifice and worn by all the devotees of Lord Shiva as his symbol. After that, Pippalaad went to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu the sustainer of this creation to know more about this Tripundra and its esoteric secrets, metaphysical significance and mystical powers as narrated in Brahman 7, verse no. 6, and then to Lord Kalagnirudra, the form of Lord Shiva himself who had first revealed this Upanishad to one sage Bhusund (Brahmans 1-6), to learn more about it as narrated in Brahman 7, verse nos. 6-7.

The Par Brahm Upanishad, which is the twentieth Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition, was revealed to sage Shaunak by sage Pippalaad. Verse no. 1 of this Upanishad, in its opening stanza, says that Pippalaad was born in the lineage of sage Angiras.

The name of sage Pippalaad appears in a number of other Upanishads as well—viz. Atharva Shikha, Kandika 1, verse no. 1; the Brihajjabal Upanishad, Brahman 7, verse nos. 5-7; the Prashna Upanishad, question (Canto) 1, verse no. 1.

(27) **Prithu (king)**— The story of Prithu is a narration of how Lord Vishnu actively takes part in making the earth self-sustaining for its inhabitant creatures, and how the Lord did this by manifesting as a great king to ensure that the creation revealed by him would not suffer for want of daily necessities of life.

In the race of Manu (the first Man) was a Prajapati (the father of a large clan) named Anga. He was married to Sunitha, the mentally-created daughter of Mritu (the God of death). From her he begot a son named Ven who was of a sinful nature, most pervert and an atheist. Sages were so annoyed at him that they killed him by employing the mystical power of their Tapa (penance and austerity). From his dead body they created another king named 'Prithu'.

Prithu was crowned Emperor of the whole earth. He was a wise king and an able administrator who organized the working of the state and established a system of government.

Once there was a great famine and he sternly warned the earth to produce food (crop) from the seeds sown and not to swallow them up, or face action. The earth was terrified and appeared before him as a cow. She apologized and asked him and others to milk her and get what they wanted. So, Prithu and other sages and seers milked her, and thus were produced the agricultural crops, the body of knowledge called the Vedas, the Soma juice for doing fire sacrifices and providing refreshment, the virtues of strength and vigour, music, offerings fit for making oblations to Gods and Spirits of dead ancestors, etc. Prithu also made the earth plain and livable, created villages and towns, provided protection from fears and dangers of all kinds to the earth's inhabitants, and established the tradition of doing fire sacrifices in order to honour the Yagya Purush who is none but Lord Vishnu.

In other words, the barren earth became productive and habitable, and Prithu did the first ground-breaking work and laid the first foundation of a complex infrastructure that would be eventually built on this earth to sustain the needs of increasing population and expansion of civilization that would eventually take place on the earth.

Hence, the earth came to be known as 'Prithivi'—the daughter of Emperor Prithu to commemorate his contribution to creation.

He performed a hundred Ashamedh Yagyas (Horse sacrifices). Towards the end of his life he preached his subjects and appointed his son Vijitaashwa on the throne. Then he went to the forest with his queen named Archi to do severe Tapa (austerity and penance) to attain Nirvana or final emancipation and salvation.

His story appears in Srimad Bhagvat, 4/15-23, and in Vishnu Puran, 1/13.

(28) **Paingal**— Sage Paingal was also known as 'Pingal Kaanva'. The sage was called Paingal probably because he was of a dark brown or tawny complexion as the word 'Pingal' refers to these shades of colour.

The Paingal Upanishad, which is the 16th Upanishad of the Shukla Yajur tradition, is ascribed to this sage, and it describes the esoteric secrets of the Kaivalya form of Mukti—i.e. the sort of spiritual liberation and deliverance whereby the soul does not have to take a birth again. Sage Paingal is also mentioned in the Rig Veda tradition's Kaushitaki Brahman Upanishad, Canto 2, verse no. 2 wherein it is affirmed that the 'Pran', the vital winds present in the creature's body that infuses life in it, is nothing but Brahm, the Supreme Being, in its form. In other words, Brahm gives life to the body of the creature by transforming himself as the Pran that makes the body, which is otherwise gross, inactive and dead, alive and active.

According to the Ram Rahasya Upanishad, Canto 1, verse no. 1 of the Atharva Veda tradition, he was one of the sages who had approached Hanuman, the wisest, the highly enlightened and the most dedicated devotee of Lord Ram, to enquire about the profound metaphysical philosophy related to the Lord.

(29) **Ribhu and Nidagh**— Sage Ribhu is said to be one of the several mind-born sons of the creator Brahma. With this gene running in his blood, he was by nature wise, enlightened and self-realised, but in order to conform to established traditions he took initiation from his elder brother Sanatkumar who was himself one of the mind-born sons of Brahma. Ribhu was renunciation personified, was unpretentious and free from all shortcomings and blemishes that tainted others in Brahma's creation. His only attire was his own skin, and he lived in a thatched hut.

It is believed that his first disciple was sage Nidagh who was the son of the great sage Pulastya. It so happened that once Ribhu, during his wanderings, came to the hermitage of Nidagh and saw that he was studying and chanting the hymns of the Vedas. Ribhu felt very pitiful for him and advised him that if one did not know or understand the essence of what the Vedas preach, if he did not come to know the Absolute and the Truth and become self-realised, then all this study is an exercise in futility. Thereafter Nidagh accepted his discipleship and learnt from sage Ribhu the intricacies of the esoteric knowledge of the Atma and Brahm.

Under the instructions of his Guru Ribhu, Nidagh accepted the life of a householder, married and established his hermitage on the banks of river Devika. After a long time, Ribhu remembered his disciple and wished to see him, and thus came to his hermitage. Nidagh could not recognize him, though he welcomed the guest with the greatest of respect and fed him. After meals, Nidagh asked Ribhu whether he was satisfied with the meal, who he was, where did he come from, and where he was going.

Then Ribhu preached him—'Oh son! I am not the body or the Pran (life forces living inside the body) that gets fed or feels quenched of hunger or thirst. The 'self' or the Atma is as eternal, infinite, all-pervading and omnipresent as the sky, so there is no question of it coming from anywhere and going anywhere. All these mundane aspects of creation—to be satisfied or not, to come and go—are related to the ever-changing 'untruth', so do not repost any trust and faith on such things that are transient, unsteady and fickle. Don't be wasting your precious life and time in delusions, hallucinating and swinging between this and that. Instead, become uniform and steady on the Truth which is itself uniform, steady, unchallengeable, unequivocal and irrefutable. Concentrate upon your Atma, the pure 'conscious self'.' Nidagh recognized his Guru, was overwhelmed with gratitude, and fell down on his august feet in surrender. This same idea was

elucidated by sage Durvasa to the Gopis (milkmaids who accompanied Lord Krishna in his childhood days at Vrindavan) that forms the text of the Gopal Uttar Tapini Upnaishad of the Atharva Veda tradition.

After another long spell of time, the Guru once again decided to visit his disciple. When Ribhu reached the hermitage he found there was a great procession passing on the road and Nidagh was waiting patiently to let the procession pass so that he can cross the road. On enquiry he told Ribhu—who he could not recognize again—that the king of Virpur was passing through. Ribhu wished to rekindle the fire of enlightenment in his disciple, so he asked Nidagh—‘Say, who is that king in this melee?’ Ribhu replied that he was sitting on the biggest elephant. Ribhu asked him to point out some characteristic feature so that he can distinguish between the king and the elephant from a distance. At this seemingly stupid and impertinent question, Nidagh pushed Ribhu down and mounted on his back, saying—‘Now, I am the king and you are that elephant’. The wise teacher was unperturbed, and asked to point out the difference between them—i.e. how has he (Nidagh) become a king, and how come the man he is riding upon has become an elephant. Shocked beyond belief, Nidagh suddenly realised that the man was no one else but his revered Guru Ribhu. He fell at the enlightened teacher’s feet and asked for forgiveness. Ever so merciful and kind as Ribhu was, he not only pardoned his disciple but preached him the fact that the external body is not the true identity of the creature, and that to recognize someone based on this physical gross feature is the most ignorant and stupid thing to do, something not expected from a so-called learned man of the Vedas. So, finally Nidagh realised the futility of studying the Vedas without understanding the principle enshrined in their tenets. Thereafter, Nidagh finally found his spiritual liberation and deliverance, and though he lived in this world like another man, but henceforth he lived as a ‘Jivan Mukta’—i.e. a person who is freed from the fetters of the world and the body inspite of living in this gross material world and having a physical body that is equally gross. Such a self-realised man is totally detached and unconcerned about both of them—i.e. the body as well as the world. When the proper time comes, such persons find ‘Videha Mukti’—i.e. they shed their mortal body even without being aware of it being shed, and merge their ‘self’ with the supreme Self, the cosmic Consciousness known as Brahm, never to take birth again. This is because at the instant enlightenment dawns upon them, they stop being associated with any of the deeds done by the body, and remain absolutely neutral. Therefore no consequences of deeds done and actions taken by them by their physical gross body accumulate as far as their true self is concerned, and they do not have to take a re-birth to go through the process of either enjoying or suffering from these consequences.

Coming back to the story of Ribhu, when this news reached Sanatkumar, the Guru of Ribhu, he was extremely pleased and impressed, and to commemorate this occasion and to immortalize this unique virtue of forgiveness, he added the first letter ‘Ksha’ (pronounced as a combined utterance of the letter ‘Ka’ and ‘Cha’) of the word ‘Kshamaa’, meaning ‘forgiveness’ in the Sanskrit language, to Ribhu’s name. Thus, henceforth Ribhu came to be known as ‘Ribhuksha’ (Ribhu + Ksha). Since Ribhuksha was ever in a blissful mood, the word of bliss and ecstasy, viz. ‘Anand’ was appended to his name, and it finally became ‘Ribhukshaanand’ (Ribhu + Ksha + Anand).

The great metaphysical preaching of sage Ribhu for the benefit of Nidagh appear in Tejobindu Upanishad, Cantos 5-6 as well as in Varaaha Upanishad, Cantos 4-5 of the

Krishna Yajur Veda tradition, in Maho-panishad, Canto 5 of the Sam Veda tradition, and in Annapurna Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition.

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, Brahman 7, verse no. 3 says that Nidagh and Ribhu were one of the great Paramhans Sanyasis.

(30) **Raivat (king)**— He was a king of Aanarta, and is mentioned in Srimad Bhagvat in its Chapter 52, Canto 10, verse no. 15 wherein it is narrated that his daughter named Raivati was married to Balraam, the elder brother of Krishna, at the behest of Brahma the creator. It is believed that Raivat was born in Sata Yuga, the first of the 4-Yuga cycle, when he had approached Brahma to know the destiny of his daughter. In the heaven, he stayed so long that the whole Sata Yuga passed, followed also by the Treta Yuga, So, his giving his daughter to Balraam in marriage during the Dwapar Yuga, which was the third era, proves that Raivat had an astonishingly long lifespan that covered three Yugas.

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that he was one of the great souls who had acquired a spiritual stature equivalent to the Gods as a result of wearing the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice. He was known as a Paramhans.

(31) **Shukdeo**— Sage Shukdeo was the son of the legendary seer and renowned sage Veda Vyas. He was highly respected and was born of the celestial maiden named Ghrataachi when she had taken the form of a parrot, called Shuka in Sanskrit, to produce Shukdeo. He had his education under the expert guidance of his father Veda Vyas (refer Maho-panishad of Sam Veda, Canto 2, verse nos. 1-20, and the entire Rudra Hridaya Upanishad of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition). He was fortunate enough to have as his wise Guru (moral preceptor and teacher) the legendary king Janak, the father of Sita of the Ramayan fame and the most self-realised and enlightened king of his time (refer Maho-panishad of Sam Veda, Canto 2, verse nos. 28-77) and Lord Shiva himself (refer Shukar Rahasya Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda which was preached by Lord Shiva to Shukdeo).

His self restraint was so profound that the celestial Apsara, the dancing damsel of the court of Indra, the king of Gods, failed to trap him in her honey-trap of lust and passions. Shukdeo learnt the epic Bhagvata Mahapurana from his father and then narrated it to Parikshit at the culmination of the Dwapar Yug (the third era of the four-era celestial cycle of mythology) and the beginning of the present era called Kali Yug. In an incident narrated in Maho-panishad, Canto 2, verse nos. 21-27 it is described how sage Shukdeo had to wait for twenty-one days before king Janak granted him an audience to test his self control over anger, ego and self-pride of being a son of an enlightened father of the stature of sage Veda Vyas as well as his sincerity and steadfastness of purpose which are important virtues that must be present in a student of spiritualism and important criterion by which his eligibility as a disciple can be judged.

The Tejobindu Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda describes him as a truly Brahm-realised sage along with sage Sankaadi in its Canto 1, verse no. 47.

Shukdeo learnt the epic Bhagvata Mahapurana from his father and then narrated it to Parikshit at the culmination of the Dwapar Yug (the third era of the four-era celestial cycle of Hindu mythology) and the beginning of the present era called Kali Yug (which is the last of the four-Yug cycle).

