

Reflections on
Contemporary Values,
Beliefs and Behaviours

Reflections on Contemporary Values, Beliefs and Behaviours:

*The Adventures
of an Enquiring Mind*

Prasanna Gautam

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The Adventures of an Enquiring Mind

By Prasanna Gautam

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To the readers who:

Are prepared to think, to feel, to understand
Not afraid to change when wrong, and
For what is right, to take a stand.

As inspired by the immortal poet Robert Burns:

Then let us pray
That come it may
(as come it will for a' that)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that.
It's coming yet for a' that.'
That Man to Man world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Preface | ix |
| Acknowledgements | xiv |
| Introductory Notes..... | xv |
| Chapter One..... | 1 |
| Sex: How to Begin and When to End | |
| Chapter Two | 11 |
| The Unthinking Brain: The Greatest Paradox | |
| Chapter Three | 20 |
| Reap What You Sow: Suffer Your Karma | |
| Chapter Four..... | 29 |
| Retirement: Liberation or Lamentation? | |
| Chapter Five | 38 |
| Superstition: Faith or Fear? | |
| Chapter Six | 46 |
| Euthanasia: Killers of Mercy | |
| Chapter Seven..... | 57 |
| Biotherapy for Religious Maladies: An Elixir of Questions | |
| Chapter Eight..... | 68 |
| The Reality of Rebirth: A Circle Without a Centre | |
| Chapter Nine..... | 76 |
| Know Thyself: Why and How | |
| Chapter Ten | 84 |
| Trust in Yourself: Where is Your Judgement | |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter Eleven | 89 |
| Centre of the Universe: The Tiny Me | |
| Chapter Twelve | 98 |
| Leaders and Leadership: The Source of Suffering | |
| Chapter Thirteen | 105 |
| The Feet or the Hands: Respect or Restraint | |
| Chapter Fourteen | 111 |
| The Garden of Eden: The First Utopia | |
| Chapter Fifteen | 118 |
| Ignorance Mired in Knowledge: The Neglected Heritage of Mankind | |
| Chapter Sixteen | 134 |
| The Bhagavad Gita: Facts and Distortions | |
| Chapter Seventeen | 140 |
| The Man Who Created Krishna: The Immortal Man | |
| Bibliography | 154 |

PREFACE

WHY THIS BOOK?

This is a book of reflections on common issues which have profoundly affected us. It is also an attempt to discern the real from the unreal, and the right from the wrong. I was prompted to pursue this by the realisation that what I thought was knowledge was a ladder instead on which to descend further into the depths of ignorance. Unlike Socrates who said of his pupils, "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think", I could only pose questions in my essays, hoping to encourage each of us to find their answers.

Our tradition has been to define a thing by what it is not, and not by stating what it is in reality. As an example, I can confess that I worked all my life to save lives, not knowing what 'life' really was. For 40 years, I have been a health worker without really knowing what 'health' is. Once I asked a friend of mine to tell me what 'life' was. He promptly replied, "It is the opposite of death." "And what is death?" I asked. He replied, "The opposite of life". I merely followed the norms as they were laid out to me and did not dwell on their validity.

This is also a book of observations on commonplace things; some well-known, others less so. Why do we do things the way we do? How far can we be objective and neutral, keeping our emotions in check, when we give our opinions on the work done by others, or interpret what we see, hear or read? I have shared my experiences too in some cases, not to make this a memoir or an autobiographical presentation, but to frankly admit my wrongdoings; not to seek an apology but write in the hope that some readers may be able to relate to similar incidents in their lives and think about them.

I have begun to feel very uncomfortable when I see the total trust in the eyes of my young granddaughter when she listens to me trying to respond to her queries. I have become acutely aware that I make all kinds of assumptions while trying to put forward my views. I try to make things as simple as I possibly can, assuming that she would not understand the

complicated issues if I were to go into detail. I sometimes show impatience when the ‘why’ to everything I explain gets followed by yet another avalanche of ‘why.’ I become the wise guy and tell her that she is too young to understand the answers to some simple questions for which I have no true answers. This nips in the bud the curiosity which, if properly encouraged, could have perhaps led to great discoveries. Her inquiries then cease. Am I not doing the same as my parents did to me and which their parents might have done to them? Am I not restricting a young and inquisitive mind from developing its full potential of analytical and logical attributes?

How far back can we trace the origins of the majority of notions, thoughts and beliefs which have influenced us in becoming what we are? We hear many kinds of profound statements every day, most of which have been repeated over generations. I repeated the same things to my children and am trying to repeat them to their children. This is clearly not appropriate for modern times. Civilisation has become an amalgam of different cultures as has never been seen before. There does not appear to be any fundamental divide between the Eastern and Western ways of life any more. Modern youths in the West seem to be as ignorant of their heritage as are those in the East. Have the sublime philosophical traditions of thought of the past ceased to be relevant in modern times? The ubiquitous internet, pop music, cell phones, social media and cheap travel have become the major determinants of our behaviour; all of these have shrunk the world as never before. But we are stuck doing what we have always done. Is this right?

