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Nature's Consciousness-The Sanatana Dharma

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Abstract

This paper explores persistent misunderstandings of Sanathana Dharma, a civilizational knowledge system emphasising harmony between Nature (Prakṛti) and the Self (Atman). Within this tradition, Varna, *Ashrama*, and Linga serve as interconnected mechanisms that structure society, support individual development, and maintain balance. Varna, defined in texts as birth-based, ensures continuity of social roles; Ashrama describes natural stages of life; and Linga expresses the complementary principles shaping both the cosmos and human



relationships. Together, these concepts form an integrated approach to inner growth, social cohesion, and ecological harmony.

Over time, the core meanings of these concepts have been narrowed by colonial and modern reinterpretations and the loss of intuitive, nature-based understanding. This led to major misreadings: Varna's birth-based structure was recast by later interpreters as determined by *guṇa* and *karma*; *Ashrama*, a continuum of human maturity, was rigidified into external obligations; and *Līṅga*, originally about complementarity, became subject to binary frameworks. These shifts obscured *Sanathana Dharma's* integrated, dynamic intent.

Sanatana Dharma is described as *Sanatana* because it mirrors the timelessness of Nature capable of sustaining balance, enabling evolution, and adapting across epochs without losing its foundational coherence. Drawing upon sources such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Upaniṣads*, and *Smritis*, this study argues that *Sanatana Dharma* represents not a theory of division but a science of balance, expressing Nature's self-sustaining rhythm. Restoring the frameworks of *Varna*, *Ashrama*, and *Līṅga* to their original depth is essential for recovering their relevance in both traditional and contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Human Values, Nature (*Prakṛti*), *Acharya* and *Sampradaya* (Traditions), *Sanatana Dharma*, Hindu, Religion.

Introduction

In the cultural and philosophical traditions of Bharat, two foundational concepts, *Acharya* and *Sampradaya*, appear consistently across all regional languages. *Acharya* refers to universal and essential principles "to be practised," whereas *Sampradaya* denotes the "manner of practice," shaped by *desa* (place), *kala* (time), *sthiti* (circumstance), and *paristhithi* (context). For instance, marriage itself is an *Acharya*, while the diverse rituals that solemnise it belong to different *Sampradayas*. Applying a *tilaka* is *Acharya*; using *tripundra*, *ekapundra*, or *bhasma* is *Sampradaya*. Over time, the fluidity of *Sampradaya* has sometimes been mistaken for rigid rule, leading to confusion in every aspect, including foundational concepts such as *Varna*, *Ashrama*, and *Linga*.



Traditional knowledge in Bharat was received intuitively by the *rishis* and transmitted through the *guru–sishya parampara*, an unbroken oral lineage of teachers and disciples. Bhagavan Vyasa later organised this vast heritage into literary conventions (*Sampradaya*) such as *Shruti*, *Smruthi*, *Purana*, *Kavya*, *Natya*, and *Nataka*, etc. Within these traditions emerged several *Gitas* - *Agastya Gita*, *Siva Gita*, *Yoga Vashishtam*, *Ashtavakra Gita*, *Gopika Gita*, and many others. Though differing in context and literary form, all *Gitas* convey the same essence of *Paravidya*, the higher knowledge concerned with Self-understanding and human values.

While most *Gitas* are traditionally named after the speaker, the *Bhagavad Gita* is uniquely titled because it was revealed directly by the Bhagavan himself through Sri Krishna. Thus, it is not “Krishna Gita,” but the “Song of the Divine.” Similarly, the *Gopika Gitas* in the *Bhagavata Purana* form a collective expression of devotion. Since the *Gopikas*, immersed in bhakti, had transcended personal identity, these hymns are attributed collectively rather than individually.

A frequently raised question concerns why the *Vasishta Gita* does not appear within the *Ramayana*, while the *Bhagavad Gita* appears in the *Mahabharata*. This difference arises from literary conventions: the *Ramayana* follows the *Kavya Sampradaya* (poetic tradition), which typically excludes *Gitas*, whereas the *Mahabharata* follows the *Purana Sampradaya*, where *Gitas* naturally find a place. Hence, the *Vasishta Gita* is preserved separately as the *Yoga Vashishtam*. Much like how a doctor wears a white coat for consultation and a green coat for surgery, each situation adheres to its own *Sampradaya*.

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretative IKS-based (*Achara* and *Sampradaya*) methodology, acknowledging that concepts such as *Varna* and *Ashrama* arise from *Adhyatma Vidya* and cannot be understood through experimental science alone. The analysis employs textual study, hermeneutics, and comparative reasoning to make traditional frameworks accessible to modern readers.

The *Bharatiya Varna Vyavastha* is fundamentally distinct from the *Kula Vyavastha*, though the two are often conflated today. Traditionally, *Varna* recognised four divisions *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, and *Shudra* understood as birth-based structures of responsibility within society. *Kula*, however, referred to occupational communities and familial lineages shaping



social and economic life. Over centuries, these boundaries blurred and gradually evolved into what is now popularly understood as the caste system.