The Sharva Upanishad of Atharva Veda, in its verse no. 22 stresses the greatness of Lord Shiva known as Maheshwar by saying that even such great sage as Shukdeo had praised and prayed to the Lord, implying that if Shukdeo had worshipped Shiva then the latter must surely be a great Lord.

(32) **Surdas**— Saint Surdas was the greatest poet saint who lived in Lord Krishna's birth place called the 'Brij Bhumi', corresponding to the present day 'Vrindavan' in the northern part of India. Like Goswami saint Tulsidas who lived and produced his vast repository of stupendous devotional literature centered on the theme of Sri Ram who was most dear to his heart and inseparable from his being, saint Surdas focuses his attention on Sri Krishna. Both the poets wrote in Hindi using the local dialect and setting their compositions to the tunes of various melodies or musical notes called 'Raagas'. The lyrics by both are soul-stirring and have the potential to mellow the sternest of hearts and wet the driest of eyes. Both Tulsidas and Surdas saw no difference between Sri Ram and Sri Krishna, because though the Lord of their hearts were Sri Ram and Sri Krishna respectively, they wrote about the other with equal aplomb, devotion and reverence. Both were prolific writers and poets par excellence in the realm of Hindi devotional literature.

Birth—Saint Surdas was born in Vikram Samvat 1535 (A.D. 1478), Vaisakh Shukla 5, Tuesday, roughly the end of April or the beginning of May, at a village called Sihi near Delhi, in the household of a Brahmin. The name of his parents and three elder brothers isn't available authoritatively. It is said that he was born blind which created great dismay and worry to his parents. His name was given 'Suraj' (literally meaning 'Sun'). There is a legendry story that when he was merely 6 years of age, his parents had lost two gold Mohars (coins) given to them by the village landlord which they had misplaced. The child had a divine sight though physically he was blind by his eyes. So, on the condition that his parents will not come in his way when he finally renounced the household, the child told them the location of the gold coins which had been hidden in some whole by a mouse.

True to his words, Suraj (the earlier name of Surdas) left his house at the age of 12 years in V.S. 1547 and took shelter under a banyan tree in another village about 4 Kosa (apprx. 12 K.M.) away by putting up a thatched hut near a pond. As providence would have it, the village Brahmin chief's ten cows went missing and Suraj told him about their whereabouts. Because of this mystical and magical power, people started calling him 'Surswami'. The Brahmin landlord was pleased with him and provided for his food and care.

By V.S. 1553 when he was around 18 years old, his fame had spread far and wide. Material benefits started pouring in—he enjoyed worldly pleasures till V.S. 1553, when self-realisation dawned upon him and he renounced the world.

During the period when his fame had spread as a clairvoyant, he came in contact of a young lady named 'Maya' belonging to the dancing tribe called 'Nut'. The story goes that once she tried to test his powers of divine sight by adorning herself in all finery except putting the 'dot' on her forehead. Surswami, as Surdas was then called, composed a verse describing her beauty but clearly stated that the only shortcoming in her charming and enthralling image was the missing 'dot' on the forehead.

His fame was mired by this single trait in his character—that he was a lustful, passionate man of carnal inclinations, a worldly man rather than a spiritual man. This

filled Surswami with indignation and extreme regret. So one day, abandoning every material thing that he had till then aloud himself to be surrounded with, he went to Mathura, the city of Sri Krishna. He arrived there in V.S. 1553 (at the age of 18 years) and stayed near Vishram Ghat in a decrepit and abandoned hut on the banks of Manikarnika Ghat of Varanasi.

Surswami lived in Mathura for 12 years. It was here that devotion took firm roots in his bosom. He was transformed from a village lad singing pop culture folksongs into a devotee soaked and submerged in the love for the Lord— as is evident from his compositions which he sang in Mathura. It is said that though physically blind, he had a mystical and divine sight which enabled him to see, inter alia, a swollen river Yamuna at Mathura, have a divine vision of Deoki and Vasudeo (the parents of Lord Krishna), the slaying of Kansha (by Krishna), the festivals held at Nandgaon at the time of Krishna's birth, the 'Raas Lilas' of Krishna at Vrindavan, the 'Holi' revelry of Varsana, the birth place of Radha, amongst other such divine visions associated with the life of Lord Krishna.

His Guru (teacher) is said to be Uddhavaacharya Ujaagir Deo (श्री उद्धवाचार्य उजागिर देव) whose daily discourses on Srimad Bhagvat moulded the mental inclinations of Surswami and turned him more devotional towards Lord Krishna. But his formal initiation took place in V.S. 1567 (A.D. 1510) when he took his vows from Swami Vallabhaacharya (स्वामी वल्लभाचार्य) who changed his name to 'Surdas'. The Guru opened a vast vista of Krishna's devotion for Surdas. Sri Vallabhacharya was a renowned preacher of his time from South India, and had established a strong following and a separate sect amongst Hindus called the 'Pusthi Sampradaaya' (पुष्टि सम्प्रदाय) in Mathura.

Surdas, in his new transformed existence, roamed around in various places associated with Sri Krishna in an around Mathura between V.S. 1567 till 1573. It was in V.S. 1572 that the great Krishna devotee Mahaprabhu had visited Mathura during the time Surdas was there.

Surdas joined his Guru Vallabhacharya during his tour of 'Brijbhumi' in the year V.S. 1573, which is remembered in history as the year in which Sikandar Lodhi of Delhi had demolished Lord Krishna's temple called 'Keshav Rai' in Mathura. Meanwhile, Surdas finally settled in a place called 'Paaraasauli' (पारासौली) in V.S. 1576 and used to sing to Lord 'Sri Nath' most emotionally and reverentially, soaked and infused with devotion for the Lord. The great lady saint Mirabai had visited 'Braj' during V.S. 1595 while Surdas was living there.

For 35 years, from V.S. 1565 to V.S. 1602, Surdas had composed thousands of devotional hymns. He had taken a vow to create 1 Lakh (100 thousands) hymns in the honour and praise of Lord Srinath Ji (Sri Krishna). By this time, Surdas had surpassed all other singers of devotional music and hymns of his time, and at the age of 67 years (in V.S. 1602), he was honoured with the title of 'The first amongst the 8 Kirtan singers.' [The others were —Parmaanand Das (परमानन्द दास), Kumban Das (कुम्बन दास), Krishna Das (कृष्ण दास), Chitta-swami (चित्तस्वामी), Govind Swami (गोविन्द स्वामी), Chaturbhuj Das (चतुर्भुज दास) and Nand Das (नन्द दास). The Kirtan singers were those who led a chorus of devotional singers who sang in unison in a group and used musical instruments for singing.]

Emperor Akbar the Great first heard about Surdas in V.S. 1607 when one of his devotional hymns ('Jasudhaa Baar Baar Yaha Bhakhe'— जसुधा बार बार यह भाखै) was sung to him by his court singer named Tansen. Akbar was spellbound, and he came to meet

Surdas around V.S. 1623 when the saint sung the immortal hymns (e.g. ‘Manaa Re Kar Maadhau Sau Priti’— मना रे कर माधौ सौ प्रीति) for the benefit of the emperor. Akbar was extremely impressed and started the process of collecting and getting written all the hymns composed by Surdas, and paid for each original verse. [This led to lot of deceit because people posed themselves as Surdas and presented the emperor with verses composed in the saint’s name just in order to get money in return. This is one of the reasons why a number of hymns exist in the name of Surdas but they do not belong to him. The emperor was so charitable in his demeanours that he did not wish to hurt the name of the Lord as well as the good name of Surdas, so he nevertheless rewarded even the imposters, although he segregated the original ones from the fakes.]

The most famous episode relating to Surdas is this—in V.S. 1626, a great saint named Sri Narain Bhatt came to meet him. Surdas asked him the whereabouts of Lord Krishna, when Bhatt told him, ‘He is herding his cows near a hillock called Sakhigiri’, Surdas went there and heard the loud chattering of cowherd boys in the distance. He asked someone to put him on the track (path) that will lead him to where Sri Krishna was, when suddenly a young boy came running to him, held his hand and put him on the path leading to the direction from where the voices came, and then the boy vanished. This experience electrified Surdas, and he sang 3 most haunting devotional hymns on the spot which are considered as his most beautiful and soul stirring ones. [These 3 hymns are the following— (i) बाहुबल कितेकु जानौं जदुराई, (ii) ब्रज में ढीठ भये तुम डोलत, (iii) मैं तुमरे गुन जाने श्याम.]

In another incident in V.S. 1628, young boys tested Surdas’ powers of divine sight by asking him to describe the decoration of the deity. Surdas composed his famous hymn ‘Dekho Ri Hari Nangam Nangaa’— ‘देखौ री हरि नंगम नंगा’ (which means ‘look, the Lord is naked’—because the foolish detractors had kept the deity naked but had told Surdas that it had been fully dressed up to test him because he was deemed to be blind by the stupid people of the world).

In V.S. 1639, Akbar the Great summoned Goswami Tulsidas to Delhi to display his supernatural powers. According to legends, Surdas also accompanied him. Akbar was made to beat a hasty retreat when Delhi was swamped by ferocious monkeys.

It was the year V.S. 1640 (A.D. 1583) when Akbar laid the foundation of his fort at ‘Prayag (on the banks of river Ganges and Yamuna) and re-christened the city as Allahabad (after ‘Allah’; this name still stands, and the city is also called ‘Triveni’ in the state of Uttar Pradesh of North India). He wished to meet Surdas on that auspicious occasion and sent an emissary with an invitation letter lauding the saint profusely. But when his minister-emissary named Abul Fazal came to the village Parasauli where Surdas lived, the saint was very ill, old and unable to oblige.

Death—It was in this year, in V.S. 1640, Magh Shukla 2 (appx., the end of February and the beginning of March in the year A.D. 1583), that Surdas left his mortal coil by lying cheerfully on the ground facing the temple of his Lord Sri Nath Ji (Lord Krishna). He was laid to rest at a place near there called ‘Jatipuraa’ (जतीपुरा) under the shadow of the holy hillock called ‘Giriraaj’.

Among his great literary output is the story of Lord Ram popularly known as Ramayan. It is in two formats—one is called the Sur Ramcharitawali, and the other is called Sur Sarawali. The divine story of Lord Krishna is narrated in his epic poetry Sur Sagar.

(33) **Shaunak**— Sage Shaunak was a wise and learned sage and derived his name after his father sage Shunak. He is regarded as an incarnation of Indra, the king of Gods. He was an expert on the Vedas, especially the Rik/Rig Veda and the majority of his works revolve around this particular Veda. They are known as ‘Anukramanika’ (indices). His magnum opus is the ‘Brihad-devta’ which deals with the deities of the Vedas. He had a large following of disciples, the chief being Ashwalyaana. He appears in many ancient scriptures such as Shatpath Brahmin, 13/5/3/5; Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, 2/5/20; Chandogya Upanishad, 1/9/3; Mundak Upanishad, 1/1/3; Kaushitaki Brahmin Upanishad, 4/7.

The Par Brahm Upanishad, which is the twentieth Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition, was revealed to sage Shaunak by sage Pippalaad.

The Sita Upanishad, which is the ninth Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, mentions sage Shaunak in its verse no. 6 as the great ancient sage who had revealed the three esoteric mystical forms of Sita, the divine consort of Lord Ram. Sita was actually a personified form of the all-powerful cosmic ‘Shakti’ of Brahm. this Shakti represented the almighty energy, dynamism and powers of the Supreme Being that was revealed both at the macrocosmic as well as the microcosmic level of creation. These three forms of Sita have been revealed by the sage in his composition called ‘Shaunak Tantra’. This is a text used to worship Sita as a Shakti or divine Goddess using her Beej Mantra in mystical forms of worship.

(34) **Shaakalya**— Shaakalya was called Shaakalya Vidagdha. The appendage ‘Vidagdha’ means one who is arrogant and haughty. He was so arrogant that he enjoyed breaking the words of the Sanhitas (i.e. the collection of Vedic hymns) of the Rig Vedas as mentioned in Nirukta-6/28. Hence he was also known as ‘Padapaathkaar’—one who relishes breaking or unnecessarily finding faults with Vedic Sanhitas. Therefore he must have been an expert grammarian. His arrogance and haughtiness proved to be his undoing because this is the precise reason why he was killed as a result of a curse of sage Yagyavalkya in the court of king Janak when Shaakalya tried in vain to defeat Yagyavalkya in metaphysical debate as mentioned in Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, Canto 3, Brahmin 9, verse no. 26 of the Shukla Yajur Veda tradition. Yagyavalkya’s annoyance with him is evident in the preceding verses—3/9/18, 25. This establishes the time of this great sage as being in the Treta Yug, the second era of the 4-era Hindu celestial cycle when Lord Vishnu had revealed himself as Lord Ram who married Sita, the daughter of the enlightened king Janak.