Old taboos are now adopted as natural and normal. New religious groups are being established at a faster rate than ever. It is not difficult to observe that this situation has presented an excuse for religious fundamentalists to justify their actions by propagating half-truths and falsehoods. They seek to recruit a faithful following for enormous self-gain to the detriment of many. This is facilitated by modern means of communication which have also become incredibly fast and effective in disseminating crime, violence and hatred globally.

This is the time, therefore, at which it is extremely important to clearly establish the truth about anything as early as possible, lest a false concept or blatant lie dig deep. Surely it is the right time for us all to ask, “Which is the right way forward, which would benefit us all?”

There are several fables which are meant to show us the right way. Books like Panchatantra and Aesop's Fables are well known; we tell their stories to our children and grandchildren for their amusement, little realising that these may have tremendous impact on the juvenile mind. Another similar guide is an acclaimed book called *Hitopadesha*, in Sanskrit, which can be translated as the 'beneficial discourses.'¹ This book is full of fables to teach five foolish princes the art of statecraft. In one of these stories, one of the princes asks, "Which is the right way to go?" The tutor answers, "On the path traversed by great men." Does this mean that we should follow the tradition set out by our great men and ancestors? Is this appropriate for contemporary society? Or, does this mean that our history, i.e. past events, should be our guide? How can we go about it? The following account may show us a way.

There is a poem composed by an unknown poet who expressed his inadequacy in describing his emotions and the beauty of his beloved. He began by stating that his heart did not have a mouth to speak, the mouth did not have eyes to see, the eyes had no mouth to utter the words and that his pen had neither the eyes to see nor the mouth to speak and, of course, had no heart. Therefore, how could he write a poem accurately describing his feelings or her beauty as they were?

After a few moments of admiring the poet on his novel way of presenting his rhetoric, I began to suspect that he had not really touched her, kissed her, smelt her fragrance or held her close. If he had done so, all his faculties and senses would have had the experience of knowing her, and he would have been able to describe her accurately as the composite picture. Can this inference be applied to us all in everyday life? Do we use all our faculties before making assumptions, speaking our mind, taking action and so on? No, we do not. So how do we determine the right way to act, teach or give advice?

I am reminded of the frequently quoted advice given by Carl Jung; "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes."² This is similar to the advice given by the *Rishis* in India several millennia earlier.³

¹ Narayana, *Hitopadesha*, Translated by Haskar. (Penguin Classics, England, 2007).

² Jung, C.J., *Two essays on analytical psychology*; 2nd edition. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), pp 157.

³ Rig Veda: 3.62.10.

Now that I have time for introspection and no pressures to conform to, or the rigour of earning a living, I can ask myself some questions and try to find their true answers. I find that I need to analyse the overt and the occult influences that have been shaping our lives, our personalities and aspirations, to be able to explain many common things around us which have had an enormous impact on us.

Our world has been dominated by several religious concepts. Understandably, any discussion on the esoteric inevitably encroaches upon one or the other religion. I believe that any religion could be a good thing, as long as it can show the path of truth, benevolence and compassion to the section of humanity which it serves. My enquiries and the quest to find their answers may be disconcerting to many faithful and devout people, and precipitate personal danger for me too. In my defence, I can only submit that I have tried to be as objective and neutral as I can, in the belief that the search for truth is encouraged by all religions.

This book is also an attempt at sharing my personal thoughts on these issues with readers belonging to all cultures and belief systems. I have tried to present my views in simple language and in a conversational style, in order to reach as many readers as possible. References to relevant world literature are given, to illustrate that the traditionally perceived divide between the occident and orient is unscientific, and probably reflects the difficulties in interpretation; there are more similarities than differences in philosophical thinking in general. Unusual Sanskrit words and names are written in italics and are also spelt phonetically to avoid the diacritic marks over or under the Roman alphabet.

I hope that this book will prompt a few readers to sit back and think a little about common issues affecting us all today.

Prasanna Gautam

-
- i. Mahaabhaarata (Mahabharata, MB) There are three recensions, known as Jaya (8000 verses), Bhaarata (24000 verses) and Mahaabhaarata (100,000 verses). The first deals mainly with the war and is attributed to KDV. The second is attributed to *Waishampaayana* and the last is credited to *Ugrashrawaa*, both being the pupils of KDV.
 - ii. Puraana (The Puranas): SBM, Vishnu, Naaradiya, Padma, Garuda, Matsya, Kurma, Linga, Vaayu, Skanda, Agni, Brahmaanda, Braamhavaivarta, Maarkendeya, Bhabishya.
 - iii. The Vedas: Rig Veda (RV), Yajur Veda, Saama Veda and Atharva Veda.

- iv. Avesta: The Iranian Gatha is regarded by some scholars to contain parts from the earliest Vedas.
- v. Monier Williams's Sanskrit English Dictionary.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Wittgenstein wrote that the “World is a totality of facts, not things.” It is this totality of facts that should shape our thoughts and actions. The present book delves freely into the vast data on philosophical thought which has been expressed and collected over several thousand years in different parts of the world. Therefore, a brief synopsis of the known facts is given, to illustrate the reference and context of the subject matters discussed in the chapters that follow. This may assist and guide a reader of any given cultural background.