Importantly, the traditional education system was not restricted to any *Varna* or *Kula*; it encouraged intellectual, ethical, and practical growth for all. British administrators in the nineteenth century failed to recognise this distinction. Reports such as Campbell's Bellary Report (1823) documented the extensive reach of the *gurukula* system and the participation of diverse communities. Yet colonial interpretation collapsed *Varna*, *Kula*, and *Jati* into a single rigid category called "caste," thus distorting indigenous social frameworks.

Translating Bharatiya concepts into English often leads to oversimplification. If *kula* becomes "caste" and *matham* becomes "religion," then concepts such as *varna* and *dharma* lose their depth. Terms like *punya* (not merely virtue) and *vandhya* (a woman without children through her husband) have no exact English equivalents. European languages, shaped by different social and historical conditions, lacked vocabulary for the layered distinctions articulated by the *rishis*, who perceived nature's infinitude with great clarity. Later interpreters, seeking acceptance within colonial frameworks, attempted to impose narrow terminology on the *Sanatana Sampradaya*, thereby diminishing its subtlety.

Traditional knowledge in Bharat was received intuitively by the *rishis* and transmitted through the guru–*sisya* parampara, an unbroken oral lineage that naturally strengthened the cognitive abilities of people. With the later introduction of the European educational system, which emphasised writing and learning, these cognitive capacities gradually declined. Because of these low cognitive skills, the misunderstanding began.

Actually, the term *kula* carries multiple meanings—family, lineage, community, institution, or a group bound by learning and discipline. This broader sense appears in *gurukula*, meaning "the household of the guru," where students lived and studied as an extended family, and in *Upakulapati*, now used to denote the Vice Chancellor of a university. Unlike *Varna*, which traditionally followed birth-based responsibility, *Kula* could be based on association, practice, and affiliation rather than heredity alone.



Similarly, the term *matham*, often translated as “religion,” inadequately represents Hindu or *Sanatana Dharma*. In the nature-based dharmic tradition, *matham* refers to a school of thought or ideology accepted according to one’s *mathi* (mindset). Thus, *Jaina matham*, *Bauddha matham*, *Islam matham*, or *Christian matham* may be identified as religions or belief systems.

Sanatana Dharma, however, is not a single *matham* but a vast civilizational framework accommodating many *mathams* within it. Within the Hindu fold exist multiple sub-traditions (mathams): *Saiva*, *Vaishnava*, and *Sakta* mathams, each containing further sub-sects. The Saiva tradition includes *Pasupata* and *Veerasaiva* mathams; the Vaishnava tradition includes *Sri Vaishnava*, *Veera Vaishnava*, and others. Further, *Dwaita* (Sri Madhwacharya), *Visishtadwaita* (Sri Ramanujacharya), and *Adwaita* (Sri Adi Sankaracharya) represent major philosophical systems (matham), with Adi Sankara also establishing the *shanmatha* tradition within Adwaita. Importantly, these *mathams* did not negate or condemn one another; they coexisted harmoniously, aligned with nature and guided by the shared ideal expressed in the universal *santhi mantra*: “*lokasamasta sukhino bhavanthu*” “May all beings in the universe be in harmony.”

Thus, Hindu *Sanatana Dharma* cannot be reduced to a single religion founded on one person’s ideology. It is a timeless, nature-aligned civilizational framework offered by the *rishis* to humanity. Its vision embraces all beings as one family, expressed in the ideal of *vasudhaika kutumbam*, upheld in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the broader dharmic worldview.

The *Bharatiya Vidya Vyavastha* envisioned knowledge as two complementary streams: *Para Vidya* self-knowledge, inner refinement, alignment with *prakriti*; and *Apara Vidya* the skills required for livelihood. Together, they cultivated both inner and outer dimensions of life, essential for understanding *Varna* as social balance and *Ashrama* as personal balance.

These considerations highlight the need for a hermeneutic, text-based approach grounded in *shastric* sources. Such an approach reveals the enduring resilience of the Bharatiya civilizational model. Even contemporary observations such as India’s comparative outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that societal strength emerges not from wealth alone but from moderated lifestyles, community bonds, and rhythms aligned with nature. Bharat has



historically been a *samruddha desa* a prosperous civilisation enriched not only by material resources but also by values, cultural continuity, and sustainable social order. This endurance was possible because the *rishis*, through their intuitive perception of nature's rhythms, established systems aligned with *dharma*. Nature itself inclines toward *dharma*, and irrespective of *Varna* or *Ashrama*, individuals are gently guided through tendencies, experiences, and circumstances toward their *svadharma*.

This civilizational resilience reflects a deeper insight: *prakriti* naturally inclines toward *dharma*, is further, nature is *Dharma-biased*. When life aligns with its inherent rhythm, societies exhibit balance and adaptability. The *Varna–Ashrama* framework was conceived by the *rishis* as a system where individual disposition, social role, and cosmic order converge. It is not a rigid hierarchy but a mechanism designed to maintain harmony within both the individual and the collective.