Notwithstanding this negative trait in his character, it is nevertheless true that he was a sincere student of the Upanishads and one of the most respected sages of his time. He never hesitated in approaching other contemporary sages and seers to quench his thirst for knowledge as is proved in the Panch Brahma Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda tradition which revolves around the answer which Shaakalya got when he approached sage Pippalaada and asked him the question regarding one of the greatest mysteries of creation—‘What came into existence in the beginning of creation?’

(35) **Sanat-kumar**— Sage Sanatkumar is considered as one of the four Manas Putras or the mental-born sons of the creator Brahma. The other three are Sanak, Sanat-sujaat and

Sanandan. They are regarded in a perpetual state of boyhood. Together they are called ‘Sanakaadi Rishis’.

Sanatkumar had taught the greatness of Vishnu to demon Vrittaasur, the enemy of Indra, the king of Gods. He also taught spiritual wisdom to sage Narad, the celestial sage.

Sanat-sujaat taught spiritual wisdom to Dhritrashtra who was the blind father of the Kauravas of the epic Mahabharat fame. Sanak is said to an eternal companion of Lord Vishnu. Sanandan is regarded as the ancient preacher of the Sankhya Shastra, even more ancient than Kapil.

Sanatkumar, along with sages Pippalaad and Angira, had approached sage Atharva to ask him about the highest form of meditation, the different aspects of OM and the culmination of spiritual journey by realising Brahm in the form of Shambhu, one of the names of Lord Shiva, in Atharva Veda’s Atharva-shikha Upanishad.

It is narrated in the Brihajjabal Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 8, that he had gone to Lord Kalagnirudra, one of the forms of Lord Shiva and who had first revealed this Upanishad to one sage Bhusund (Brahmans 1-6) to learn about the metaphysical importance and spiritual value of the Rudraksha beads. [Rudraksha beads are the seeds of the tree *Eleocarpus ganitrus*.]

According to Kalagni Rudra Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda, Sanatkumar was taught how to wear the Tripundra, the three lines marked on the forehead of all Hindus, by Lord Kalagnirudra himself.

The Sharav Upanishad of Atharva Veda, in its verse no. 22 stresses the greatness of Lord Shiva known as Maheshwar by saying that even such great sages as Sankadi and Sanatsujat (i.e. sages Sanatkumar and others collectively called the Sankaadi Rishis) had praised and prayed to the Lord, implying that if these great sages had worshipped Shiva then the latter must surely be a great Lord.

(36) **Sankriti**—Sage Sankriti was a great devotee of the Sun God and an Avadhut Sanyasi, a renunciate ascetic of the highest order. He was enlightened and a self-realised wise sage. Two Upanishads of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition are attributed to him—viz. Akchu Upanishad and Avadhut Upanishad. In the Akchu Upanishad, Sankriti has offered his obeisance to the Sun God by praying to him in specially composes hymns in the Lord’s honour, and as a blessing the Sun God revealed this Upanishad to him in which he expounded the eclectic virtues and divine characteristics of those who have attained success in doing Yoga (meditation and contemplation); it describes the seven Bhumikas or signs of such success in simple terms. The Avadhut Upanishad is an exposition on the grand characteristics of Avadhut Sanyas which is the highest spiritual stage of renunciation, and was preached by sage Dattatreya to Sankriti. This fact establishes that Sankriti was a contemporary of Dattatreya.

(37) **Satyakaam**— Sage Satyakaam/Satyakam was the son of a woman named Jabaalaa who used to serve guests when she was young. She could not tell her son who his father was when he wished to know about him when the teacher to whom he had gone for being inducted as a disciple, the renowned sage Gautam, wished to know his lineage. So the mother christened him after her own name, and called her ‘Satyakam Jabal’. Gautam was very pleased at his sincerity and accepted him. These facts appear in Chandogya Upanishad of Sam Veda, Canto 4, section 4, verse nos. 1-5. Satyakam rose to become a

renowned sage of his time, and he was taught by none other than the Fire God himself—refer Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 4, sections 4 to 9. Later on in life, he assumed the name of his Guru (teacher) Gautam and hence came to be known as Satyakam Gautam or Gautam Satyakam.

He is also mentioned by the enlightened king Janak to sage Yagyavalkya in Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad of Shukla Yajur Veda, Canto 4, Brahman 1, verse no. 6 as having taught him that the Mana (the creature's thinking mind and emotional heart) is Brahm personified. He also appears in the same Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad in Canto 6, Brahman 3, verse nos. 11-12 as been an expert in the performance of special fire sacrifices because he was blessed by the Fire God himself.

However, a sage with the same name Satyakam is mentioned in Prashna Upanishad of Atharva Veda, in its Canto 5, verse no. 1 as being the son of Shibi. It is not clear whether these two gentlemen were the same person or two different sages with the same name. But it appears to be the same person by the virtue of the fact

(38) **Samvartak**— Sage Samvartak was the son of the great sage Aangiras. Brihaspati and Ucathya were his brothers. [Mahabharata, Adi Parva, 67.] He is probably the author of the ancient work called 'Samvarta Smriti' which is in the form of his teachings to sages Vamdeo and others. The topics dealt with in it are related to Brahmacharya (i.e. the life of immaculacy and observance of self righteousness), Prayaschitta (i.e. expiation for various sins), duties of a householder, a forest dwelling ascetic as well as a Sanyasi (a reclusive monk who observes exemplary renunciation), a king etc.

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that he was one of the great souls who had acquired a spiritual stature equivalent to the Gods as a result of wearing the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice.

(39) **Shwetketu**— Sage Shwetketu was the son of sage Aaruni and a grandson of sage Arun, and belonged to the lineage of the ancient sage Gautam. So, on numerous occasions he is referred to as 'Gautam' in the Upanishads. He is one of the more famous sages appearing in the Upanishads. He was taught the principles of metaphysics pertaining to the supreme transcendental Brahma by his father Aaruni (also known as Uddyalak). [Refer—Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 6.]

He was initiated as a disciple very early in life at the age of 12 years and studied the Vedas for 24 years. But he was very arrogant and haughty of his knowledge. [Refer—Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 6, section 1, verse no. 2.] When he returned from his teacher's hermitage, his learned father was sorry at this mentality of his son. The father asked him if he knew about that by knowing which even the unknown could be known. When Shwetketu replied in the negative, his father taught him this great esoteric secret in the whole of Canto 6 of the Chandogya Upanishad.

His arrogance led him to taste defeat and humiliation at the hands of king Pravaahan, the son of king Jaivali, of Panchal, when the king asked him about Brahm. [Refer—Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 5, section 3, verse nos. 1-5.]

In another incidence, he could not answer questions about the 'Vaishwaanar Atma' (the cosmic Consciousness that is all-pervading and omnipresent) when approached by five noble householder sages Aupmanyu (the son of sage Upmanyu), Paulashi alias Satyayagya (the son of sage Pulush), Bhaallavi (the son of sage Bhalavi),

Bhaalarveya alias Indradumnya (the son of Bhaallavi), Shaarkaraakshya (the son of sage Sharkaraaksha), and Budil (the son of sage Ashwatarashwa). They then went to king Ashwapati (literally a king who had a large cavalry and a huge stable of war horses) who elaborated on this aspect of metaphysics. [This episode is narrated in Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 5, sections 11-24.]

It was Shwetketu who had assigned specific duties to priests who perform the elaborate fire sacrifices. He was very annoyed at the promiscuity of the people of his time and had thus initiated reform in this direction by establishing and systematizing the institution of marriage. He is credited in this context to have penned an abridged version of the Kaamsutra (the science and principles of Erotica) which was originally written by Nandi, the mount of Lord Shiva.

One of his talented disciples was the learned sage Upkosal. [Refer—Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 4, section 10.]

His wife was named Suvarcala who was the daughter of sage Devala. His brother was sage Nachiketa who had been blessed by the God of death, Yama, himself, and who is the cause of the revelation of the famous Katho-panishad of the Krishna Yajur Veda. His sister was Sujata, the wife of sage Kahola. Another famous sage Ashataavakra was his nephew.

The *Brihajjabal Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, in its Brahman 7, verse no. 3 asserts that he was one of the great souls who had acquired a spiritual stature equivalent to the Gods as a result of wearing the sacred ash of the fire sacrifice.

(40) **Shandilya**— The word ‘Shandilya/Shandilya’ means the son of sage Shandila. In ancient scriptures the name of sage Shandilya appears at various places, the earliest reference being in the Shatpath Brahman (9/4/4/17; 10/1/4/10) which belongs to the Shukla Yajur Veda. It is believed that it was compiled around 3000 B.C.

Shandilya was a great authority of the fire ritual, and in fact the fire which he worshipped has been named after him as Shaandila. He was a pupil of sage Atharva from whom he learned the great philosophy of Yoga and of Brahm as narrated in the Atharva Veda’s Shandilya Upanishad. His main disciple was named Kushri. According to other lists of lineage, his teachers included Vaatsay, Kaishorya, Kashyap, Vaishtapureya, Gautam etc.

The Chandogya Upanishad also refers to sage Shandilya in its Canto 3, section 14 wherein the sage taught the knowledge of the divine Being known as Brahm which have a clear resonance in Cantos 2 and 3 of our present Shandilya Upanishad.

The great epic Mahabharata mentions sage Shandilya many times as being a sage who attended the court of king Yudishthira (Sabhapurva, 4/17). He had propounded the laws governing giving of donations (Mahabharata, Anushashanpurva, 65/19).

Sage Shandilya is credited with the composition of the treatise on Bhakti or devotion, called the Bhakti-sutras—the essential principles that govern the attainment of Bhakti. Besides it, the Shandilya Sanhita and the Shandilya Upanishad are also attributed to him. The Shandilya Upanishad, which is the 14th Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, is dedicated to the philosophy of Yoga. This Upanishad was preached to sage Shandilya by sage Atharva. Since this Upanishad was taught to him by sage Atharva, it obviously follows that the two sages were contemporaries of each other.

According to the Ram Rahasya Upanishad, Canto 1, verse no. 1, of the Atharva Veda, he was one of the sages who had approached Hanuman, the wisest, the highly enlightened and the most dedicated devotee of Lord Ram, to enquire about the profound metaphysical philosophy related to the Lord.

(41) **Shankaracharya/Shankara**— Sage and seer Adi Shankaracharya (788-820 A.D.) was born at a time when the true Vedic religion of India, known as the Sanatan Dharm, the eternal and ancient religion based on the teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads, was on the decline because of the rise of other schools of philosophies, such as the Buddhism and the Jainism, as well as the Charvaaka school and the Vaam or leftist school of thought. He is honoured by the prefix ‘Adi’ meaning the ‘first of his kind’.

It is said in the Bhagwat-Gita, 4/7-8, that when true Dharma, which are the eternal laws governing the life of the human race as laid down by the ancient scriptures and envisaged by wise and erudite ancient sages and seers, is eclipsed and neglected by its followers who are overwhelmed by A-Dharma or villainy, the Lord God intervenes to restore the balance in favour of the Dharma. This task is accomplished by the Lord in two ways—either coming down to earth as an incarnation, or empowering some man with the mystical powers of the Holy Spirit.

Shankaracharya lived a short life of just 32 years. About 21 works called ‘Shankara Digvijay’ are known in which his life is detailed. As the name implies, these chronicle his conquest of the land by defeating his detractors in metaphysical and theological debates as he toured the length and breadth of the country. From the apparent fact that he did accomplish such stupendous success in so early an age, because he died when he was a young man of merely 32 years of age, show that the Holy Spirit was working through him, for otherwise it is impossible for a man to accomplish this success in such a short span of time. It’s not less than a miracle.

Two of the works on Shankara, i.e. Shankara-Vijay by Anandgiri, and Shankara-Digvijai by Maadhav-Vidyaranya, are regarded as authentic.

His parents were Shivaguru and Aaryaambaa. They were devout a couple belonging to the Nambudari Brahmin caste of South India. They lived in Kaaladi in the state of Kerala. This town is situated on the banks of river Purna. They had worshipped Lord Shiva to beget a son, and so named the child after their Lord, as Shankara. They had a promination that their son would be prodigal and an omniscient spiritual teacher, but with a short life-span.

Brilliant and prodigious as he was, Shankara mastered all the scriptures at an early age. His father died when he was still young, and this ignited the spark of renunciation in him as he saw the futility of worldly life and its mortal nature. Besides this, the study of the scriptures and the Holy Spirit residing in him spurred him to embrace the life of Sanyas—or the monastic life of renunciation and detachment from this world.

The story of his taking to the life of Sanyas is very fascinating. It so happened once that he was caught by a crocodile while taking bath in a river, and as his helpless mother watched, he was on the verge of death when he pleaded with her to grant him permission to take the vows of Sanyas so that he can die peacefully and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Caught literally between the devil and the deep sea, the mother gave her consent, because she saw no chance of her son’s escape. But destiny had different plans—the crocodile left Shankara alone immediately, but now his mother could

not force him to remain as a householder as it would be highly incorrect to go back on the vows of Sanyas once they are taken. So Shankara was free to become a Sanyasi by divine intervention, and the miracle is that even his mother gave him the permission to do so. The only rider his mother attached was that he should be by her side at the time of her death. So when she died later, he came back to perform her last rites even though he had become a full-fledged Sanyasi.

