



VISHNU PURAN

AN INTRODUCTION AND
SUMMARY

16 January 2021

INVOCATION

जितं ते पुंडरीकाक्ष नमस्ते विश्वभावन ।
नमस्तेऽस्तु हृषीकेश महापुरुष पूर्वज ॥ १,१.०१ ॥

Victory be to you, Puṅḍaríkāksha; adoration be to you, Vīswabhāvana; glory be to you, Hrishikeśa, Mahāpurusha, and Pūrvaja.

प्रणम्य विष्णुं विश्वेशं ब्रह्मादीन् प्रणिपत्य च ।
गुरुं प्रणम्य वक्ष्यामि पुराणं वेदसंमितम् ॥ १,१.०३ ॥
इतिहासपुराणज्ञं वेदवेदांगपारगम् ।
धर्मशास्त्रादितत्त्वज्ञं वसिष्ठतनयात्मजम् ॥ १,१.०४ ॥

Having adored Vishṇu, the lord of all, and paid reverence to Brahmá and the rest; having also saluted the spiritual preceptor, who was versed in traditional history, who was acquainted with the Vedas, and the branches of sciences dependent upon them, and skilled in law and philosophy, the grandson of Vasishtha; I will narrate a Purána equal in sanctity to the Vedas.



VISHNU PURAN: REFERENCES

Sanskrit	Critical Edition of Vishnu Puran, edited by M.M. Pathak, Vadodara, Oriental Institute 1997-99
English translation	The Vishnu Purana: A system of Hindu mythology and tradition, translated from the original Sanskrit and illustrated by notes, derived chiefly from other Puranas, by the late H.H. Wilson, M.A. F.R.S., Boden Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford, Edited by Fitzedward Hall, Volumes 1-5, London: Trubner @ Co., 1864
Kannada translation	Vishnu Puranam, translated by Pandit Gamjam Thimmannayya, Shri Jayachamarajendra Grantharatnamala, Mysore, 1948, in three volumes

STRUCTURE OF VISHNU PURAN

- 5,607 verses organized into 6 parts and 126 chapters
- 23,000 verses according to Matsya Puran/Bhagavat Puran
- 17,393 (75%) verses seem to have been lost

Amsha	Chapters	Verses	Major content
1	22	1395	Cosmology
2	16	781	Earth
3	18	832	Time
4	24	633	Dynasties
5	38	1473	Krishna
6	8	493	Liberation
TOTAL	126	5607	



OUTLINE OF TODAY'S TALK

1

The setting

- Who narrated this Purana to whom?