Grounded in this vision, the present study outlines how the Bharatiya frameworks of *Varna*, *Ashrama*, and *Linga* are to be understood and why they remain conceptually relevant today and demonstrates how Indian Knowledge Systems provide the appropriate lens for understanding them.

Literature Review

Annamacharya's *kirtana* "*Brahmamokkate*" highlights the unity of Brahman across all beings^[1]

The Bhagavadgita declares:

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा
न्यान्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥

Just as a person discards worn-out clothes and takes new ones, so too the embodied self (*dehi*) casts off worn-out bodies and assumes new forms.^[2]



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Sri Krishna declares in Bhagavadgita:

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं
गुणकर्मविभागशः ।
तस्य कर्तारमपि मां
विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम्

The fourfold *Varṇa* system was created by ME, classified according to guṇa and karma of previous life's vibrations written by self. Although I am the creator of this system, know Me as the non-doer, eternal and unchanging.^[3]

Further Srikrishna declares in Bhagavadgita:

विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने
ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।
शुनि चैव श्वपाके च
पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥

A wise person (*pandita*) sees with equal vision a learned and humble brahmaṇa, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and even a dog-eater.^[4]

Further, Srikrishna teaches Arjuna in the Gita about varna dharma:

Gita 18-41 :

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां
शूद्राणां च परन्तप ।
कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि
स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥

“O Arjuna, the duties of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras are divided according to the qualities born of their own nature.”



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Gita 18-42:

शमो दमस्तपः शौचं
क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च ।
ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं
ब्राह्मणकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥

“Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, forgiveness, honesty, knowledge, wisdom, and faith these are the natural duties of a *Brahmana*.”

Gita 18-43:

शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं
युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।
दानमीश्वरभावश्च
क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥

“Heroism, vigour, determination, resourcefulness, not fleeing from battle, charity, and leadership these are the natural duties of a *Kshatriya*.”

Gita 18-44:

कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं
वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।
परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म
शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥

“Farming, cow protection, and trade are the natural duties of a *Vaishya*. Service to others is the natural duty of a *Sudra*.”^[5]

During the Author’s Discussions with Guru and general practices of yoga it is made to realise with sloka:



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देहो देवालयः प्रोक्तः

जीवो देवः सनातनः ।

त्यजेदज्ञाननिर्माल्यं

सोऽहं भावेन पूज्यताम् ॥

“As preserved in the Advaita guru–śiṣya teaching tradition, the verse *deho devalayaḥ proktaḥ, jīvo devaḥ sanātanaḥ* presents the body as a sacred site (devalaya) and the jīva as the eternal divine (sanatana deva).” [6]

Similarly, the track of the Jīva is laid down by Nature according to the vibrations and requests of the Jiva himself. [7]

To this, Bhagavān Krishna offers a solution: through *abhyāsa* (consistent practice) and *vairāgya* (detachment) (Bhagavadgita), control of the mind becomes possible. With further study and contemplation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the author came to an interesting linguistic realisation: the syllable “MA” in Sanskrit can mean “no,” “not,” or “don’t”; “NA” also shares a similar negating function; and “H” (visarga) serves as an exclamatory or expressive phoneme. Thus, the term *MANAH* (or *Manas*) could be interpreted philosophically or symbolically as a surprising expression of something that fundamentally *does not exist*. [8]

Pathanjala yoga sutrani declares:

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

Yoga is the practice of stopping chitta vrutti (vibrations or thoughts rising in the mind). [9]

ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद्

बाहू राजन्यः कृतः ।

ऊरू तदस्य यद्वैश्यः

पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत ॥

Brāhmaṇa was (His) face/mouth, Kṣatriya was made from His arms, Vaiśya came from His thighs, Śūdra was born from His feet. [10]



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In Ramayana, Sri Rama forces Vibhishana to perform the *Achara* (rituals) as per *Sampradaya*:

सजातीयं हि पुरुषं
स्वजन्मकुलसंश्रयम् ।
अपि वै रिपुमापदतः
संस्कर्तुं कथमर्हसि ॥

यत्तु धर्म्यं सनातनं
तदिदं परिकीर्त्यते ।
तस्मात्संस्कारमस्याद्य
त्वमेव कर्तुमर्हसि ॥

“A man belonging to the same family and lineage should perform the last rites. Even if he has been an enemy, how can you (Vibhishana) refuse to perform his funeral?”