Back from the jaws of certain death, Shankara was a changed man; he decided that now onwards he will spend his life in preaching the teachings of the scriptures in the service of the Lord God. Shankara was just '8 years old' then.

After that, the young Shankara went to the banks of river Narmada where he met a great sage named Govinda-bhagvat-pada. He was believed to be an incarnation of Lord Sheshnath, the legendary serpent. He accepted Shankara as his disciple and taught him for three years. Now Shankara was asked to go to Kashi, the holy city well-known as the seat of learning, both secular and sacred. At that time Shankara was (8 + 3) 11 years old.

Shankara established himself in Kashi and preached the philosophy of Vedanta, which lays emphasis on Advaita or non-duality of the Absolute Truth in creation. It is this philosophy of 'Advaita Vedanta' which made Shankara famous in history as its greatest exponents and proponents.

He made many disciples here among whom Sanandan was one of the four chief disciples. Once he met Lord Shiva in the form of an untouchable, and this encounter removed any vestige of delusions and ignorance that still lurked in him. Thus fully enlightened and backed by Lord Shiva himself, he was ordained to go to the Himalayan pilgrim site of Badrinath and restore the deity of Lord Narayan (Vishnu) there along with establishing a proper method of worship in the shrine.

After that, he started writing his celebrated commentary on the Brahmasutra which were originally written by sage Veda Vyas, the legendary classifier of the Vedas and the author of the 108 Upanishads as well as the 18 Purans. Then he went on his voyage of preaching the principles of Advaita Vedanta, and in the course of his travels he vanquished many a renowned scholars of his time, the chief amongst them being one exceptional scholar named Mandana Mishra. Amongst his great spiritual successes were the revival of faith in the Vedas and the teaching of the Upanishads.

After successful tour of the country, from the Himalayas (Badrinath shrine) to the plains (Varanasi) and further down to the south of the country, defeating many a scholar in philosophical debates and turning them round to his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, he went back to the north to reach Kashmir. Here he occupied the seat reserved for the greatest scholar alive, called the 'Sarva-gyan-pith'.

During his sojourn round the country, Shankara established four Mathas, or monasteries, in the four cardinal points of the country. These were at Puri in the east, at Johimath in the north, at Dwarka in the west, and at Sringeri in the south of the country.

It is believed that he entered a cave near Badrinath temple in the Himalayas, known as Dattatreya Gupha, to leave his mortal coil and vanish forever. According to another version of his demise, he established a monastery in the south of India at Kanchipuram in the state of Tamil Nadu. It is believed that he spent the last days of his life here, and died here.

Shankaracharya was a prolific writer of commentary on the Dharma-shastras or ancient scriptures. They are basically of three types—(i) Bhaasya, (ii) Prakarana, and (iii) Stotras.

The ‘Bhaasya’ is an erudite exposition on the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta and Hindu religious thinking based on the teaching of the Upanishads and the Vedas. These include commentaries on ten Upanishads, the Bhramasutra, the Bhagvatgita, the Vishnu-sahastra-naam, the Sanatsujaatiya, etc.

The ‘Prakarana’ is a simple treatise on Advaita Vedanta. Some of them are the following—Atmabodha, Vaakya-vritti, Laghu-vaakya-vritti, Vivek-chudaamani, Updesh-sahasari etc.

The ‘Stotras’ are hymns dedicated to different deities. Some of the famous Stotras are the following—Aanand-lahiri, Bhajgovindam, Dakshin-murti-asthaka, Dasha-shloki, Gopaal-ashtak, Hari-midish-stotra, Manishaa-panchak, Shiva-bhujang, Sopaan-panchak, and Vishnu-shat-padi.

(42) **Tukaram**— Tukaram (1598-1649 A.D.) is one of the greatest poet-saints of India. He was a native of the state of Maharashtra. He wrote in the vernacular Marathi, and his compendium of devotional songs, called the ‘Abhangas’, run into thousands of verses of pristine beauty. These Abhangas are gems of spiritual truths, and they attracted thousands of people because of their spiritual charm, the simplicity of the language that conveyed profound spiritual messages, coupled with the charm of music and song.

He was born at Dehu, a village approximately 14 miles from the city of Pune. He belonged to the Maratha class, which according to some is classified as a Shudra group. He married at an early life, but as destiny would have it he lost his wife, son and parents due to a severe famine that devastated the area. He married again, and his second wife was known as Jijabai.

He was spiritually inclined and a firm believer in the path of Bhakti (devotion for God and total submission to him). The more he failed in practical life in this world, the more he got bent towards the Lord. It is believed that he was initiated in his dream by some divine Spirit which gave him a Mantra (a holy Name of the Lord God which acts as a spiritual formula) which he continued to repeat throughout his life. It is said that the name of this Spirit was Baba Chaitanya. In one of other dreams he dreamt of saint Naamdev (1270-1320 A.D.), another great saint of Maharashtra, who inspired him to compose and write devotional songs, which were collected into the Abhangas. Actually, Naamdev had started to compose and write them but couldn’t finish the task, which was then entrusted to Tukaram by him through this dream.

As expected, the orthodox Brahmins were annoyed at his popularity and resisted him tooth and nail, but when someone is protected and commanded by the Holy Spirit no obstacle can stop his progress. As it happened, the Brahmins gradually yielded, and in due course of time many of them too became his ardent followers.

Even the all-time great saint-poet of India, Goswami Tulsidas who wrote the magnum opus Ram Charit Manas and the Vinai Patrika along with a host of other books which till today remain unparalleled in the annals of devotional literature, had to suffer at the hands of orthodox Brahmins just like Tukaram who was subjected to ridicule and scorn from these Brahmins in the beginning so much so that, like Tulsidas, he was forced to throw the manuscripts of his Abhangas into the river Indrayani. But it is said that Lord

Paduranga Vitthal, a form of Lord Krishna, retrieved them from the water of the river and restored them to the saint Tukaram.

Tukaram was a contemporary of the great Maratha king and warrior known as Chatrapati Shivaji (1627-1680 A.D.). It is said that once he miraculously saved Shivaji from being captured by the Mughal (Muslim) army.

It is also believed that Tukaram did not die an ordinary death but ascended to the heaven bodily in a divine chariot.

He was a devotee of Lord Paduranga Vitthala (a form of Lord Krishna), the deity most revered and worshipped in Maharashtra. His devotional songs are directed to this form of the Lord. He stressed in the futility of rituals, in the great power of devotion and love for the Lord as well as power of the holy name of the Lord, and in the irrelevance of caste and birth in spiritual life and the right to attain the Lord.

(43) **Veda Vyas**— Sage and seer Veda Vyas was the great grandson of sage Vashistha, grandson of sage Shakti, and the son of sage Paraashar and his wife Satyawati, a fisherwoman. Since he had dark complexion, he was also called Krishna, and since he was born on an island, he was called Dvaipayana. Hence his other name was Krishna Dvaipayana.

He is said to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself. The Lord felt that the vast knowledge enshrined in the scriptures were so huge, jumbled up, abstract and complicated that they were beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. Further, till this time, everything was based on memory—hearing and speaking, passing from one generation of disciple to another generation in the oral form. There was a need to sort them out, to codify, systematise and classify this vast ocean of knowledge contained in the Vedas to make them more useful and handy.

So, Vishnu took the form of Veda Vyas to undertake this mammoth, daunting and formidable task. It is believed that Veda Vyas was born at the end of Dwapar Yug during the period of the Mahabharat war.

Soon after his birth, he took permission from his mother Satyawati and went to Badrinath in the Himalayas to do severe penances and austerities (Tapa), and he established his hermitage there. Hence, he was also called 'Badaraayana'.

Veda Vyas gathered all the Mantras of the hitherto undivided Vedas, edited them and grouped them according to the use to which they were put during fire sacrifices. He named them according to the class or section of the priests (called Ritwij) who would use them for their ritualistic practices, such as the fire sacrifices. This added another epithet to his name—viz. 'Vyas', the one who knew the Vedas like the back of his hands and was therefore able to classify and divide them into four distinct texts as they now exist; the one who is the best preacher of the subject and made it easy for dissemination and teaching purposes. He classified the Vedas into four basic texts called the Rik, the Atharva, the Sam and the Yajur Vedas.

The four classes of such expert priests and the relevant Vedas were—(i) 'Riks'—they were also the senior most priests who presided over the ritual, and were also called Hota. They chanted the hymns of the Rig Veda. (ii) 'Yajus'—these priests were junior to the Riks and were also called Adhwaryou, and they chanted the verse categorised as the Yajur Veda. (iii) 'Samans'—these priests were the chanters of the holy hymns in chorous, in a loud, clear and melodious voice. They can be called modern day classical

singers who attend any great function or festivity. They were also called Udgata. The Sam Veda was meant for them. (iv) 'Atarvans'—these priests did the actual, physical offerings of oblations in the fire pit of the fire sacrifice. They were called Brahma because they represented the senior most God, and the hymns used by them were classified and collected under the name of the Atharva Veda. So, as we have seen, the basic function of this classification was to facilitate the performance of the fire sacrifice.

But this exercise did not give peace of mind to Veda Vyas. His soul was yearning for something higher than these futile ritualistic exercises. So, as a next step, he further classified the Vedas into various Sanhitas, the Brahamans, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads.

The result of this tireless exercise produced a much vaster tome of spiritual, philosophical and metaphysical literature so much so that Veda Vyas thought it necessary and fit to write the basic tenets and maxims of the Vedas into a single volume for quick referral. This was called 'Vedant Sutra', literally, the key to the Vedas.

The concept of the Vedas was still indigestible and daunting for the masses. So, he rendered the precepts palatable and within the grasp of the common man by resorting to the time-tested and more acceptable method of the story-telling form by writing the eighteen Purans and the eighteen sub-Prans—a stupendous literary achievement of mammoth proportions.

He had also penned the epic Mahabharat besides these eighteen Purans and eighteen sub-Purans. It is said that Ganesh, the most revered and wise son of Shiva who has the head of an elephant, was the scribe who wrote down the dictation of Mahabharat as Veda Vyas narrated it non-stop, a job which is not a child's play. It is also believed that inspite of remaining a chaste saint for life, he had begot the three legendary figures of Mahabharat, viz. Dhritraastra, Pandu and Vidur, from the wives of Vichitravirya at the behest of his mother Satyawati. He gave divine sight to Sanjay, the charioteer who narrated the on going famous battle of the Mahabharat to Dhritraastra who was blind. Being a contemporary sage of the Mahabharat period, he knew almost all the persons of this great epic.

During the reign of Kurus, he was revered by both the Kurus as well as their arch rivals, the Pandavas. Both the heroes of the epic Mahabharat war held him in high esteem. When he decided to write the story of Mahabharat—the documentary narration of the epic story of clan-fight and the devastating war that followed it—he chose Lord Ganesh as his scribe; Veda Vyas had dictated while Ganesh had written the epic. It is said that the site where the epic Mahabharat was written is called 'Vyas Gufa' (Vyas' cave) located near Bharoach while the place where he did his final Tapa is called Vyas Ashram located in the village of Mana two miles from the shrine of Badrinath in the Himalayas. His hermitage during the epic Mahabharat war was located in a village about ten miles north of the city of Ambala in Haryana state. River Saraswati flows nearby. This place is also famous as Vyas Ashram.

Time flew by, but still Veda Vyas did not get peace at heart. Once, while he sat near river Saraswati, full of remorse, unsatisfied and contrite, sage Narad came to him and advised him to write Srimad Bhagwat containing 18000 Slokas. This voluminous work gave him his final peace, so it is said.

His Guru was sage Yagyavalkya. His son was sage Shukdeo, the parrot saint. Veda Vyas chose five chief disciples who were initiated by him in the four Vedas and

Purans. They were as follows—(a) He taught Rig Veda to his disciple named Paila; (b) Yajur Veda to his disciple Vaishampaayana; (c) Sam Veda to his disciple Jaimini; (d) Atharva Veda to his disciple Sumanthu; and (e) the Purans to his disciple Ramharshan.

It is believed that sage Veda Vyas still lives, albeit in an invisible, intangible and subtle form in the shape of the vast repertoire of spiritual, philosophical and metaphysical literature that he has created for humankind, something which is not possible for any ordinary human being. These fortify the legend that he was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and not an ordinary human being, a fact that is extensively covered in Vishnu Puran 3.3.

Summary of His Works :—

Sage Veda Vyas classified the Vedas into four volumes—Rig, Yajur, Sam, and Atharva. Each of the four Vedas had various Sanhitas, Braahmans, Aaranyakas and sub-Vedas.