Philosophers through the ages: a brief history, mostly from an Eastern perspective

The thinking man has always tried to understand myriad things; events, emotions and aspirations which affect us all. These thinkers are generally known as philosophers. These men who think about life, reality of the universe, codes of conduct and the values to be followed in a humane society, and those who deal with the subtle aspects of religion, are all desperately trying to find the same end point which makes everything clear, transparent and relevant to most of us. We are aware that this state is unattainable because the acquisition of knowledge is an unending stepwise progression. Hence the quest continues, from the dawn of civilisation up to the present.

Human civilisation developed in many different areas, separated by distance and language. We had not been able to appreciate until a few centuries ago, that the philosophers other than those around us had also thought about similar issues and, surprisingly, reached comparable conclusions. This realisation of a global concordance of thoughts and concepts has been possible due to advances in science and technology. We now have easy access to the recorded thoughts (data) of the past six millennia.

There are records of several philosophers in the ancient Aryan (*Aaryan*) civilisation. They were known as the Rishis, the ‘*mantra drastaa*’ (those who saw the formulae). They instructed what they had realised to their pupils, who memorised them and passed them on verbatim

to successive generations. These were called the *mantra* and the collection is recorded as the *Veda*. The first compilation, known as the Rig Veda, originating in circa 4000 BC, is frequently quoted in this book.

This system continued until several *Upanishads* were also produced. The philosophy of Yoga began to develop in about 2000 BC. At least six philosophical schools began to proliferate over the following centuries. Mahavira in the 6th century BC, who taught the ideals of non-violence and pacifism, and Buddha, a little later, proposed great philosophical ideas which culminated in the establishment of Jainism and Buddhism.

Tantrik (*Taantrik*) philosophy developed in the 3rd century BC, in India and has spread far and wide. This is a system that shows a man how to become capable of absorbing and harnessing the infinite energy of the universe, through a dozen neural centres within his body. Many modern Gurus and Lamas practice and teach this system for various uses, as well as abuses.

Contemporary to the Aryan culture, the Semites too had produced several philosophers. Most of them limited themselves to the deliberations within Judaism. Moses and Abraham were acclaimed as philosophers in the very distant past; it was not until Jesus Christ that a new philosophical thinking emerged from the fringes of Judaism. Today, the latter is followed by a third of the world's population. Judaeus was recognised as a great philosopher in the first century AD. It was in 1300 AD that Gersonides proposed the immortality of soul and also stated that reason could answer all philosophical questions.

The ancient Egyptians became accomplished mathematicians, astronomers and architects, but clung firmly to the concept of the afterlife which consumed their passions and resources, leaving the pyramids and the ruins as the mausoleum of their past achievements.

Chinese philosophical thought began to be formally produced and debated in around 600 BC. The famous among the Chinese philosophers are Confucius, Laozi, the founder of Taoism, and Dong Zhoushu, who put forward the concepts of the *Yin and Yang*. This is a system of duality in everything where opposing forces are believed to be mutually dependent to function in unison as a whole unit. Most Chinese philosophical thought is humanist in nature, unlike the Indian and Greek philosophies which emphasise metaphysical aspects.

Ancient Greek philosophers also surfaced around 600 BC. There are many who have profoundly influenced western civilisation. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and Pythagoras have become household names. It was Aristotle who said, “We must no more ask whether the soul and body are one than ask whether the wax and the figure impressed on it are the same.”

The Roman philosopher, Ptolemy, put the Earth firmly at the centre of the universe in 150 AD where it remained until Copernicus, born in 1473 AD, proposed otherwise. The philosopher and mathematician, Aryabhata (*Aaryabhaata*), in the 4th century AD calculated the diameter of the Earth to be equivalent to about 40,000 km. The prophet Mohammad brought about Islam in the 7th century AD. Several other civilisations developed, for example, among the Incans, the Mayans and the Aborigines, which flourished for several centuries before reaching their nadirs.

Galileo, born in 1564 AD, was put on house arrest for life for openly supporting Copernicus. Eventually, all those within the Church had to believe that the Earth moved around the sun. Martin Luther profoundly influenced the Christian world, heralding the Renaissance. The pioneering works of Newton, Kepler, Einstein and others, have taken us to the age of quantum mechanics and physics, and propelled man into space. This knowledge has enabled us to design, manufacture and use lethal nuclear weapons with which to destroy ourselves. Mohandas Gandhi and Bertrand Russel influenced political thinking in India and the world at large. The brave new world imagined by Aldous Huxley to come about in 2540 AD has already begun, as shown by the advances in genetic engineering heralded by the discoveries of Watson and Crick.

The intellectual world has come full circle from the blessed *Purusha* of the Rig Veda to the M theory and Super Consciousness proposed by Stephen Hawking, Michio Kaku (Nobel laureate and quantum physicist), Abdul Kalam Azad (former president of India, nuclear scientist and father of Indian nuclear arms) and others. The building blocks of the universe, i.e. the fermions and the bosons, closely correspond to the three *gunas* and the *pancha-tan-maatra* (*pancha*, five; *tan*, continuous; *maatra*, particles, i.e. five sequential particles) visualised by *Rishi Maitreya*, in about 1200 BC—as documented by Veda Vyaasa in *Srimad Bhaagavata Maahaapuraana* (SBM) Chapter 10.