2

Creation

- 9 types of creations

3

Structure of the Universe

- Bhu-Mandala and Lokas

4

Liberation

- In Kali Yuga

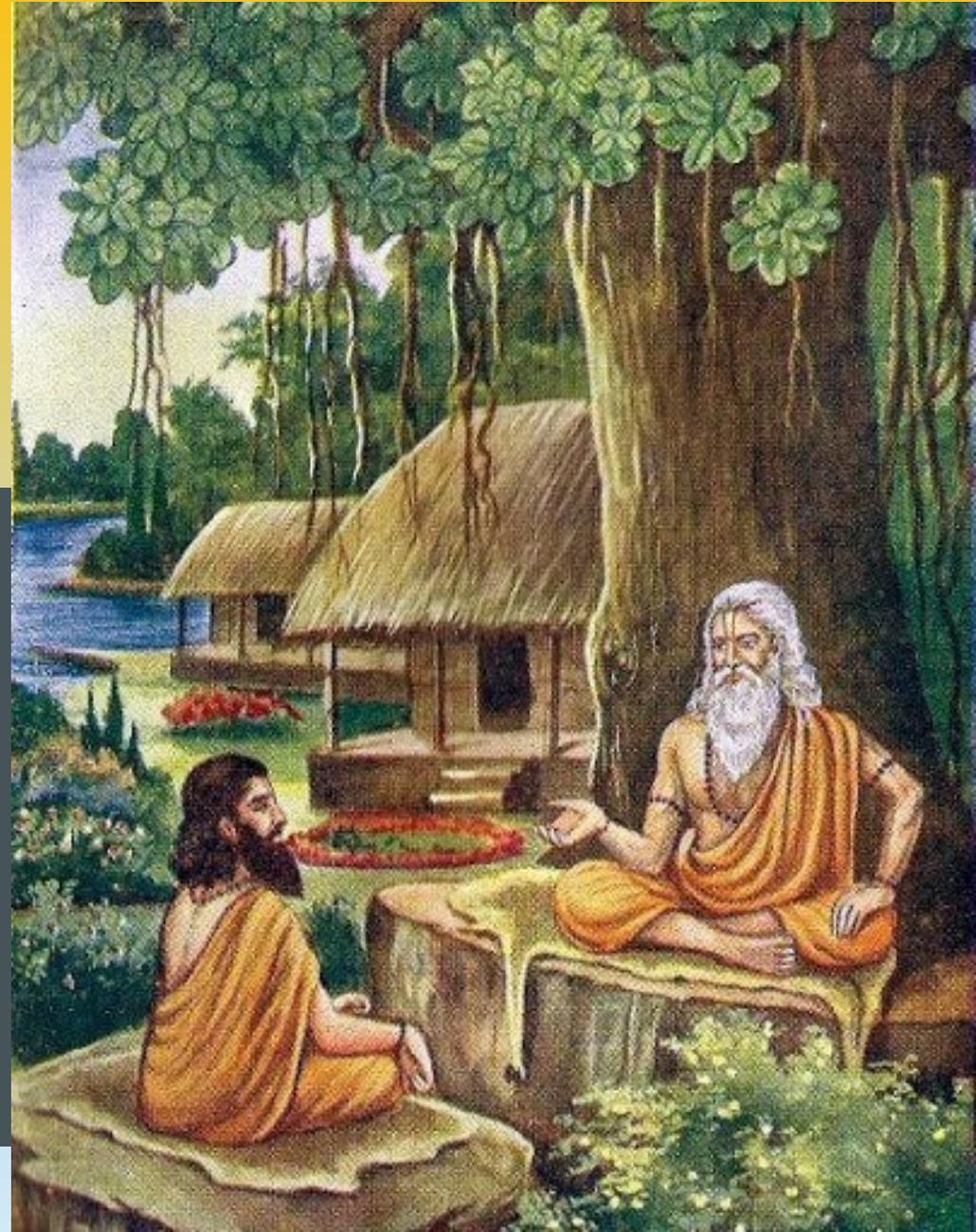
5

Other contents

- Legends



THE SETTING



VISHNU PURAN

Conversation
between
MAITREYA
and his teacher
PARASHARA

पराशरं मुनिवरं कृतपूर्वाह्निकक्रियम् ।
मैत्रेयः परिपप्रच्च प्रणिपत्याभिवाद्य च ॥ १,१.१ ॥

Maitreya, having saluted him reverentially, thus addressed Parashara, the excellent sage who had performed the morning rites of devotion.

Maitreya

- A disciple of Parashara (Vishnu Puran)
- Cursed Duryodhana (Mahabharata)
- Instructed Vidura on spiritual matters which seems to be a summary of Vishnu Puran that he heard from Parashar (Bhagavata Puran)
 - Maitreya is described as महा भागवत , द्वैपायन सुहृत्सखा, and सिद्ध.
- Maitreya Upanishad – Shiva’s teaching to Maitreya

Parashara

- Son of Shakti, raised by his grandfather Vasishtha, and Krishna Dvaipayana’s father (Mahabharata)
- Vyasa of the 26th Dvapara of Vaivasvata Manvantara (Vishnu Puran)
- The following texts are attributed to Parashara
 - Rishi of parts of Rig Veda
 - Parashara Smirti/ Dharma Samhita
 - Brihat Parashara Horashastra, a foundational text of Astrology
 - Vrikshaayurveda (the science of life of trees)
 - Krishi Parasharam, on agriculture and weeds

सोऽहमिच्छामि धर्मज्ञ श्रोतुं त्वत्तो यथा जगत् ।
बभूव भूयश्च यथा महाभाग भविष्यति ॥ १,१.४ ॥
यन्मयं च जगद् ब्रह्मन्यतश्चैतच्चराचरम् ।
लीनमासीद्यथा यत्र लयमेष्यति यत्र च ॥ १,१.५ ॥
यत्प्रमाणानि भूतानि देवादीनां च संभवम् ।

How did this world come about? How was it? And how will it be? In whom were the animate and inanimate things resolved and into whom will they be dissolved? How did the elements manifest? From where did the Gods and other beings emerge?

Maitreya to Parashara (1/4)

समुद्रपर्वतानां च संस्थानं च यथा भुवः ॥ १,१.६ ॥
सूर्यादीनां च संस्थानं प्रमाणं मुनिसत्तम ।

What are the situation and extent of the oceans and the mountains, the earth, the sun, and the planets?