(a) The *Rig Veda*—The word Veda is derived from the root ‘vid’ meaning ‘to know; to be enlightened; to be aware and learned’. Therefore, the Vedas represent the vast body of esoteric and sacred knowledge concerning eternal spiritual values and metaphysical matters regarding the Absolute Truth and Reality of creation. They were revealed to great sages and seers during their meditation and contemplation sessions. The Vedas are the highest canonical literature in Hinduism. As to the rough date of their revelation, a consensus amongst scholars is that it is roughly the period between 10000 and 1000 B.C.

The Vedas are called ‘Srutis’ because they were orally transmitted and were ‘heard’ from one generation to another. Fundamentally, the Vedas honour the divine forces of Nature which govern all aspects of life in this creation by personifying them as deities or Gods who were offered respect in the form of offerings made during the fire sacrifice which was deemed to be the best and the most sacred form of religious activity since early times. That is why the hymns of the Vedas—which were initially one composite mass of verses—were divided into four divisions according to the convenience and use they were put to by the priests who performed these elaborate fire sacrifices.

Hence, the liturgical hymns used by the priest called the ‘Hota’ to invite the various deities to the sacrifice became the Rig Veda. Those hymns used by the priests called the ‘Adhvaryu’ who was the chief executor of sacrificial rites were brought together as the Yajur Veda. A collection of all the hymns that were musical chants that could be sung and had melodious intonations were grouped under the Sam Veda. These musical intonations were used during special fire sacrifices called the Soma Yagya where the extract of the Soma plant was used as offerings to the sacred fire. The priests that performed this sacrifice were called ‘Udgaatar’. The rest of the hymns, which were like the appendix and addenda, were collated in to the Atharva Veda, and the priests who used them were called the Brahma. They were the senior priests who presided over the whole sacrificial ritual.

It was sage Veda Vyas, known as Krishna Dvaipaayana Vyas, who divided the Vedas into four types, and taught them to his four chief disciples—Paila was taught Rig Veda, Vaishampaayana was taught the Yajur Veda, Jaimini was taught the Sam Veda, and Sumantu was taught the Atharva Veda.

The Vedas are classified into two sections—Mantras and Braahmans. The collection of Mantra is called the Sanhita. The Braahman have two more divisions—viz.

the Aranyaka and the Upanishad. The Sanhita is a pure collection of hymns in poetical style of composition while the Braahman is a liturgy in prose format. The Aranayaka may be described as basically symbolical interpretations of the liturgical rites included in the hymns and they are based on meditation and contemplation. The Upanishads are metaphysical discussions and philosophical treatises on the esoteric and mystical meaning of the Vedic hymns, and they deal with the practical problems of life vis-à-vis the different tenets and various doctrines that form the integral part of the Vedic canons.

Taken in their purest form, the Vedas refer to the Sanhitas—the collection of hymns. The Brahmanas are considered as appendages. This is probably because the main use of the Vedas in earlier times were fire sacrifices and it was not until later period that emphasis was laid on their utility and importance from the philosophical angle and the practical application to answer the problems of life and the final way to get rid of them.

Since Veda Vyas had four disciples and each of them had their own line of disciples, it is natural that the Sanhitas got edited and readjusted down the line. It is also due to the fact that they were transmitted orally, with no written standard text. So the chances of edition, readjustment, distortion, insertion, interpolation and unilateral changes, minor and major, in the origin body of Vedas was inevitable. The influence of local customs and circumstances over the thousands of years that the Vedas survived also had a great deal of role to play.

The Vedas are said to be not man-made but revealed texts, and therefore called 'A-paurushya'. Their language and terminology is difficult to comprehend, and hence many subsidiary texts called the Up-vedas came into existence. These are called Vedangas or limbs of the Vedas. They are the following—Shiksha (deals with learning the hymns and how to chant them), Vyaakarana (grammar), Chandas (poetical styles of composition), Nirukta (meaning and explanation of Vedic texts), Jyotisha (astrology and astronomy) and Kalpa (formula or aphorisms called the Sutra). The Kalpa has 4 branches—viz. Shrauta, Grihya, Dharma and Shulba. This deals with all sacrificial rites and even those that are done at home by an individual householder.

The Rig Veda is the oldest Veda revealed over a long period of time (10000-4000 B. C.). Hence there is a variety of languages, grammar, ideas and compositions styles noted in this Veda. Two methods are used to divide this Veda. In the first method, the Sanhita is divided into eight Ashtakas, and the latter is divided into Adhyayas, the latter into Vargas, and the latter contains the Mantras. The number of Adhyayas in each Ashtaka, the number of Vargas in each Adhyaye, and the number of Mantras in each Varga is more or less the same. Therefore, there are total of 8 Ashtakas, 64 Adhyayas, 2024 Vargas, and 10552 Mantras.

The other method is that the entire Sanhita is divided into ten Mandals or sections or divisions or chapters. These Mandals are then divided into Anuvakas, the latter into Shuktas, and these Shuktas into Mantras. The number of Anuvakas is 85, and the Shuktas are 1028. The total number of Mantras are however the same as stated above—i.e. 10552. This latter method is now accepted as the norm.

The Rig Veda originally had twenty-four branches out of which only five exist today. These are Shaakal, Baashkal, Aashwalaayan, Shaakhaayan, and Mandukeya.

The Brahmanas of the Rig Veda are—Aitareya and Kaushitaki.

The Rig Veda had Artha-Veda as its sub-Veda. It deals primarily with economics, politics and other aspects of life.

The Aaranyakas of the Rig Veda are the following Aitareya and Shaankhaayan.

The Rig Veda has ten Upanishads—such as Aitareyaopanishad, Kaushitaki Upanishad etc.

The topics dealt with in the Rig Veda fall roughly into three broad categories. The first deals with worship of personified forces of Nature as deities such as Agni (fire), Varun (water), Indra (the king of Gods and the controlling deity of rains) etc. The second topic deals with philosophy of creation and the real nature of human life. The third topic deals with mundane subjects like marriage, wars, the virtues of generosity and magnanimity etc.

There are said to be a long chain of sages and seers belonging to the Rig Veda tradition, and according to some estimates their number is 800.

Basically, the Rig Veda deities are 33 in number—viz. the 8 Vasus, the 11 Rudras, the 12 Adityas, Indra and Prajapati. [Refer Narayan Upanishad, Verse no. 1 of Krishna Yajur Veda tradition.]

The priests who used the hymns of the Rig Veda during fire sacrifices were called 'Hota'.

(b) The *Yajur Veda*—The word 'Yajus' means a liturgy of hymns chanted during the fire sacrifice. The Yajur Veda has been classified into Krishna and Shukla branches. It would be pertinent and interesting to add a brief note here on why the Yajur Veda has come to be known as Krishna and Shukla, meaning 'black' and 'white' respectively. The Yajur Veda Sanhita (a collection of Mantras or hymns) is classified into these two types for a variety of reasons. One of the probable reasons for this Yajur Veda having two names is that the collection in the Sanhita that came to be known as 'Krishna' had a mixture of prose and poetry, and hence considered 'impure and corrupted'. This is because primarily the Vedas were composed in poetry form with the verses structured according to one or the other methods of poetical composition called 'Chandas'. Prose as style of composition came later on and was regarded as an interpolation, interposition or juxtaposition which is all tantamount to corrupting the original method. Hence, that text which had both the poetry and prose was deemed to be 'corrupted and impure form of the Vedic text', and therefore called 'Krishna'—the dark one. On the other hand, the Sanhita which had only poetry was considered un-adulterated and pure form of the Vedic text, and hence called 'Shukla' or the white one, the colour 'white' being the colour of purity, immaculacy, divinity and holiness.

Since the primary use of the hymns of the Vedas in earlier times was for incantatory chanting during religious fire sacrifices, the poetical mode of composition was more suitable than the prose model. That is why these hymns were composed in 'Chandas' which are the different styles in which Sanskrit verses are composed. Later on, when these verses were also being used for purposes other than the fire sacrifices, the prose model evolved and developed. The Upanishads are mainly in the prose model because they are philosophical treatises and not ritualistic incantatory chanting.

Another plausible reason is that the verses of the Krishna Yajur Veda are more difficult to understand than those of the Shukla Yajur Veda. Hence, the former were called 'dark' or Krishna because of the difficulty in their comprehension and explanation as compared to the more easier ones classified as 'white' or Shukla. The Krishna Yajur Veda Sanhita was more prevalent in the south of India while the Shukla was more common in the north of the country.

The third reason is that the original classifier of Vedas was 'Krishna Dvaipaayana Veda Vyas' who taught the text of the Yajur Veda to his disciple called Vaishampayana. Hence, the original version of the text was named 'Krishna' in order to commemorate this fact.

There is a fourth probable reason as outlined here. The chief exponent of the Yajur Veda is regarded as the ancient sage Yagyavalkya. He was one of the several disciples of sage Vaishampayana. Once the teacher asked his disciples to perform the 'Brahmavadhya' sacrifice (a type of elaborate penance) for him. Yagyavalkya was so confident of himself, his knowledge and competency that he offered to do it all by himself for his teacher. The teacher thought that he was haughty and boastful. So, disowning or disinheriting him from his line of disciples, he commanded that Yagyavalkya should return all that he had learnt from his teacher. The sage returned all the Mantras of the Yajur Veda that he had learnt from his teacher by 'vomiting' them out. The rest of the disciples were very cunning; they transformed themselves immediately into partridges, called Tittars, and gobbled up everything. From that developed the Krishna Yajur Veda's Taittiriya branch. It is called 'Krishna' after the teacher and 'Taittiriya' after the partridges. Also, since they were 'vomited products' they were regarded as polluted and impure. Such body of knowledge came to be known as 'Krishna'—the impure one.

Now, not to be demoralized so easily and determined to get back his lost knowledge and wisdom, Yagyavalkya worshipped the Sun God who blessed him with a fresh set of Mantras of the Yajur Veda. Since it came from a 'bright source' represented by the sun, this set of Mantras was called the 'Shukla Yajur Veda'. [The word 'Shukla' means 'bright or light or illuminated'.] The sage revised this into fifteen sub-texts, called the Vaaj-sanei, i.e. those belonging to the horse race. This is because the Sun God had assumed the form of a 'horse' to teach him, and the word 'Vaajis' means a horse. The sage revised this into fifteen sub-texts, called the Vaaj-sanei, i.e. those belonging to the horse race. This is because the Sun God had assumed the form of a 'horse' to teach him, and the word 'Vaajis' means a horse. The teaching was done in the form of the cosmic neighing. This form of the Sun God came to be worshipped as 'Hayagriva', the Lord with the neck of a horse. An entire Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition is named after this God, and it is called 'Hayagriva Upanishad'. It is the 29th Upanishad of this Veda.

Yagyavalkya had fifteen disciples (e.g. Kaanva, Maadhyandin etc.) who mastered one each of these fifteen sub-text created by Yagyavalkya. [Vishnu Puran, 3-5; Vayu Puran, 60-1.] The list of sages and seers who excelled in the Shukla Yajur Veda branch has been given in Brihad-Aaranyaka Upanishad, Canto 2, Brahmin 6, and Canto 4, Brahmin 6.

The Yajur Veda is divided into two major types—viz. the Shukla (white) and Krishna (black or dark). The Krishna Yajur Veda has only four branches existing at present out of the earlier eighty-five—Taittiriya, Maitraayani, Katha, and Kapisthal. Its Brahman is known as Taittiriya Brahman. The Shukla Yajur Veda, also known as the Vaajsaneyi Sanhita, originally had seventeen branches, but now only following two branches exist—Kaanva and Maadhyandeen. Its Brahman is known as Shatpath Brahman.

The sub-Veda of the Yajur Veda is known as Dhanur-Veda which deals with the science of archery and warfare.

The Aaranyakas of the Yajur Veda are—Taittiriya (of the Krishna Yajur Veda) and Brihad-aaranyak (of the Shukla Yajur Veda).

There are 19 principal Upanishads of the Shukla Yajur Veda, and 32 principal Upanishads of the Krishna Yajur Veda—such as Taitiriya, Swetaasvatar, Katha, Brihdaaranakya, Maitri, Ishavasya Upanishads etc.

The priests who used the hymns of the Yajur Veda during fire sacrifices were called 'Yajus' or 'Adhwaryu'.

(c) The *Sam Veda*—The Sam Veda is basically musical chanting of hymns, and it is basically the hymns of the Rig Veda set to music. All such Mantras of the Rig Veda which were useful for singing purposes by the Udgata priest have been brought together as Sam Veda.

The Sam Veda has only three branches available now out of the total of one thousand that originally existed. These three branches are the following—Kauthum, Jaiminiya, and Raanaayaniya.

The Sam Veda is divided into two parts—Aarcikaa, and Uttaraarchika. The former contains 585 Mantras and the latter 964 Mantras, bringing the total number of Mantras to 1549. Out of these, it is believed that 1474 Mantras are taken from the Rig Veda Sanhita and only 75 are original to the Sam Veda. Then, about 272 Mantras have been repeated twice. If these repetitions are taken into account, then the total number of Mantras becomes $1549 + 272 = 1821$.