We now live in a digital world, exploring new planets and reaching new horizons. Our ‘old’ world is changing rapidly and crying out for vitalising new concepts for the preservation of our civilisation. Although

many of the philosophical thought and values expressed over the millennia continue to be cherished, some are beginning to lose their weight and are not being replaced by appropriate ones. This is creating increasing unrest, polarisation and violence among human beings, as never seen before. Much thinking is needed to chart a new course in order for us to survive.

Kaala: The circle of time

According to the Vedic mantras, first documented around 4000 BC, the universe was always there, just as a circle which has neither a beginning nor an end. This has been implied in the concept of time without a beginning or an end. It is called the *kaala chakra*, (*kaala*, time; *chakra*, circle). This is described in the Bhagavad Gita (BG) when Lord Krishna says, “*kaalo asmi*” – ‘I am time’ – while showing his *Vishwaroopa* (the universal form) where simultaneous and incessant formations and transformations of everything are occurring continuously.⁴ It can be likened to the concept of zero- nothing and also infinite at the same time.

The SBM, a great mythological and philosophical epic of the Hindus, proposes that ‘time’ originates from each ray of the sun. It begins as *Paramaanu* (the ultimate unit). Two Paramaanus make an *Anu*; three make a *Trasareynu*; three *Trasareynu* make one *Truti*; 100 *Trutis* make one *Weda*; three *Wedas* make a *Lawa*; three *Lawas* make a *Nimesha*; three *Nimeshas* make a moment and five moments, one *Kaastha*; 15 *Kaasthas* make one *Laghu*; 15 *Laghus* make one *Naadi*; two *Naadis* make a *Muhurta*; 30 *Muhurtas* make one night; 15 nights make a *Pakshya* (fortnight); two fortnights make one month and two months make one *Ritu* (season).

Three seasons make one *Aayana*; two *Ayanas* make one year, which is equivalent to one cosmic night; 360 cosmic nights make one cosmic year; 360 cosmic years make one *Yuga*; four times 70 *Yugas* make one *Manwantara*; 2000 *Manwantaras* make one *Kalpa* on the earth and is known as *Aharnish* for the Cosmos; 100 *Kalpas* are known as two *Paraardhas*. The sum of all these concepts of measurements of time represents one *Paramaanu* for the *Parabrahma*, i.e. the primordial source (the ultimate reality). In other words, ‘the nano x nano fraction of a moment’ is all that there is in reality which has neither a beginning nor an end.

⁴ BG: 11.32

Since formation and transformations are continuously and simultaneously occurring within each Paramaanu, this process is called the Circle of Time or Kaala and should not be confused with a Tantrik method of a special neural stimulation, the Kaala Chakra, which was developed much later.

Vedic mathematics used these measurements of time in astronomical calculations. The concept of zero (*Shunya*) probably developed in the first millennium AD and was used in mathematical calculations. This was subsequently explained and expanded by the Islamic scholars, circa 900 AD.

These theories on the measurement of time are similar to the mind-boggling modern concept of 'light years' which is another way of coupling time with the rays of the sun.

Yugas: The eras

The Puraanas are the complex collection of Indian mythology, history, and philosophical discourses which propose that the earth transforms itself cyclically. Each cycle has four eras or Yugas, at the end of which there is total dissolution, i.e. the *Pralaya* and the beginning of another cycle. The current cycle is estimated to be the eighth, and the *Kali Yuga* we live in began about 4000 years ago. It is said to have about 6000 years remaining until its next transformation.

The four eras or Yugas are *Satya*, *Treytaa*, *Dwaapara* and *Kali*. Each Yuga is supposed to last for several thousands of years and the cycle to end with the *Pralaya*, similar to the 'Biblical Apocalypse', when everything on this planet will be destroyed and a new cycle will begin. The description of the last *Pralaya* was that the whole world was submerged in water, like the biblical flood. I suspect that a great natural calamity such as a tsunami must have occurred, destroying most things and lives at the time. Many new mountains and land masses might have surfaced, giving the impression of new creation. I fail to understand how very ancient knowledge could have survived and continued otherwise, if everything was indeed destroyed earlier without a trace.

It is likely that the various Yugas symbolically refer to the development of a human society, perhaps as follows:

A new civilisation begins with good will, joint ownership and peace within its community, as depicted in the *Satya Yuga*. Subsequently, when

selfishness begins to creep in a little, some discord also begins to manifest, heralding the Treyya Yuga, although society continues to function ideally and in a stable manner most of the time. When further deterioration reaches unacceptable levels causing turmoil, violence and conflict, it signifies the beginning of Dwaapara Yuga. This culminates in the Kali Yuga where the undesirable elements dominate and chaos finally ensues, leading to the dissolution or extinction of an entire civilisation. A similar concept was proposed by Hesiod, in the 7th century BC. He had postulated five ages: the golden, the silver, the bronze, the heroic and the iron. It is interesting to note that this concept was beautifully put forward by Ovid, in the 8th century AD, in *Metamorphosis*.