“What is righteous and eternal dharma is declared thus: Therefore, you alone are fit to conduct his saṃskāra (final rites) today.”^[11]

जातिलिङ्गं न पश्यन्ति
ब्रह्मवादिनो जनाः ।
गुणकर्मविभागेन
ब्राह्मणाद्याः प्रचक्षते ॥

“The knowers of Brahman do not recognise varna by birthmarks. They define Brahmana and others by guṇa and karma.”^[12]

शूद्रोऽपि शमदमोपेतो
विद्याक्रामोपलक्षितः ।
ब्राह्मणत्वं व्रजेत् तात
न च जातिर्निबन्धनम् ॥



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“Even a Shudra, if endowed with tranquillity, self-control, and disciplined knowledge, may attain the state of a Brāhmaṇa, O dear one. Birth is not the determining criterion for a brahma vadi.”^[13]

मृत्युकाले तद्विचिन्तयन्
प्रामादाद् योनिमृगिमासीद्।

At the time of death, thinking of the deer, he carelessly accepted the womb of a deer.^[14]

स तु योगबलात् पूर्वजन्मस्मृतिं
लब्ध्वा मृगतां गतश्चरेत् स एव।

By the power of his previous spiritual practice, even in the deer’s body, he remembered his past life.^[15]

स्मरन् पूर्वदेहं वनमेजे
साधुसंघं व्रजन् स एव।

Remembering his previous mistake, the deer wandered alone in places of sages, avoiding all attachments.^[16]

ततश्च मृगतां हित्वा
ब्राह्मणकुलेऽजायत।
ज्ञानिनां वंशजः साक्षात्
निर्मुक्तः सर्वबन्धनैः ॥

After giving up the deer body, he was born in a noble brahmaṇa family, completely freed from previous worldly bondage.^[17]

ब्रह्मचारिण आचार्यं
सन्तं गुरुमुपगता ।



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अभिवाद्योपसङ्गृह्य
मौनमादौ समाचरेत् ॥

“A brahmacārī should approach the guru with respect, offer salutations, and first cultivate silence and discipline.”

श्रुतं चैव विमृशयार्थान्
नित्यं श्रवणकीर्तनैः ।
रतेनाप्लावयेदात्मान्
गुरुशुश्रूषणेन च ॥

“He should carefully reflect on what he hears, immerse himself daily in listening and recitation, and purify himself through devoted service to the guru.”^[18]

न देहगेहेषु रुचिं
क्वचिदादधीत बुद्धिमान् ।
निवृत्तः सर्वकर्माणि
नैव कुत्रापि तिष्ठति ॥

He should not become attached to any dwelling or body-related identity. Having renounced all duties, he does not stay fixed in any place.

न मित्रं न च वै शत्रुं
न गृहं न कुटुम्बकम् ।
उदासीनो नित्यमेष
न्यस्तकर्मा च यत्स्थितः ॥

He recognises neither friend nor enemy, neither home nor family. He remains neutral, having given up all personal duties. ^[19]



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मुखबाहूरूपदजान्
जनानहुर्यद्विदोऽखिलाः ।
वर्णाश्रमविभागेन
लोकानां यद्यथाक्रमम् ॥

Those who know the truth say that from My mouth, arms, thighs, and feet arise the various classes of human beings, and thus the order of varṇa and āśrama is established in the world. [20]

सन्तोऽतिथीन्द्रा भूतानि
ऋषयो भूतरक्षकाः ।
साधवश्चैव ये चान्ये
गृहं प्राप्योपजीवनाः ॥

Saints, guests, beings, sages, and those who depend on householders must all be cared for by the gr̥hastha.”[21]

गृहस्थः कुटुम्बी स्यात्
सत्यवादी जितेन्द्रियः ।
स्वधर्मनिरतः शान्तो
दानशीलो यथाविधि ॥

“The householder must be truthful, self-controlled, devoted to his svadharma, peaceful, and generous.”

यज्ञदानतपोहोम
स्नानजपसमाधिभिः ।
वर्तेत यत्नतः शुद्धो
गृहस्थो धर्ममाश्रितः ॥

“He should purify himself through yajña, charity, austerity, fire-offerings, bathing, japa, and meditation.” [22]



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अक्रोधः सत्यवाग्दीन्तः

शमवान्नियतव्रतः ।

ध्यानयोगपरो नित्यं

निर्ममो निरहङ्कृतिः ॥

He must be free of anger, truthful, self-controlled, dedicated to meditation, without possessiveness or ego.^[23]

यः सर्वभावेन भजते

मां त्वानन्देन चेतसा ।

न तस्य विद्यते किञ्चित्

मद्भक्तो लभते परम् ॥

One who worships Me with a joyful and undivided heart lacks nothing in this world or the next; such a devotee attains the supreme state.^[24]

Methodology

Birth, according to the Bhagavad Gita's description (*vasansi jirani*), is like changing worn-out clothes for new ones^[2]. That which takes birth is the *jiva*, the individual self, which in its essential nature has no *varna*, no *ashrama*, and no *linga* (gender). The *jiva* is pure consciousness associated with *prarabdha*^[7], while the same consciousness without *prarabdha* is the *parabrahman*.^[3] The traditional advaita yoga sadhana traditions, when taught to the author, the Guru taught: *jivo devah sanatanah*.^[6] The term *devah* does not correspond to the English idea of a "demigod." It arises from the root *dyotana dyotanāt iti devah* meaning "that which illumines or makes one aware." When the *jiva* departs from the body, the body becomes *jada prakriti* (inert matter), and it is either cremated or buried. When the *jiva chetana* or conscious principle resides within it, the same body functions as a living being- illumined.