Since these hymns are meant to be sung melodiously, they have been set to musical meters and notes. Thus, they have 7 musical scales called the Swars which correspond to the seven meters of classical music. These are Saa, Re, Gaa, Maa, Pa, Dha, Ni.

The sub-Veda of the Sam Veda is known as Gandharva-Veda and it deals with the art and science of classical entertainment which involves music, song, drama, theatre, acting, deception etc.

The Sam Veda has nine Brahmans. Out of them, the Taandya Mahaa Braahman is the largest and the most important. The others are Aarsheya, Devtaa-dhyaaya, Praudha, Shadh-vimansh, Saam-vidhaan, Sam-hito-panishad, Talwakaar, and Vansha.

Only one Aaranyaka is known now, and it is called Jaiminiya or Talwakaar Aaranyaka.

There are 16 Upanishads in the Sam Veda—such as Kena Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishads etc.

The priests who used the hymns of the Sam Veda during fire sacrifices were called 'Saamans' or 'Udgaata'.

(d) The *Atharva Veda*—The Atharva Veda is also known as Brahma Veda since it is assigned to the Brahma priest during the fire sacrifice. The Atharva Veda Sanhita deals with more mundane things of life as compared to the Rig Veda.

The composition style is more sophisticated as compared to the earlier Vedas, and therefore modern scholars conclude that the Atharva Veda is of later period origin.

The Atharva Veda had nine Shakhas (branches) in earlier times, but only two are available now—viz. the Pippalaad and Shaunak.

The Atharva Veda Sanhita is divided into 4 books called the Prapaathakas comprising 20 chapters or Kandas. Each Kanda is divided into hymns or Shuktas, and the latter into individual verses or Mantras. There are a total of 4 Prapaathakas (books), 20

Kandas (chapters), 736 Shuktas (hymns) and 6077 Mantras (verses). The last Kanda, i.e. the 20th is borrowed heavily from the Rig Veda Sanhita.

The sub-Veda of the Atharva Veda is known as Ayurveda, and it deals with medicinal herbs and the science of healing.

Its Brahman is Gopath Brahman.

No Aaranyaka of this Veda has come to light so far, and only one Brahman is known—and it is the Gopath Brahman.

A major part of the Atharva Veda is concerned with the rituals of the fire sacrifice that can alleviate diseases, foster longer life, fulfill one's desires and aspirations, bring favourable environment for construction of buildings etc., matters such as economy, trade, commerce, agriculture, statecraft, penances, repentance, austerities, black magic rituals such as Tantric and other occult practices. But that does not mean that this Veda is devoid of metaphysical and spiritual philosophy as it contains 31 Upanishads—such as Mundak, Mandukya, Prashna Upanishads etc.

The priests who used the hymns of the Atharva Veda during fire sacrifices were called 'Atharvans' or 'Braahmans'.

The Vedas—The metaphysical relevance and significance of the Vedas have been explained in the Atharva Veda's Nrisingh Upanishad, Canto 2, verse no. 2; Canto 4, verse no. 9-10, and Canto 5, verse no. 9.

The Sita Upanishad, verse nos. 21-33 of the Atharva Veda tradition narrates how the four Vedas came into existence along their branches and other scriptures associated with them.

The Krishna Yajur Veda's Suk-rahasya Upanishad, verse no. 3 alludes to the fact that sage Veda Vyas was a classifier of the Vedas and had a thorough knowledge of these sacred texts by saying that he 'was an embodiment or a personification of the Vedas'.

Sage Veda Vyas also wrote the *18 Purans* as follows—Brahm, Padma, Vishnu, Vaayu, Bhaagwat, Naarad, Maarkandey, Agni, Bhavishya, Brahma-vaivarta, Linga, Varaaha, Skanda, Vaaman, Kurma, Matsya, Garuda, Brahmaa-nand Purans.

His *other contributions* to spiritual literature include—Mahaa-bhaarat, Srimad Bhaagwat, Vedant Sutra, Vyas Smriti and Laghu Vyas Sanhita.

(44) **Vashistha**— Sage Vashistha is one of the well known ancient sages and mentioned even in the Rig Veda (refer Rig Veda, 7/33/14). He is regarded as the Manas-putra of the creator Brahma. In other words, he was the mental-born son of Brahma born as a result of his decision to have a son. As such, he is one of the great celestial sages known as Sapta Rishis—or the seven great sages. According to another version, he was born in a Kumbh or a pitcher as a son of the Varuna God (the Water God). Another great sage named Agastya was his twin brother.

He was the court priest or Rajguru of the Ikshavaku clan belonging to the solar race who ruled over the kingdom of Ayodhya. It was in this solar race that Lord Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu around whom the epic Ramayan was written, was born. Vashistha is credited with one of the greatest treatises on Vedanta, called Yog Vashistha. It is also called Maha Ramayan.

Arundhati, also known as Akshamala and Urjaa, was the most erudite, sagacious and wise wife of sage Vashistha. She was the daughter of Prajapati Kardama and his wife

Devahuti. Sage Atri's wife Anusuiya was her sister, and sage Kapil was her brother. Her famous son was sage Shakti. She was a preacher and a well known scholar of the scriptures in her own right, and was no less enlightened than her husband Vashistha.

His son was sage Shakti. Sage Parashar was his grandson, and sage Veda Vyas, who is the legendary classifier of the Vedas and the author of the Purans, was his great grandson.

The celebrated sage Kapil, who is said to be the proponent of the great school of Hindu philosophy known as Shankya Shastra, was the brother-in-law of sage Vashistha, being the brother of his wife Arundhati, and the only son of sage Kardama and his wife Devahuti. He taught even his mother spiritual wisdom in Bhagavata, and hence this part of this scripture is called 'Kapil Gita' in which the sage has expounded upon the philosophies of Sankhya Shastra, Ashtanga Yoga (the eight-fold path of Yoga) and Bhakti-yoga (the path of devotion for and submission to the Lord) (3/25-33).

There are a number of legends associated with Vashistha. One such tale narrates how his all-wish fulfilling cow named Nandini was attempted to be stolen by king Vishvarath, the son of Gaadhi. The attempt failed miserably. This king was so determined and in awe of Vashistha's mystical powers that had prevented him from acquiring this cow that he did severe Tapa (austerity and penance) to acquire similar powers. Thus, he became sage a great sage known as Vishwamitra.

The Sharva Upanishad of Atharva Veda, in its verse no. 22 stresses the greatness of Lord Shiva known as Maheshwar by saying that even such great sage as Vashistha had praised and prayed to the Lord, implying that if Vashistha had worshipped Shiva then the latter must surely be a great Lord.

(45) **Vaamdeo**—Sage Vamdeo/Vaamdeo is a well referred to sage in the Upanishads. According to Aitareya Upanishad, 2/1/5, he had realised the existence of the Atma, the pure consciousness, while still in the womb. The Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, 1/4/10, says that he had realised Brahm, the supreme transcendental Lord, and hence he is treated as being on the same high spiritual pedestal as Manu and Surya.

According to Shiva Puran, Kailash Khanda, 11/12, he had learnt about Pranav, the ethereal form of Brahm and revealed as the sound OM, from Kumarsvaami, also known as Shanmukha or Subramanya.

Sage Aatreya was his disciple.

Amongst his great teachings is the Vamdeo Gita. It is one of the sixteen minor Gitas in the epic Mahabharata. It occurs in Shantiparva, Chapters 92-94, and has 94 verses. It is in the form of a dialogue between sage Vamdeo and king Vasumanas. It has been recounted by Bhishma to Yudishthir. The duties of kings are the main theme of this Gita.

The Sharva Upanishad of Atharva Veda, in its verse no. 22 stresses the greatness of Lord Shiva known as Maheshwar by saying that even such great sage as Vamdeo had praised and prayed to the Lord, implying that if Vamdeo had worshipped Shiva then the latter must surely be a great Lord.

The name Vamdeo has other connotations also. Vamdeo is one of the eleven forms of Rudra or Lord Shiva. His divine consort is known as Vaamaa.

The Panch Brahm Upanishad of the Krishna Yajur Veda describes him as being the third name or form of Brahm, the Supreme Being, in verse nos. 10-14. It says—"The

third form (of Brahm) is known as *Vamdeo*—basically because Lord Shiva’s general demeanours are at odds with the way the world likes to live. He is a renunciate par-excellence and lives completely submerged in perpetual meditation, not at all bothered by the niceties and attractions of this material world. This life style would be treated as unconventional and odd by the less-enlightened creatures of the world who remain submerged, neck-deep, in enjoying the material comforts and pleasures of this world. So it is natural they would call him ‘Vamdeo’—the odd, weird, strange and anomalous God. This would be very evident if Shiva is compared with Vishnu and Brahma, the other two Gods of the Trinity. Vishnu is very much engrossed in the upkeep of this world because it is part of his duties—as he is the protector, sustainer and nourisher of this creation. Brahma also remains neck-deep involved in this creation—because had it not been so he would never have explored means to create creatures who would copulate to propagate themselves. It is only Shiva who remains aloof from this swamp. Further, the word ‘Shiva’ itself means ‘one who is auspicious, beautiful, truthful, enlightened and eternal.’

Iconographically, the face of Shiva pointing to the north is called Vamdeo. This form of Brahm is a symbol of the fire element and stands for the power to purify, absorb and purge everything that comes in contact with it—like the fire that burns all impurities and brings out the inherent natural shine in an entity. He is said to rule over this element.

The Brihajjabal Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, in its Brahman 1 describes the five forms of Brahm but in a different way in the context of creation. It says that Vamdeo is the second form of Shiva who is treated in this Upanishad as being synonymous with Brahm (Brahman 1, verse no. 1). Let us examine what it has to say—“The second subtle form of Shiva is called Vamdeo who produced a sweet fluid which was like sweet water, and the earth was floated on it. [In other words, the first primordial ‘water’ from which the earth emerged refers to the vast cosmic ether that is symbolised by the salty ocean, and this second sweet ‘water’ refers to the underground water that is found under the solid surface of the earth. It is this water that is found in wells and springs. Since it surrounds the earth as a ring underneath the surface, the solid outer surface of the earth where terrestrial creatures and trees grow is virtually floating on this inner ring of sweet water. The salty water of the ocean floats on the surface of the earth and not vice versa.]

The Panch Brahm Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda tradition, in its verse nos. 10-14 describe the third form of Brahm called ‘Vamdeo’.]. To quote—“The form of Brahm as ‘Vamdeo’ has the following grand virtues—he is a bestower of great knowledge, wisdom, erudition and enlightenment; he is like fire personified (i.e. he has the astounding potential and vigour as possessed by the fire, he is as powerful and potent as fire, as purifying and rejuvenating as the fire which is the third element of creation after earth and water).

He is illuminated with the light that is a metaphor for knowledge and wisdom. It is as brilliant and splendid as millions of suns (signifying the power of knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment) [10].

He is a personification of the virtues of Anand (extreme sense of bliss, happiness and joys, of ecstasy and exhilaration, of beatitude and felicity). The Sam Veda with all its melodious connotations and singing patterns is its revealed form. [The Sam Veda is usually sung melodiously, set to beautiful music with all its captivating charm, as opposed to other Vedas which are chanted or recited in unison or even read quietly in

seclusion, and therefore it fits in well with the observation that this form of Brahm is a personification of Anand—for music is indeed exhilarating and uplifting for the soul.]

Since singing obliges one to have a soothing and melodious voice, a voice which is sweet and pleasant, is mellowed and steady, and is able to sustain long notes and tones while singing, this form of Brahm is a personification of these virtues. [A melodious, pleasant, welcoming and sweet voice is the best gift that a man possesses; it endears him to everyone and at all places and time. Further, singing of the Sam Veda requires special skills, and all these qualities would distinguish a man from the rest. In other words, Brahm is not an ordinary God, but it is the sweetest, the most skilled, and the wisest entity in creation. Another connotations is this—the mellowed from of sound as indicated by the first vowels of Sanskrit language—viz. ‘A’ as in ‘a man’, and ‘Aa’ as in ‘master’ are indicative of Brahm’s virtues that signify the origin of creation. This is because to pronounce the letters ‘A’ and ‘Aa’ one has to open one’s mouth which symbolise the start of the process of creation.]

He is revealed in the form of the Ahavaniya holy fire, the best of the fires. [This fire is lit at the beginning to invoke the Gods and welcome them, hence is like the herald of good and auspicious intentions in creation.] [11].

Since Gyan is a personified form of this Brahm, it is very potent and powerful in slaying one’s enemies (represented by ignorance and delusions). It is empowered with great authority, strength and potentials in this respect.

This Brahm is ‘Avaya’, i.e. it is imperishable, undiminished and infinite, and a personification of unmatched Shakti, i.e. it is a fount of divine cosmic energy, stupendous strength, great powers and astounding potentials.

His complexion is Shukla (white) in colour. [This word is indicative of, one, semen which is a metaphor for vitality, potency and stamina, symbolising its ability to create and propagate the creation, and second, the Sata Guna which is the best, the most auspicious and noblest virtue in creation. This word ‘Shukla’ also refers to the Shukla Yajur Veda.]