Then a new civilisation will emerge once again, thus continuing the cycle. The biblical concept of the New Jerusalem also indicates this possibility. Anthropological studies of extinct ancient societies would support this theory.

Guna: the nature or characteristic of everything

These are Vedic concepts to denote the nature or qualities of all things in this universe. There are, primarily, three Gunas namely the *Satya*, the *Raja* and the *Tama*. These three are the main ingredients which make up the universe. The *Nyaaya* School of philosophy subsequently suggested 24 types of qualities of all the things in existence.

The Satya guna refers to the truth or the reality in anything. This is extrapolated as *Saatwik* to denote a pure, benevolent, charitable and divine quality. This term is also used to classify food, drinks, thoughts, activity and life itself. In addition, the Satya guna is commonly considered as the positive life force.

The Raja guna is the brilliant characteristic which describes that which is obvious (*raja* in Sanskrit means 'that which shines') to all. This also denotes the neutrality between the Satya and the Tama characteristics in matter or thought. Its extrapolation, the *Raajasic*, signifies this neutral characteristic in any activity, food, thought or material. The visible universe is raajasic.

The Tama guna refers to the dark or negative characteristic of matter and thought. Its extrapolation, known as the *Taamasik*, is used to identify the hidden, the unknown, the death, the violence, the hatred and all which are undesirable. This too is an essential component of this universe.

The Rig Veda describes a few mantras about Rishi Vishnu who was able to transcend these three qualities, thus attaining a state of *nirguni* (beyond any characteristic where nothing matters). This has since become a legend which relates how Rishi Vishnu was the first to overcome heaven (*satya*), the earth (*raja*) and the underworld (*tama*) in just three steps. Hence, the Hindus revere Vishnu as God and several men who have reached that state have become known as his subsequent incarnations (*avatar*).

Upanishads

The Upanishads are a group of Indian philosophical expositions. The literal translation of the word, as given by Max Mueller, suggests that it means ‘devotedly sitting down near’, thus implying an intimate discourse or discussion on various philosophical matters. The Indian Sanskritists claim the same root of the word ‘*sad*’ in Sanskrit to mean a loosening, movement or destruction, implying annihilation of ignorance.

An unfortunate tradition has developed in which the Upanishads have been equated with the scriptures of the Hindus. It is extremely important to be aware that many words have changed their meaning or connotations over the ages. This is particularly important during translations and transliterations into other languages from Sanskrit. For example, *brahma*: *brahmaa*, *brahman*, *braahmana*, *braamhanam*, *brahmaanaama*, have been interpreted in different ways, and when their plurality is denoted in English, the meanings change further. So also, *aatma*, *aatmaa*, *aatman*, *aatmanam*, *aatmaanam*, *etc.* have been varyingly interpreted by English translators.

Careful studies of the contents of the Upanishads reveal that rather than being the ‘faith’, which is the hallmark of religion, they are a repository of many questions, anecdotes, philosophical concepts and aspirations of the inquisitive mind since ancient times. These are applicable to any religious following and do not specifically contradict any theological doctrine that I have read in the Bible, the Koran or the Buddhist literature. Some Upanishads, e.g. *Mundaka* and *Swetasvatara*, mix up pure philosophical ideas with sectarian thoughts too.

The knowledge obtained from the Upanishads is called *Brahma Vidya*, or Vedaanta and explained by S. Radhakrishnan as ‘the science of the Absolute.’ There are many Upanishads: many are short texts in prose. Careful studies also reveal that there are several instances when conflicting

and diverse views are expressed within the same context and with the same reference. This suggests that many ancient texts have been modified over the millennia. These kinds of additions are also evident in different publications of the Bible and other ancient documents.

The commonality seen among the Upanishads is that they all relate to the original Vedic mantras containing most of the concepts put forward as formulae by the Rishis. Some scholars have tried to pair a specific Upanishad to a Veda but this is an unproductive exercise. Similarly, attempts have been made to identify the probable dates of composition of the Upanishads. It is likely that the verbal tradition had continued for a very long time before someone decided to edit the verses and give it a name. Western scholars believe them to have originated in the pre Buddhist era, probably 800 or 900 BC, but scholars in India believe them to originate earlier than 1900 BC. I find this amusing since a glance at the contents of the texts of the Upanishads reveal them to contain ideas that emanated from the Vedic mantras of ancient times. Hence, it is unscientific to assign any specific period to them. Moreover, many of the personalities found in the Upanishads were also the seers i.e. the Rishis in the Vedas.

I have expressed my conclusions which are based upon my understanding and research which are by no means the most comprehensive. Therefore, I haven't the authority to question the validity of the suppositions made by the others. Since serious scientific research on this subject has not been undertaken, suppositions shall continue to prevail. It is, however, commonly agreed that there are about a dozen major Upanishads which represent the vast majority of Upanishadic thought. These are known as *Isha, Kena, Katha, Swetasvatara, Mundaka, Brihadaraanyaka, Maandukya, Prashna, Maitraayani, Chaandogya, Taittiriya and Aitareeya Upanishads*. There are several minor Upanishads e.g. *Paramhamsopanishad, Aatmanopanishad, Tejabindupanishad, Sarvopanishad, Brahmopanishad, Aaruneyi, Kaivalopanishad* etc., numbering about 200.