The *jiva* is parabrahman carrying *prarabdha* the vibrations it inscribed upon itself in previous lives^[7]. Based on these impressions, the *jiva* chooses the type of life it must undergo next. In accordance with his own choice, nature blesses that *jiva* with a specific family, environment,



and circumstances, each of which is conceptual, not physical. Thus, based on the choices of jivas, nature organises human beings into four classifications by birth, known as the Varna.

The word *varna*, derived from *vr* (to choose, classify, cover), originally signified a natural classification rather than a rigid division. The four varnas are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra, which are mentioned in the *Purusha Sukta* of *Rig Veda* ^[10], the *Bhagavad Gita* ^[3], and the *Bhagavata Purana* ^[20].

When a jiva leaves the body at death, it carries the subtle impressions (*samskaras*) formed by its dominant *gunas*, final thought-patterns, and even the intentions or actions left incomplete ^[7]. These accumulated *guna-karma samskaras* determine the jiva's next birth. Accordingly, the jiva is born into a particular varna-family that matches its previous-life tendencies and karmic trajectory. The life of Jada Bharata ^[14] spanning three births and shaped by retained *samskaras* beautifully illustrates this continuity of *guna* and *karma* across lifetimes ^[17].

Many people claim that one should remember aspects of previous lives, but such remembrance is not normally possible for ordinary individuals. The *Bhagavatha Purana* itself shows that the memory of past births is accessible only to beings endowed with extraordinary spiritual strength (*yoga-bala*), as in the case of Jada Bharata, who retained awareness of his prior existence even in a deer's body ^{[15][16]}. For most people, the *samskara* of past lives operate subconsciously, shaping tendencies and dispositions, but they are not consciously recalled. Explicit memory of previous births is therefore the exception, limited to those with highly refined yogic attainment, and the term "yoga sadhana" is often mistaken as mere physical training, but in reality it is a discipline centred on the mind ^{[8][9]}.

All the major texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Rig Veda*, the *Manu Smriti*, and the *Bhagavata Purana* affirm that *varna* is grounded in *guna* and *karma*. It is therefore essential to clarify a commonly misunderstood point: *varna* is not decided by the *guna* and *karma* of the present life. The present birth-*varna* is the result of the jiva's *past life's* *guna* and *karma*; the *current* *guna* and *karma* will influence the *next* birth-*varna*. This distinction is often overlooked in modern interpretations, leading to confusion regarding the traditional framework, which is naturally very in line with nature.



This principle is clearly illustrated in the itihasa. Ravana, though dominated by *tamo-guna* and engaging in *rajo-tamo*-oriented actions during his life, was still born into a Brahmana lineage due to previous-life *samskaras*. Therefore, Sri Rama ensured that Vibhishana performed Ravana's final rites according to their tradition^[1] because *varna* for 'that lifetime' of Ravana was fixed by birth, not by the individual's behaviour or *guna* during the present life.

The same principle is beautifully expressed by Annamacharya in his famous Telugu kirtana "*Brahmam Okkate.*"^[1] He explains that during sleep, a king (*raju*) and a servant (*bantu*) behave in exactly the same way both respond identically even to something as small as a mosquito bite without any distinction of role, wealth, or social status. This illustrates that the differences we observe among people operate only in the waking state, where each individual performs specific functions or duties in accordance with *dharma*. Similarly, after death, the cremation ground is the same for a brahmana and a *chāṇḍāla*, even though their responsibilities and social roles differ greatly while they are alive. Thus, the distinctions of *varna* function only during life for the orderly organisation of society, and they are not inherent or permanent attributes of the *jiva*.

Annamacharya further teaches that if one wishes to transcend these distinctions, it must be through *adhyatma vidya* the knowledge of the Self. The *jiva*, when experienced self as consciousness that is free from *prarabdha*, is none other than *parabrahman* or *Sri Hari*. This profound insight has often been misunderstood and reduced to the simplistic claim that "Annamacharya said all are equal and therefore everyone must perform the same duties and follow the same *dharma*." Such interpretations overlook the depth of his teaching and, if applied literally, can disrupt the natural order of society. Annamacharya's message is not that all worldly functions should be identical, but that the inner Self is one in all, and therefore social roles should never become a basis for ego, pride, or division.

Misinterpreting Annamacharya's teaching is like a child playing with an electric switch. The child sees only the on and off positions and concludes that it is the switch alone that lights the bulb or turns it off, without understanding the electricity flowing through the wires behind it. In the same way, some people look only at the external positions of social roles and decide that



these roles themselves create all differences, without perceiving the deeper principles of jiva, varna, and dharma that operate beneath them.

Along with the above examples, the Bhagavad Gita explicitly enumerates the duties of all the Varnas^[5]. If Varna were determined solely by the guṇa and karma of the current lifespan of a jīva, the Gita would have stated that “*those who perform these actions belong to that Varna.*” Instead, the text presents it differently: it declares, “*These are the duties to be carried out by members of that particular Varna,*” implying that the Varna is already determined by birth, and the corresponding karma is to be performed by those born into that Varna. In this way, nature manages cultural and social order, assigning individuals to specific contexts that align with their svabhava and svadharma.