In spite of the fact that he is such an exalted entity, he has the low quality called Tama in him. [This is because if we are expected to take it for granted that everything in existence is Brahm personified, then it obviously includes the darker side of creation along with the brighter side. The darker side is symbolised by the word ‘Tama’—meaning dark, while the brighter side is symbolised by the word ‘Shukla’—meaning white. In other words, Vamdeo Brahm possesses the unique and often paradoxical qualities that defy understanding. It is not without reason that Brahm has not been able to be defined even by the Vedas, and they threw up the towel, saying ‘Neti Neti’—not this not this.]

He (Vamdeo Brahm) is completely enlightened, wise and realised. No knowledge escapes it; it is a personification of these auspicious virtues [12].

He (Vamdeo Brahm) is not only the regulator and controller of the three worlds, but also has revealed himself in the form of these three worlds. [The three worlds are the ones revealed in the form of the three words uttered by the creator at the time of creation—viz. ‘Bhu’ referring to the terrestrial world, ‘Bhuvaha’ to the world above the earth, i.e. the sky, and ‘Swaha’ meaning the heavens where the Gods live. These three worlds also symbolically refer to the three states in which the consciousness exists—viz. the Jagrat or waking state, the Swapna or the dreaming state, and Sushupta or the deep

sleep state which correspond to the Vishwa, Taijas and Pragya forms of existence. This concept has been explained in a separate appendix of this volume.]

He is a bestower of all good fortunes and auspiciousness to all the creatures in creation. He gives the rewards to all according to the deeds done by them [13].

He is honoured by the eight 'Akchars'. [That is, he is praised by a Mantra having eight letters or syllables. This Mantra is 'OM Namoha Mahadevaye'.] It also means that he has revealed himself as the eight elements of creation that are 'imperishable, eternal and infinite' by nature—i.e. are 'Akchar'.

This supreme Divinity lives in the heart that is symbolically like a divine lotus with eight petals. [This vision of the heart as a lotus of eight petals is expounded in the Upanishads dealing with Yoga and Tantra.] [14]. (10-14).

The Varaaha Upanishad of Krishna Yajur Veda, Canto 4, verse nos. 34-42, 44 employ the metaphor of the bird (parrot) and an ant to describe the two types of creatures and the way they take to their Mukti or Moksha (spiritual liberation, deliverance, emancipation and salvation) citing the case of sage Shukdeo who was a parrot, and sage Vamdeo who represented an ant.

In its Canto 4, verse no. 34 it says that 'Sage *Shukdeo* (the parrot saint and son of sage Veda Vyas) found Jivan Mukti as did sage Vamdeo. But there was a subtle difference between the two types of Muktis. Those wise people who follow the path shown by sage Shukdeo find the ultimate liberation and deliverance for themselves in such a way that they do not have to come back into this world again, i.e. they obtain final emancipation and salvation.'

On the other hand, in its Canto 4, verse no. 34 it says that 'those who follow the example set by sage *Vamdeo* repeatedly die and take birth in this world. This cycle would continue for them till the time they find the Truth by practicing Yoga in relation to the profound philosophy known as Sankhya Shastra, understanding its principle tenets and basic philosophy, besides painstakingly adhering to the theory of Karma (doing deeds correctly, with the proper perspective and wisdom, so that no consequence accrue which would create a baggage that is carried over to the next birth as destiny that forces the creature to enter a fresh cycle of birth and death). It is then only that they can get Mukti.'

In its Canto 4, verse no. 39 it says that those who practice Yoga do obtain Mukti just like sage Vamdeo did, but this involves due diligence and great effort. Followers of the path of Yoga are said to be the followers of the path shown by Vamdeo because they believe in obtaining Mukti through making diligent and hard efforts symbolised by their doing Yoga which is rigorous and involves painstaking efforts over a long period of time. Yoga is fraught with a lot of danger and hurdle as compared to the path of finding Mukti through the pursuance of the path of Gyan or acquisition of knowledge and enlightenment based on meditation and contemplation, study of the scriptures and pondering deeply upon their doctrines and other such methods that do not require rigid exercises and hard labour as required by Yoga.

(46) **Vaalkhilya**— Sage Vaalkhilya was the head of a family of sages born from Kratu, the father, and Kriyadevi, the mother. There are said to be sixty-thousand Vaalkhilyas who are supposed to be siblings. They were of the size of a thumb. Once they had helped sage Kashyap perform his fire sacrifice successfully, but became tired. When Indra, the

king of Gods, saw them weary, he laughed at them, thereby incurring their wrath who cursed him that he would be punished for his impertinence and arrogance by Garud, the legendary vehicle of Lord Vishnu.

The chief Vaalkhilya was preached by the creator Brahma himself about the eclectic knowledge of Brahm, the cosmic Consciousness and the Supreme Being, in the Pashupat Brahmin Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition. This is the nineteenth Upanishad of this Veda.

(47) **Vishwakshen**— Vishwaksen is the chief of the close attendants of Lord Vishnu. His name appears repeatedly in the Atharva Veda's Tripadvibhut Maha Narayan Upanishad in its Canto 5, paragraph no. 15, and in Canto 6, paragraph no. 15. His own abode is known as 'Vishwaksen Vaikunth' (Canto 6, paragraph no. 16).

Vishwaksen is an important attendant of Vishnu and regarded as the chief amongst the Lord's attendants. He is given precedence over all other attendants or close associates of Vishnu and has the same importance that Lord Ganesh has amongst the Gods. Like the latter who is worshipped first in all religious ceremonies and invoked to give protection and help in successful accomplishment of all endeavours, Vishwaksen too is regarded as the protector of all devotees of Lord Vishnu and helps them in their endeavour to reach the Lord.

Lord Vishwaksen is a personification of the virtues of majesty, magnificence, power and authority. He is the upholder of law (i.e. Dharma, or the righteous code of conduct for all activities undertaken by all inhabitants of this creation) and ensures that it is strictly implemented while firmly enforcing prohibitions on unlawful activity. He is the motivator or inspirer of all inclinations, temperaments, tendencies and habits that form the nature of all the creatures. He is the primary cause of all causes that result in any kind of activity in this creation. He epitomises all the eclectic signs of Anand unbound. [That is, he possesses the signs or characteristics that are the hallmarks of someone who is extremely happy, contented, cheerful and blissful.] He is a personification of Lord Maha Vishnu (the great sustainer, nourisher, care-taker and protector of creation). He protects all kinds of Mokshas (spiritual liberation, salvation and emancipation). [That is, he is the patron God of Moksha and helps those who seek spiritual emancipation and salvation. Those who seek liberation and deliverance from this entrapping world regard Vishwaksen as their patron God or deity.] He is extremely powerful and strong, bold and brave, valiant and valorous.

His *city* known as '*Vishwaksen Vaikunth*' is described in Canto 6, paragraph no. 16 of the Tripadvibhut Maha Narayan Upanishad as follows—“This divine city of Vishwaksen Vaikunth is illuminated by rows upon rows of brilliantly lit lights of immense intensity. It is full of and also surrounded from all sides by divine bodies who are personified forms of the virtues of eternal Anand (bliss, cheerfulness and happiness) as well as of Gyan (knowledge, enlightenment and wisdom). There are numerous buildings and chariots in it that also personify pure Gyan. It has countless mountains (i.e. hills and hillocks) that symbolise mounds of endless Anand. It therefore appears to be extremely astonishing and fascinating. [In short, this divine Vaikunth is full of Anand everywhere. Its happiness and bliss, its cheerfulness, merriment and joyousness are evident everywhere. There is no trace of miseries, sorrows and pains, or of any kind of turmoil and turbulence in it. It's charming and magnificent to the extreme.]

In the center of this magnificent divine city there is a hill or large mound known as ‘Kalyan Parvat’—the mountain of welfare and well being. On its top there is a ‘Vimaan’ (a chariot, a dwelling or a palace, or a multi-layered tower, a seat or an altar where the worshipped deity is seated) which symbolises pure and unadulterated Anand.

Inside this Vimaan there is a divine and very glorious seat that is located at the center of illumination that is of extreme brilliance and is like the splendour that emanates from Brahm, the Supreme Being. This seat resembles the thallus at the top of the stalk of the divine Lotus flower. On this seat is seated, most majestically and with great dignity, Lord Vishwaksen.”

(48) **Valmiki**— Sage Valmiki is well known for his classical work known as the famous epic ‘Ramayana’, which is his magnum opus. He is also credited with penning Advhut Ramayan in which Sita had assumed the form of Maha Kali to kill the Ravana with a thousand heads.

Valmiki is said to be the son of sage Pracheta who is said to be the son of Varun, the Water God. He is also said to be one of the Prajaapatis—the ancient patriarchs of this world.

According to Adhyatma Ramayan, Ayodhya Kand, Canto 6, verse nos. 57-58 he was a Brahmin by birth but became a robber and adopted their means of livelihood because he was brought up by robbers. Once the seven celestial sages known as the Sapta-Rishis went through the forest where he lived, and Valmiki accosted them. When asked by the sages why he robbed others, Valmiki replied that he did it to feed his family and other dependants. The sages advised him that they would not share the consequences of sins that he is committing for them. To test the correctness of this advice, Valmiki tied them to a tree and went to his house to ask his kith and kin if they would share any misfortune that might befall upon him. When they replied that they are only concerned with what loot he brings home, Valmiki’s eyes of wisdom opened instantaneously. He rushed back to the sages, untied them and fell at their feet seeking forgiveness. He asked them to show him the path by which he can seek redemption and salvation for himself. The sages then advised him to do Japa (repetition) with Lord Ram’s holy Name ‘RAM’. Valmiki said that he was so sinful that it is not possible for him to utter the Lord’s holy Name. At this, the sages thought over the matter and told him to repeat the name in the reverse order—as ‘MARA’. When this word MARA is repeated it becomes RAM. This trick worked fine for Valmiki, and he immediately sat down to do Tapa (severe form of penance) and meditated on the name of the Lord in the reverse order. He became so immobile and lost in contemplation that a mound of anthill formed around his body. It so happened that when the sages returned to the same place during their return journey, they saw him in this condition. They poured consecrated water on him and revived him. It was then that they gave him a new name ‘Valmiki’, which means ‘one who has emerged from an anthill’. This story is narrated in Adhyatma Ramayan, Ayodhya Kand, 6/57-58.

He established a hermitage on the banks of river Tamsa and lived there. Lord Ram went to meet him during his outward journey to the forest, and it was in the sage’s hermitage that Sita lived and her two sons Lav and Kush were born when she was sent to exile by Ram during the final days of the Lord’s days on earth as a prelude to his winding up his worldly ‘Leela’ or deeds and ascending to the heaven as Lord Vishnu.

One day Valmiki saw a hunter shoot down a male bird and heard the wailings of his companion, the female bird. He cursed the hunter in a verse that came out of his mouth in a poetic style called the Anushtup Chand (metre). Never before had Valmiki ever composed any verse, so he was astonished at this development. Then Brahma the creator appeared before him and ordered him to compose the epic Ramayan for which the basic story was provided to him by sage Narad.

The genesis of the story of Ramayan is this—Once the celestial sage Narad came to his hermitage (called an Ashram) on the behest of Brahma. Valmiki asked him if there was anyone living in this creation who embodied all the 16 Kalaas (qualities) that the Supreme Being is known to possess. Then Narad told him about Lord Ram. This is how the grand and magnificent story of the Ramayan was revealed.

(49) **Vishwamitra**— The word ‘Vishwamitra’ literally means a friend of the world. He is the Rishi (the wise and enlightened sage or seer who conceptualized and preached) of the entire 3rd Mandal of the Rig Veda. 501 Richas (hymns) of this Mandal are directly attributed to him, and the rest to his disciples.

Along with sages Vashistha and Valmiki, he is the most famous sage who played a pivotal role in the life of Lord Ram. It was Vishwamitra who had taken Lord Ram and Laxman to protect his fire sacrifice from being defiled by the demons. It was when Lord Ram went with him that he first encountered the demons, and had killed the demoness Tadka and the demon Subhahu while flinging the demon Marich far away into the middle of the ocean. Sage Gautam’s wife Ahilya was also liberated by the Lord during this trip with Vishwamitra. The sage took the Lord and Laxman to the marriage ceremony of Sita where the Lord had broken the sturdy bow of Lord Shiva and married her. All the four brothers were married on the occasion.

There is a famous story in Nadishukta (Rig Veda, 3/33) that he once prayed to rivers Vipaata and Shutudri (the modern rivers Beas and Sutlej of Punjab state of India) to part and give him a way when robbers were pursuing him.

He has been mentioned as a great sage in a number of Vedic literature—e.g. Aitareya Aaranyaka, 2/2/1; Taittiriya Samhita, 2/2/1/2; Kaushitaki Brahman, 15/1; Panchavinsha Brahman, 14/3/12.