The important discussions in the Upanishads relate to: *aatmaa* (the soul), *brahma* (the spirit) and the self (the life); *vidya* vs *avidya* (ritualistic conduct vs meditation; knowledge vs ignorance); *praana* (the life force); specific forms and methods of meditation; states or levels of consciousness; consciousness and brahma; evolution of brahma through the five elements up to food and the human form; ultimate bliss or happiness; *shikshya* (teaching good values); one god manifesting in many forms; *tat twam asi* (reality, i.e. that thou are); *sansaara vrikshya* (the

upside down tree of the world); *sadvidya and upaasana* (knowledge and meditation), austerity, righteousness and duty, etc.

Some of the frequently heard and quoted Upanishadic teachings and aspirations are as follows:

- i. *Between a teacher and pupil:*
 May we both be protected
 May we both be nourished
 May we both become courageous
 May we both be enlightened
 May we not fall out with each other.

- ii. *Teacher to the pupil at the end of his tutelage:*
 Speak the truth, practice righteousness
 Do not speak truth unkindly
 Treat mother, father, guest and your teacher as god.

- iii. *A common prayer for all:*
 Lead me from the unreal to the real
 from darkness to light
 from death to immortality.

The Big Bang, Om and M theories of Creation

The Big Bang is often understood to mean the precise time of the origin of our universe, estimated about 13.8 billion years ago. It is supposed that the universe began as infinitesimally small. But this is a hypothesis, using various principles of physics, which was put forward by Professor Stephen Hawking and his colleague, Dr Penrose. This has been widely accepted and believed by many. However, I have my doubts.

We have seen the forces of gravity and understand the theory of relativity. I have no idea if these principles of physics will be valid at zero gravity and at a static point, since the supposition is that the starting point was an infinitesimal something which probably had zero mass and no motion. Hence, I find this difficult to accept as the full explanation of the beginning of the universe.

The Big bang is often equated with ‘The Word’ in the Bible, and the ‘Om’ in the Indian philosophical discussions. One needs to be aware, however, that there could not have been a ‘Bang’ of any kind at that point

of creation, if indeed such a point did exist. The pedantic arguments suggest the ultra, subsonic or supersonic sounds which could have produced the Big Bang. But the cosmic, and other, sounds come from the cosmos and not from a static point, variously referred to as a very dense particle or a wave prior to its formation.

Perhaps these doubts have led the quantum theorists to suggest ‘The Grand Design of Creation’ when all the theories of physics fuse into one another, resulting in the self-creating perpetual universe. This is referred to as the M Theory. The concept of Om is similar. The ancient Rishis had already provided this theory many years ago in the Rig Veda⁵ which Vivekananda elaborated upon eloquently in the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, USA, in 1893. We appear to have come full circle!

It is interesting to observe that the conclusions of great scholars and scientists have begun to converge on the topic of the starting point of our existence. This is certainly a great testament to man’s quest to seek the ultimate truth.

Mahabharata (MB)

This is an epic tome, containing 18 books, written in Sanskrit by Krishna Dwaipaayana Vyaasa (KDV). The plot is fascinating as it contains everything that one can imagine, from the sublime to the base, and all things in between which are related to human behaviour, emotion and philosophy.

In brief, this is mainly a narration of two sets of feuding cousins for a kingdom in ancient northern India. This may correspond to the ‘Heroic Age’ as described by Hesiod. This resulted in a war where millions died. The great discourse given by Krishna to the warrior Prince Arjuna is known all over the world as Gita (*Geeta*, BG). This is regarded as a distillate of the Rig Veda (RV), the foundation of the ancient Aryan (*Aryan*) civilisation. There is also a great discourse given by Bhishma (*Bheeshma*) to Prince Yudhishthira, which deals with righteousness and moral living.

The plot very cleverly distorts the sequence of events of different eras, draws freely from historical events and fictionalises them, and thus weaves a most intriguing narrative. The scale to which morality is lacking—

⁵ RV: 6.75

particularly among the Brahmins and the ruling classes—described in the Mahabharata, is horrifying even today. There are many clues which suggest that MB is a work of fiction, but most people in India regard this to be an historic and religious document. Serious and purely academic research on this epic is yet to be conducted. Readers are advised to read the short abridged Mahabharata by C. Rajagopalachari in English. Although an abridged translation, *The Mahabharata* by John D. Smith, is a much larger and more informative work.

It is thought that this was written in around 1200 BC, although the astronomical calculations of physicists at NASA suggest some of the natural events described in the book to have occurred in around 3000 BC. This may correspond to the period of The Indus Valley Civilisation. This can perhaps allow us to speculate that the Mahabharata war was based loosely on the historical and infamous *Dasaraja Yuddha* described in the Rig Veda. This was the very bloody war which the Aryans had to fight for 40 years with ten local kings who had unsuccessfully opposed their King Sudasa and block his eastward conquests.⁶

The story of two frogs: Illustrating religious rivalry

The following is based on a story told by Swaami Vivekananda to the delegates at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

There lived a frog in a well, happy and content. He was alone, independent and was not challenged or threatened by anybody. There was sufficient food and insects for him to feed. He would jump from one point of the well to the opposite spot and be pleased with himself. All was well.