For example, go-rakṣaṇa (cow-protection) is prescribed as a duty of the *Vaishya* Varna. Those specialised in this duty came to be known as *Gomatis* individuals who established *matas* and served cows. Over time, in certain southern regions of Bharath, the term Gomati gradually evolved phonetically into Komati.

The author once approached his guru seeking deeper clarity on the principle of Varna. The guru instructed him to meditate upon Maha Viṣṇu with absolutely no desire, allowing the truth to reveal itself naturally. After several weeks of intense and disciplined meditation, the author began to receive a faint inner vision of Maha Viṣṇu reclining on the *Kshira Sagara*, pervading and becoming the entire *Viswam*. In that contemplative state, the form of Viṣṇu appeared extended from head to feet in a single continuous axis of existence. At that moment, the author realised that if Brahmana is symbolically expressed from the “face” of the cosmic form and Sudra from the “feet,” then both are equally parts of the same Mahā Viṣṇu, inseparable and sacred. The vision revealed that the distinctions described in scripture are functional, not hierarchical; all Varnas exist within the same divine body, and therefore none is inferior or superior, each is an integral expression of the same cosmic principle. The balance of the Varna system is further reflected in the practical disciplines prescribed for each group. A Brahmana may at times find no students to teach, a Kshatriya may lose his kingdom or position, and a Vaishya may suffer loss of wealth or livelihood. To prepare for such contingencies, these three



Varnas are trained in Bhikshatana, the discipline of accepting alms and living with dignity even in adverse circumstances. A Sudra, however, is not instructed in Bhikshatana, because regardless of economic or political shifts, he always has access to work through service-oriented occupations. Thus, while the *upper three Varnas* (the misunderstanding goes on here with this term as ‘*these three are UPPER VARNs*’, but literally it is ‘*the above-mentioned three varnas*’) require training in renunciation as a safeguard against potential loss of role or resources, the Sudra’s livelihood remains anchored in continuous service, making the practice of bhikshatana unnecessary.

The guru then explained that there is no single law that applies identically to all people. For the ordinary person, *jati* is understood through birth, because social order and duties operate at the level of family, lineage, and inherited responsibilities. But for a Brahmovadi^[12] one who has realised the Self his assessment of Varna is made on the basis of guṇa and karma because such a person stands beyond the limitations of social identity and as he is dharma-adharma-vivarjita, untouched by merit or demerit. This guṇa-based discernment, however, applies only to the brahmavadi; it is not the standard for ordinary people, whose *JATI* functions according to birth-based social order. A realised being neither needs to visit temples nor is forbidden from doing so, for temples and rituals are tools meant for those still walking the path. For the common man, however, the situation is different: having specific dharma to uphold, one must indeed visit temples, perform rituals, and follow the prescribed practices that refine the mind and sustain social harmony.

If a person lives as a common man, his Varna is determined by the birth based on guṇa–karma samskaras carried forward from his previous birth. However, Varna is not absolutely rigid: by cultivating knowledge, discipline, and inner refinement, a person may elevate themselves to the level of a brahmavadi or pandita^[13], transcending the limits of their inherited Varna. ^[12] Conversely, if a person fails to follow the dharma of their birth-Varna and instead acts against its principles, they naturally decline in their inner disposition and may thereby degrade their Varna, both in this life’s character and in future birth. Thus, upliftment occurs through jnana and Achara, while decline results from neglect of one’s svadharma reflecting the natural, guṇa-based adjustments that dharma makes across lifetimes. And one who declines from the



discipline of his Varna through sustained adharna, negative conduct, or gross violation of social and ethical norms is traditionally regarded as falling outside the fourfold Varna framework, a category later referred to as Panchama. This Panchama group generally includes communities such as the sva-paka those who ate the flesh of dogs, indicating an inversion of purity norms; the Chandala those who performed tasks associated with cremation grounds; and the vyadha those who lived by hunting and sometimes consumed uncooked meat. These classifications were not arbitrary but emerged as social markers for individuals or groups who had moved far away from the refining influence of Varna-dharma. Thus, while upliftment in Varna is possible through knowledge and discipline, decline results from sustained departure from dharma, placing a person outside the structured social order.

Thus, *varna dharma* is not a division of people but a balance of functions preserving societal harmony by aligning the innate tendencies of the jiva with the roles required for the proper functioning and stability of the world.

Sri Adi Shankaracharya, in his work *Moha Mudgara* popularly known as *Bhaja Govindam* includes the line “bhagavad-Gita kinchidadhita.” This phrase is often misspelt and mispronounced as “bhagavad-Gita kinchita Gita,” leading to the misunderstanding that “reading a small portion of the Gita is sufficient for life.” However, the original term is adhita, not *kinchit Gita*. The word adhita means *properly studied, understood with clarity, and held firmly in dhi (buddhi)*. Such depth arises not from casual reading but from repeated study, reflection, and linking of concepts across the different texts with correct Tarka(logics). Only through this sustained engagement can one arrive at a correct and integrated interpretation of the Gita’s teachings.