In Rig Veda 1/24 there appears a story of Shunashshepa who was saved by sage Vishwamitra when he was about to be sacrificed in a Vedic sacrifice ritual. The sage adopted him as his son.

He is said to be Kshatriya king as mentioned in Nirukta 2/24, and Panchavinsha Brahman 21/12/2. He is believed to have been the son of king Gaadhi of Chandravansha. His earlier name was Vishwarath.

The Valmiki Ramayan describes some very interesting stories related to him in Baal Kand, Cantos 51-65 in which it is narrated that he had created a heaven for his patron king Trishanku, and his conflict with sage Vashistha and his ultimate elevation to the status of a Brahma-rishi, i.e. a sage who has acquired the highest stature which makes him equivalent to the stature of Brahm, the Supreme Being personified.

He is counted amongst the seven great celestial Rishis or sages. The greatest contribution of sage Vishwamitra was his creating the famous Gayatri Mantra dedicated to the Sun God. It is regarded as the greatest Mantra ever conceptualized and preached in the entire pantheon of Mantras.

(50) **Yagyavalkya**— Sage Yagyavalkya belonged to that Vedic period when people had an integral and holistic view of life and the reality behind existence, and all-activities, secular or religious, were regarded as one big, wholesome and composite religious sacrifice called a Yagya. Life itself was consecrated and devoted to the realization of the transcendental and supreme truthful Reality. There was no distinction between renunciation and involvement in life's chores. There was no dichotomy between the two, and the various debates arising in Indian spiritual practices due to different interpretations and re-interpretations of the Vedic and Upanishadic tenets was a product of the later period. One such exemplary sage and seer belonging to that golden period was Yagyavalkya—he was an enlightened wise man who was not only a self-realised householder but an ardent ascetic, an acclaimed scholar and an exemplary renunciate man par-excellence, all at the same time.

It is believed that Yagyavalkya was an incarnation of Lord Brahma, the creator, when he was cursed by Lord Shiva. [Skand Puran, Nagar Khand, 1-9.] His father was named Brahmabahu (literally, the limbs of Brahma, because the latter's limbs had manifested as this person). [Vayu Puran, 61.] But according to a book of religious law written by Yagyavalkya himself known as 'Yagyavalkya Sanhita', his father also had the same name. So, our Yagyavalkya was, in effect, 'Yagyavalkya, the second'. [Yagyavalkya Sanhita, 1.]

Yagyavalkya's teacher in the science of Yoga (meditation) and the knowledge of the self (metaphysics and philosophy) was sage Vashistha, son of Hiranyanabha Kaushalya, a king of the Raghu dynasty which ruled Ayodhya in ancient times. [Vayu Puran, 88; Bhagwat Mahapurana, 93/106.] The sage performed severe penances and austerities, known as Tapa, at Mithila, the birth place of Sita, the divine consort of Lord Ram. [Skandpuran, Reva Khand, 42.]

He used to attend the court of great ancient wise kings, such as king Janak (the father of Sita—Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, canto 3-4) and Yudhisthir (of the Mahabharat fame—Mahabharat, Sabha Parva, 4/32). It was in the court of king Janak that Yagyavalkya had defeated all the assembled scholars of the time on various metaphysical and theological concepts. He is also believed to be a chief priest in Yudhisthir's Rajsu Yagya.

Sage Yagyavalkya was one of the greatest, most erudite, wise and renowned seers of his time. He was a senior and enlightened man, so wise and learned a scholar that even king Janak, who himself was a most self-realised and enlightened king of his era, was so much bowled over by his erudition, depth of knowledge and scholarship that he accepted the sage's discipleship (refer Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, Canto 4, Brahmin 2, verse nos. 1, 4). He was proclaimed the undisputed champion and winner in a metaphysical and theological debate held in the court of Janak during the course of a great fire sacrifice held where great scholars, seers and sages from far and wide had assembled (refer Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, Canto 3, Brahmin 1-9).

He was a much sought after teacher and an honoured exponent of the eclectic Advaitya Vedanta philosophy of non-duality. This basically propounds, inter alia, that everything in existence, visible or invisible, minute or colossal, important or unimportant, are all fundamentally the same singular unit called Brahm manifested in myriad and diverse ways, that therefore nothing that exists which is not Brahm is not

true, that this Brahm is the only supreme Authority and Divinity in the entire creation, that this Brahm and the individual Atma or pure consciousness of the creature are one and the same, and not two independent units, that this Atma is the pure self, etc. Anything contrary to this is false and fallacious.

It is believed that all major Upanishads belonging to the Yajur Veda tradition are either directly or indirectly expounded and enunciated by and elucidated upon by Yagyavalkya or any one of his long line of disciples who had acquired this eclectic knowledge from him. (Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 2/6/1-3, 4/6/1-3 and 6/5/1-3.)

One such example is the Ram Uttar Tapini Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition in which sage Yagyavalkya has taught even the teacher of the Gods, i.e. Brihaspati, about the esoteric secrets and the profound spiritual importance as well as the significance of the Tarak Mantra, and about the divine nature of Lord Ram and his great Mantras that can provide a creature with Mukti (spiritual liberation and deliverance) once and for all.

The high spiritual prowess and reach of Yagyavalkya can be judged from the fact that he could communicate directly with the Supreme Being called Mandal Purush in his visible manifestation as the brilliant and splendourous Sun as described in Mandal Brahmin Upanishad of Shukla Yajur Veda tradition. The fact that Yagyavalkya had a repeated communion with the Sun God, at least on four occasions is clearly marked out in Mandal Brahmin Upanishad, 1/1/1-2; 2/1/1-2; 3/1/1-2; 4/1/1-2.

Yagyavalkya was a rich householder sage and seer. This is borne out by the fact that (a) on each occasion when he attended great debates he was showered with huge largesse by king Janak in the form of immense quantity of gold and thousands of cows (Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 3/1/1-2, 4/1/1-7, 4/3/33, 4/4/23), and (b) when he asks his wife Maitreyi to partition his vast estate before he went on to take Sanyas (Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 2/4/1-2, 4/5/1-2).

The creation of Yajur Veda's two branches:- The word 'Yajus' means a liturgy of hymns chanted during the fire sacrifice. The Yajur Veda has been classified into Krishna and Shukla branches. It would be pertinent and interesting to add a brief note here on why the Yajur Veda has come to be known as Krishna and Shukla, meaning 'black' and 'white' respectively. The Yajur Veda Sanhita (a collection of Mantras or hymns) is classified into these two types for a variety of reasons. One of the probable reasons for this Yajur Veda having two names is that the collection in the Sanhita that came to be known as 'Krishna' had a mixture of prose and poetry, and hence considered 'impure and corrupted'. This is because primarily the Vedas were composed in poetry form with the verses structured according to one or the other methods of poetical composition called 'Chandas'. Prose as a style of composition came later on and was regarded as an interpolation, interposition or juxtaposition which is all tantamount to corrupting the original method. Hence, that text which had both the poetry and prose was deemed to be 'corrupted and impure form of the Vedic text', and therefore called 'Krishna'—the dark one. On the other hand, the Sanhita which had only poetry was considered un-adulterated and pure form of the Vedic text, and hence called 'Shukla' or the white one, the colour 'white' being the colour of purity, immaculacy, divinity and holiness.

Since the primary use of the hymns of the Vedas in earlier times was for incantatory chanting during religious fire sacrifices, the poetical mode of composition

was more suitable than the prose model. That is why these hymns were composed in 'Chandas' which are the different styles in which Sanskrit verses are composed. Later on, when these verses were also being used for purposes other than the fire sacrifices, the prose model evolved and developed. The Upanishads are mainly in the prose model because they are philosophical treatises and not ritualistic incantatory chanting.

Another plausible reason is that the verses of the Krishna Yajur Veda are more difficult to understand than those of the Shukla Yajur Veda. Hence, the former were called 'dark' or Krishna because of the difficulty in their comprehension and explanation as compared to the more easier ones classified as 'white' or Shukla. The Krishna Yajur Veda Sanhita was more prevalent in the south of India while the Shukla was more common in the north of the country.

The third reason is that the original classifier of Vedas was 'Krishna Dvaipaayana Veda Vyas' who taught the text of the Yajur Veda to his disciple called Vaishampaayana. Hence, the original version of the text was named 'Krishna' in order to commemorate this fact.

There is a fourth probable reason as outlined here. The chief exponent of the Yajur Veda is regarded as the ancient sage Yagyavalkya. He was one of the several disciples of sage Vaishampayana. Once the teacher asked his disciples to perform the 'Brahmavadhya' sacrifice (a type of elaborate penance) for him. Yagyavalkya was so confident of himself, his knowledge and competency that he offered to do it all by himself for his teacher. The teacher thought that he was haughty and boastful. So, disowning or disinheriting him from his line of disciples, he commanded that Yagyavalkya should return all that he had learnt from his teacher. The sage returned all the Mantras of the Yajur Veda that he had learnt from his teacher by 'vomiting' them out. The rest of the disciples were very cunning; they transformed themselves immediately into partridges, called Tittars, and gobbled up everything. From that developed the Krishna Yajur Veda's Taitirriya branch. It is called 'Krishna' after the teacher and 'Taitirriya' after the partridges. Also, since they were 'vomited products' they were regarded as polluted and impure. Such body of knowledge came to be known as 'Krishna'—the impure one.

Now, not to be demoralized so easily and determined to get back his lost knowledge and wisdom, Yagyavalkya worshipped the Sun God who blessed him with a fresh set of Mantras of the Yajur Veda. Since it came from a 'bright source' represented by the sun, this set of Mantras was called the 'Shukla Yajur Veda'. [The word 'Shukla' means 'bright or light or illuminated'.] The sage revised this into fifteen sub-texts, called the Vaaj-sanei, i.e. those belonging to the horse race. This is because the Sun God had assumed the form of a 'horse' to teach him, and the word 'Vaajis' means a horse. The teaching was done in the form of the cosmic neighing. This form of the Sun God came to be worshipped as 'Hayagriva', the Lord with the neck of a horse. An entire Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition is named after this God, and it is called 'Hayagriva Upanishad'. It is the 29th Upanishad of this Veda.

Yagyavalkya had fifteen disciples (e.g. Kaanva, Maadhyandin etc.) who mastered one each of these fifteen sub-text created by Yagyavalkya. [Vishnu Puran, 3-5; Vayu Puran, 60-1.] The list of sages and seers who excelled in the Shukla Yajur Veda branch has been given in Brihad-Aaranyaka Upanishad, Canto 2, Brahmin 6, and Canto 4, Brahmin 6.

The Yajur Veda is divided into two major types—viz. the Shukla (white) and Krishna (black or dark). The Krishna Yajur Veda has only four branches existing at present out of the earlier eighty-five—Taitirriya, Maitraayani, Katha, and Kapisthal. Its Brahman is known as Taitirriya Brahman. The Shukla Yajur Veda, also known as the Vaajsaneyi Sanhita, originally had seventeen branches, but now only following two branches exist—Kaanva and Maadhyandeen. Its Brahman is known as Shatpath Brahman.

The sub-Veda of the Yajur Veda is known as Dhanur-Veda which deals with the science of archery and warfare.

The Aaranyakas of the Yajur Veda are—Taititriya (of the Krishna Yajur Veda) and Brihad-aaranyak (of the Shukla Yajur Veda).

There are 19 principal Upanishads of the Shukla Yajur Veda, and 32 principal Upanishads of the Krishna Yajur Veda—such as Taitirriya, Swetaasvatar, Katha, Brihdaaranakya, Maitri, Ishavasya Upanishads etc.

The priests who used the hymns of the Yajur Veda during fire sacrifices were called ‘Yajus’ or ‘Adhwaryu’.

Family—He had two wives. The elder was named Katayani, and the second was called Maitreyi. From the elder wife, he had a son named Katyanana. [Skandpuran, Nagar Khand, 130; Brihad Aranya Upanishad, 4/5/1.] According to ‘Yogi Yagyavalkya’, a hand book on Yoga, his third wife was Gargi, though she is depicted as a rival interviewer who tested the sage’s erudition and scholarship in Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad. [Yogi Yagyavalkya, edited by Upendranath, Vasumati—Calcutta, 1-5.]

Sanyas—Though Yagyavalkya was externally a householder sage and seer, he was internally a self-realised and an enlightened man, a sincere ascetic and a renunciate monk who knew the futility of worldly pursuits. He was not preaching what he did not believe in. So he finally took to the eclectic path of Sanyas as clearly mentioned in Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, 4/5/15.

Works—Yagyavalkya wrote great texts on Yoga, metaphysics and law pertaining to daily life, much like Manu’s Smiriti Law. (i) Yagyavalkya Sanhita contains religious laws; (ii) Yog Sanhita was composed in the hermitage of sage Upmanyu [Kurma Puran, 25.]; and (iii) Yogi Yagyavalkya on Yoga philosophy.

Yagyavalkya was a great and acclaimed Yogi (an ascetic) as well as a metaphysical philosopher and preacher par-excellence who was well-versed in the knowledge of Brahm and the Atma.

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