A toad from a neighbouring lake accidentally fell into the same well, alarming the frog. The toad was trying to get out of the well but it was a hard struggle.

The frog saw this. He realised that the intruder looked like him but was of different colour. He challenged him. The toad told him that he had fallen into the well accidentally and would get out as soon as he could. The frog was pacified. He asked the toad where he had come from and why he was of different colour.

“I live in the sea, so I look different,” the toad replied. “I am really like you,” he commented further, to assure the frog.

“What is a sea?” the frog asked.

“Oh! It is a huge area full of water,” said the toad.

⁶ RV: 6. 75

“What is huge?” the frog asked.

“It is really very big,” said the toad.

The frog jumped a distance and asked, “As big as this?”

“No, much bigger,” said the toad.

The frog jumped higher and further and asked, “As big as this?”

“No, much bigger,” said the toad.

The frog then jumped to the opposite point in the well. Triumphant, he said, “It could not be as big as that, surely?”

The toad replied, “No, much bigger.”

The frog got very angry and called him a liar and a cheat. “No sea can be larger than my well,” he declared, and was preparing to attack the toad. Luckily, the toad was able to jump out of the well at that time and make his escape.

Abbreviations and phonetic spellings

Aaryan, aaryan (Aryan)

Before Christian Era, BCE, syn. BC

Bhaagavata (Bhagavat)

Brihadaraanyaka (Brihadaranyak)

Dasaraaja (Dasaraja)

Ganges (Gangaa)

Geetaa (Bhagavad Gita,) BG

Mahaabhaarata (Mahabharat) MB

Puraana (Purana)

Raamaayana (Ramayan)

Rig Veda, Rig; RV

Saama (Sama)

Shaastra (Sastra)

Shraddha (shra-ddhaa)

Shraddha (Shraa-ddha)

Sootra (Sutra)

Swaamiji (Swamiji)

Upanishad (Upanisad)

Vishwaroopa (Viswarupa)

Vyaasa (Vyas)

CHAPTER ONE

SEX: HOW TO BEGIN AND WHEN TO END

“Campus rape happens in the UK, too” was the headline in *The Huffington Post* on 29th August, 2016. The victim, Nathalie Greenfield, a student at Cambridge University, had described her horrific ordeal. This reminded me of the news of the rape of a young medical student in Delhi¹ and other incidents.² Has any nation really thought seriously about the main reason(s) why heinous sexual offences are carried out at home and abroad? Is our denial of discussing sex in a comprehensive and open manner in our homes, educational establishments, our parliaments, places of worship and civic gatherings, the root of this problem? Is sex education the answer? Nathalie Greenfield had written “...education is key to reducing sexual assault and dispelling rape culture in UK universities...” Should each of us do something about this? What can we possibly do? What had I done? This jolted my memory.

The reflections triggered by the rape incident took me back to Kathmandu in 1972, when Dr Baral and I were commissioned to write a book on sex education in the Nepali language. The publishers had decided the title of the book would be ‘*Youn: Tapainle jaanna chaahekaa Kura.*’³ It could be translated as ‘Sex: Things you wished to know.’ This was a blatant attempt to make the readers believe it to be a Nepali translation of the international best seller ‘Sex: all that you wanted to know but were afraid to ask.’⁴ This was definitely not a translation of that famous book. The jointly authored book was published in 1974 and sold like hot cakes. I did not have a copy and was delighted to find one in my mother’s house in Kathmandu, when we put it up for sale after her death a few years ago. It

¹ “Delhi Gang rape”, The *BBC*, www.bbc.co.uk/magazine-31698154. 2012.

² Profiles: “Delhi gang rapists”, The *BBC*, 20th Dec 2015; www.bbc.co.uk/world/asia/indi.

³ Reuben D., *Everything you always wanted to know about sex but were afraid to ask.* (McKay publishers, 1969).

is a standard-sized paperback. Bookworms had feasted on its cover and a few pages, but it was largely intact. I had brought it back to Aberdeen and forgotten all about it until now. I rapidly scanned its pages.

I was glad to notice that we had indeed provided all factual answers correctly and often humorously. The information on all physical aspects of sex, ranging from foreplay to the actual acts and its possible consequences, had been given. It was more of a manual for training on sex than a book on holistic sex education as suggested by Nathalie Greenfield. We had not realised 45 years ago that there were big differences between the factual information on the physical aspects of sex and holistic education on this subject. We had thought that we were providing sex education with our book. Unfortunately, this ignorance has persisted: mainly factual information relating to the physical aspects of sex is being provided in most schools today. I find that we do not comprehensively tackle the issue of sex education in the UK. Clearly, this is far from satisfactory.