The *ashrama* system was designed as a complete model for the gradual evolution of the individual from learning to responsibility, to withdrawal, and finally to realisation. Classical texts describe the four āshramas (stages) as *brahmacharya*, *grhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsa*, each contributing to the refinement of the *jiva* and the harmony of society.



The brahmacharya stage begins when a jiva approaches the guru to study both para vidya (knowledge of the Self) and apara vidya (knowledge required for livelihood). The Bhagavata Purana ^[18] explains that the student must cultivate simplicity, humility, self-restraint, and attentive awareness, learning with a steady and focused mind. The purpose of brahmacharya is to establish a foundation of sattva, to prepare the intellect, and to refine the mind for a life aligned with dharma. Thus, brahmacharya does not merely mean “being unmarried”; it is a disciplined stage of mental, moral, and educational training that forms the basis of all later Ashrama duties.

In the *grhastha* stage, the jiva becomes a householder, earning for himself and supporting family and society, and the *grhastha* is the “pillar of dharma” because he supports all other ashramas through charity and responsibility: “All ashramas depend upon the *grhastha*, just as all beings depend on the earth.”^[21] In the Bhagavata Purana, Krishna instructs that a householder must practice generosity, uphold family duties, and maintain balance between material life and spiritual awareness. Thus, the *grhastha* is not merely a social role but the centre of social sustainability and ethical living.^[22]

In *vanaprastha*, the jiva gradually withdraws from the world. The responsibilities of society and family are handed over to the next generation, and the couple moves toward a life of contemplation. Further lead this life as one of simplicity, meditation, and non-attachment, where external duties are replaced by internal refinement. The purpose of *vanaprastha* is to prepare the mind for renunciation and stabilise the awareness in *sattva*.^[23]

The final stage, *sannyasa*, operates on two levels: the *sadhaka-sannyasi* and the *siddha-sannyasi*. Dharmashastra defines *sannyasa* through the aphorism “*sat-padarthena buddhi-nyasat iti sannyasi*”, meaning one who places the mind firmly in *satya* (the Absolute) is a *sannyasi*. The qualities of a true renunciate include equanimity, fearlessness, compassion, and uninterrupted awareness of Brahman. A *sadhaka-sannyasi*^[19] is one who practices these disciplines through effort, while a *siddha-sannyasi*^[23] is one who abides naturally and continuously in realisation. In the verse **मां त्वानन्देन चेतसा** “One who worships Me with a joyful heart”^[23], the *sadhaka-sannyasi* worships Sri Krishna as the “Me,” whereas the *siddha-*



sannyasi recognises this “Me” as Aham the Self and remains established in that nondual awareness. This state of siddha-sannyasa is traditionally referred to as the condition of a paṇḍita or brahmavadi.

Purpose of the Four Ashramas:

Together, the four āshramas form a holistic path:

- *Brahmacharya* builds knowledge, discipline, and clarity
- *gṛhastha* trains responsibility, generosity, and balance
- *vānaprastha* cultivates detachment and contemplation
- *sannyāsa* leads to realisation and freedom

The ashrama system thus enables the jiva to refine itself gradually, progressing toward the awareness of the actual Self (*Atman*), beyond all conceptual identities.

The injunction “na rudro rudram arcayet” that Rudra alone can worship Rudra of Mahanyasa tradition, expresses the same principle: true worship becomes possible only when one transcends identification with the body, mind, and personality and abides in the state of Rudra, the inner Self. For this reason, Rudra-parayaṇa and Rudrabhiṣeka are prescribed for sannyasis as essential disciplines, both for attaining jñāna and for remaining established in it. One who has reached this state the brahmavadi, paṇḍita, or self-realised sage sees the entire visva as Viṣṇu, Parabrahman, or the Atman, without any distinction. For him, brahmana animals panchama all are equal.^[4]

The author did not encounter any direct or systematic descriptions of *liṅga* (gender) classification in the texts he was guided to study. Although the sastras offer profound insights into *jiva*, *śarira*, and *prakṛiti*, explicit discussions on the metaphysical basis of gender were either brief, symbolic, or embedded in poetic dialogue. This absence created a space for sincere inquiry. Over time, through guidance received from the guru during states of deep contemplation, the author began to discover subtle principles that were later found to resonate with ideas expressed in discussions with the guru on the script *Manidweepa Rahasyam*, which was framed as a dialogue between Siva and Parvati. As is customary in the works of Rishis,



transcendental experiences are often conveyed through divine conversations Lakṣmi-Narayaṇa, Siva-Parvati not to claim authorship, but to maintain humility.