We, as parents, consciously avoid discussing these issues openly with our children. The teachers in our schools teach the basic facts but are unsure of how to match the information to the age of their pupils appropriately. We agree that sex education should be widely available, but there is still a debate about whether the parents and/or the schools should be responsible. We are also undecided on determining the right age for children to begin this learning. It may be fair to say that this reticence in delivering well-rounded and accurate education on matters of sex is one of the major causes of social discord and violence that we are witnessing today. The statistics on teenage pregnancy and termination, the divorce rates, instances of domestic violence, sexual offences, child abuse and the exposition of bizarre sexual practices make for depressing and alarming reading. I notice a similar situation in India, particularly among the educated high-earning households, who have almost wholly adopted a western lifestyle.

As new parents, we follow what we learned from our parents - if we learned anything at all. As children and adolescents, we learned about 'the birds and the bees' mostly from our peers, siblings, neighbours, movies, television shows, newspapers or magazines. The curiosity about the physical act and the promise of the pleasure that it guaranteed to provide, were sufficient enough for us to access information from any source. We never objectively thought about, or tried to ascertain, the validity of these secrets. I did not receive any sex education from my parents. I only became aware during my medical school days that I had accumulated

several erroneous notions on the subject. Likewise, I didn't give any sex education to my children. I was embarrassed to talk to them about sex. I remember explaining to them in detail about sexually transmitted diseases, but only haltingly about contraception. I remember both of them hastily telling me that they had already been taught about these things in school. They too were obviously equally embarrassed to talk about sex to their parents. Both of us were relieved to have finished with this issue right there.

Two common causes of marital breakdowns are pre- and extramarital sex. This is due to the enormous sanctity accorded by religion to an ordinary and common act of copulation. Should this biological impulse and a base physical act be allowed to destroy several lives by causing marital breakdowns? Would it be desirable for our religious leaders to consider an alternative to sexual fidelity as the foundation of marriage? Is it possible to form a strong foundation of married life on something more esoteric, sublime and tangible? We all know that marriage is a social contract, a compromise and an act of profound love. Should all these components be allowed to be destroyed by an act of impulsive animal instinct?

If an alternative or substitute could be proposed and agreed upon, then perhaps there would be no great heartaches, disruption in the family, and domestic violence associated with marital breakdowns due to sexual infidelity. This, however, does not mean giving license to becoming licentious and recklessly debauched. After all, for the vast majority, an act of sexual intercourse with one's spouse reinforces the love and tenderness between the couple. Religions demand sexual chastity, and restrict physical acts of sex to the purposes of procreation. This is obviously an impossible route which only few may follow. Religion deals harshly with its savants for indulging in prohibited sexual practices. Should the religious savants not be judged by assessing their pious lifestyles, demonstrable compassion and selfless service? Celibacy has been breached by many who have taken this vow and have been chastised severely if caught, with no benefit to anyone.

Sex is extremely important in our lives. For most of us, marriage and reproduction are the two most pertinent issues related to sex. But learned psychologists tell us that there is much more to sex than just these two aspects. They tell us that it is the main driving force which shapes our personality and guides our behaviour. To quote the famous Havelock Ellis: "Sex penetrates the whole person; a man's sexual constitution is a part of

his general constitution.”⁵ Freud believed that infantile sexuality, which he termed the Oedipus complex, determined libido and adult sexuality. More recently, psychologists have developed novel theories about sexual expression. They have designed scientific methods of psychoanalysis and psychosexual counselling for many abnormal behaviours and personality traits. Repressed sexuality is seen to be expressed in schizophrenia, in psychopathic personality disorders and in many divorces.

It is an inescapable fact that sex is essential and deserves consideration with seriousness and an open mind. But we have not prioritised this issue in our civilisation. The Guardian, on 1st January 2017, began with the headline: ‘Sex and relationship advice from the Guardian: sexual health matters, sexuality, information and sex tips all discussed.’ This was followed by several advertisements about various books on sex, whose titles did not inspire confidence in me to believe in their authenticity. It appeared to be a blatant commercial scam. But it is not only the newspapers which promote this kind of hype and trash. The cosmetic industry, the fashion industry, the Yoga and Tantra industry, television chat shows, cinema, music and other branches of the media industry appear to be very lucrative enterprises by selling sex and sex products, promoting weird and intriguing sexuality globally and thus generating unimaginable incomes. Cumulatively, they are causing increasing damage to the younger generation. All these are so high profile that it is impossible not to notice sexual references in products and the media.

Children in their formative, tender years also notice references to sex. I have seen children as young as three and four indulging in sexual play, mimicking daddies and mummies! Carl Jung noticed this tendency in children as far back as the last century and commented: “Children are educated by what the grown-up is and not by his talk.”⁶

It is we, the adults, who have to alter our behaviour. We need to re-examine our attitudes and values, and to ask ourselves whether we wish to prevent the adults of tomorrow, i.e. our children, from plunging into the same sort of world as the one in which we are now living. The following examples give us a flavour of our current world:

⁵ Ellis, H., *Psychology of sex*. (William Heinemann medical books ltd. London, fifth impression, 1939), pp14.

⁶ Jung, C.G., *Collected papers on analytical psychology*. Dr Constance C Long. (Balliere Tindall and Cox, 1916).