The deeper understanding of *linga* began to unfold when the guru asked the author to revisit two deeply personal moments. The first was the passing of the author's father. In the midst of the grief and confusion, when neighbours asked that the body be checked once more, the officiating priest simply said in Telugu, "*labham ledu, jivudu poyadu*" "There is no use; the *jiva* has departed." The term *jivudu* is grammatically masculine. What struck the author only later was that, on the very next day, when his mother passed away, the same priest used the very same words "*Jivudu poyadu.*" The deceased was female, yet the masculine form *jivudu* was used again, instead of the feminine *jivita*. In that moment of mourning, the author did not reflect upon this, but the memory remained as a subtle imprint.

A second memory surfaced from the author's service in the armed forces. During a military operation, he sustained a gunshot wound to the shoulder. The medical officer, also from Andhra Pradesh, asked in Telugu, "*Yes, javan? cheyyi unda, poyinda?*" "What happened, soldier? Is the hand still there, or has it gone?" Here, *cheyyi* in Telugu is hand, and the expression *unda* in Telugu is "is it existing", and *unda* is the feminine form. At the time, the author did not consider why parts of the body were addressed in feminine or neutral grammatical gender; the focus was on the urgency of the moment. Yet this linguistic instinct, unnoticed then, later revealed its significance.

When the guru asked the author to reflect on these two experiences, each marked by vulnerability, loss, and immediacy, the meaning became clearer. Almost all Bharatiya languages intuitively refer to the body and its parts as feminine or neutral, whereas the departing principle, the *jiva*, is consistently expressed in masculine terms. These are not merely grammatical habits; they reflect the metaphysical vision of Sanatana Dharma.

In this worldview, the *jiva* consciousness endowed with *prarabdha* is the masculine principle (*puruṣa*). The physical body, irrespective of whether it is biologically male or female, belongs to *prakṛiti*, the feminine principle. At the moment of death, what leaves is the masculine *puruṣa*; what remains is the feminine *sarira*. The repeated use of the masculine word *jivudu*



during both deaths, and the feminine usage for the body and its parts during the author's injury, reflect this deeper ontological understanding. Through these lived experiences, the guru's guidance, and later textual resonance, the author arrived at the foundational principle: *linga* is rooted not in biology, but in the cosmic relationship between *puruṣa* (masculine consciousness) and *prakṛiti* (feminine embodiment). Thus, when the *jīva* (*puruṣa*) departs from the body (*prakṛiti*) and moves to subtler realms such as *Svarga*, his *puṇya-phala* is experienced through feminine embodiments, traditionally described as *apsaras*, which is again a conceptual world (*MAYA*).

As we live in a conceptual world, it is called *viṣaya-prapañca*. In Vedic terminology, this is referred to as *vikalpa*, and in Vedānta the same is called *maya* that which appears to exist though it does not truly exist. *Maya* operates for all ordinary *jīvas*, because a common human or animal functions with a bodily identity or with a conceptual identity called *aham-bhava* (the sense of "I").

For a Vedāntin, brahmavadin, paṇḍita, or a self-realised person, *maya* is understood as "*maya sa ya ma*" that which has never truly existed. When one transcends *maya*, that *jīva* is considered realised, free from all *samskaras*. That state is *mokṣa*, liberation. If such a realised being continues to express through a body, he is known as a *jīvanmukta*.

As long as one experiences *papa-phala* as *duḥkha* and *puṇya-phala* as *sukha*, one is still within the domain of *maya*.

In the Sri Rudram of the Yajurveda, the *Aṣṭama Anuvaka* declares:

*“namah Shambhave cha mayo-bhave cha
namah Shankaraya cha mayaskaraya cha
namah Shivaya cha Shivataraya cha”*

Here, "Sham" means "good" or "auspicious." "Shambhu" means "sham bhavayat iti shambhu", "the one who exists as or grants auspiciousness." Thus, Paramatma, functioning as Shambhu, creates *maya* and grants *Sham sukha* within that *maya*. Shankara means "*Sham karoti iti Shankara*" He who bestows auspiciousness. By creating *maya* for the growth of the *jīva*, He



does good to all. Therefore, He is called *Shiva* that means, the embodiment of niratisaya-ananda (supreme bliss). By holding onto Him, the conceptual SELF is ultimately made like Him, the pure SELF.

Through Rudra-parayana, the *devotees* perform abhisheka with bhakthi and Shardda, the *sadhaka* gains understanding, becomes a jnani, and the *jnani* abides in the state of brahma-bhava.

Further Scope

With the conceptual framework sufficiently clarified, this study also highlights how common societal misunderstandings arise from inadequate linguistic skills, reduced cognitive cultivation, and the limitations of present-day educational models. By addressing and clarifying many of these misconceptions, the paper re-establishes a more faithful understanding of the subject.

What now remains is the translation of these clarified insights into lived practice, for their true significance emerges only through application.

Conclusion

Thus, the living beings can be in *maya* (conceptual world) or out of *maya* (realised). The one out of Maya is called a *Jnani*. For those in Maya, there are varna, ashrama and linga dharmas, and they must follow them. The one who is out of maya, he counts on guna.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have conducted this research independently and declare no conflicts of interest, ensuring objectivity and integrity in the study of spiritual concepts.



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