Maitreya to Parashara (2/4)

देवादीनां तथा वंशान्मनून्मन्वन्तराणि च ॥ १,१.७ ॥
कल्पान् कल्पविकल्पांश्च चतुर्युगविकल्पितान् ।
कल्पान्तस्य स्वरूपं च युगधर्मांश्च कृत्स्नशः ॥ १,१.८ ॥

What are the families of Gods, Manus and others? What are the periods called Manvantaras, Kalpas, and their subdivisions, and the four Yugas, the events that happen at the close of a Kalpa, and the terminations of the several yugas? What is the Dharma in each Yuga?

Maitreya to Parashara (3/4)

देवर्षिपार्थिवानां च चरितं यन्महामुने ।
वेदशाखाप्रणयनं यथावद् व्यासकर्तृकम् ॥ १,१.९ ॥
धर्माश्च ब्राह्मणादीनां तथा चाश्रमवासिनाम् ।
श्रोतुमिच्चाम्यहं सर्वं त्वत्तो वासिष्ठनन्दन ॥ १,१.१० ॥

What are the histories of the Gods, the sages, and kings? How were the Vedas divided and arranged by Vyasa? What are the duties of the Brahmins and the other castes as well as those who pass through different orders of life?

Maitreya to Parashara (4/4)

साधु मैत्रेय धर्मज्ञ स्मारितोऽस्मि पुरातनम् ।
पितुः पिता मे भगवान् वसिष्ठो यदुवाच ह ॥ १,१.१२ ॥

Well inquired, pious maitreya. You recall to my recollection that which was of old narrated by my father's father, vaśishthā.

Parashara to Maitreya

- After hearing that his father had been devoured by a Rakshasa employed by Vishwamitra, Parashara was seized by violent anger
- He commenced Rakshasa Satra, a yajna for the destruction of the Rakshasas
- Hundreds of them were reduced to ashes by the rite
- As all the Rakshasas were about to be entirely extirpated, Vasishtha stopped Parashara by saying:

Enough, my child; let your wrath be appeased: the Rákshasas are not culpable: your father's death was the work of destiny
विहितं तथा ।

Anger is the passion of fools; it becomes not a wise man. By whom, it may be asked, is any one killed? Every man reaps the consequences of his own acts.

हन्यते तात कः केन यतः स्वकृतभुक् पुमान् ।

Anger, my son, is the destruction of all that man obtains by arduous exertions, of fame, and of devout austerities; and prevents the attainment of heaven or of emancipation.

The chief sages always shun wrath: do not be, my child, subject to its influence. Let no more of these unoffending spirits of darkness be consumed. Mercy is the might of the righteous
क्षमासारा हि साधवः ।

- Parashara immediately stopped the sacrifice, and Vasishtha was happy
- There came Pulastya, the son of Brahma, brother of Pulaha
- And Pulastya told Parashara

Since, in the violence of animosity, you have listened to the words of your progenitor, and have exercised clemency, therefore you shall become learned in every science:

since you have forborne, even though incensed, to destroy my posterity, I will bestow upon you another boon,

you shall become the author of a summary of the Puráñas;

you shall know the true nature of the deities, as it really is; and, whether engaged in religious rites, or abstaining from their performance, your understanding, through my favour, shall be perfect, and exempt from doubts

पुलस्त्येन यदुक्तं ते सर्वमेतद्भविष्यति ॥ १,१.२८ ॥

Whatever has been said to you by Pulastya, shall assuredly come to pass

Vasishtha to Parashara

कथयामि यथापूर्वं दक्षाद्यैर्मुनिसत्तमैः ।

पृष्टः प्रोवाच भगवानब्जयोनिः पितामहः ॥ १,२.८ ॥

तैश्चोक्तं पुरुकुत्साय भूभुजे नर्मदातटे ।

सारस्वताय तेनापि मम सारस्वतेन च ॥ १,२.९ ॥

I will relate to you that which was originally imparted by the great father of all (brahmá), in answer to the questions of Daksha and other venerable sages, and repeated by them to Purukutsa, a king who reigned on the banks of the Narmadá. It was next related by him to Sáraswata, and by Sáraswata to me.

Parashara to Maitreya

CREATION

- How did this world come about?



PROCESS OF CREATION

VISHNU

Not to be apprehended by the senses

The supreme soul

Self-existent

Devoid of all the distinguishing characteristics of complexion, caste or the like

Exempt from birth, vicissitude, death or decay

Who is always and alone

Exists everywhere and in whom all things here exist

The 4 aspects of Vishnu

Purusha/spirit

Pradhana/Prakriti/Avyakta

Mahat/Vyakta

Kala/Time

- Coming together of Pradhana and Purusha is creation
- Separation of Pradhana and Purusha is destruction
 - Kala is in-between

**BEFORE THIS
CREATION**

i.e., before this
(Varaha) Kalpa

नाहो न रात्रिर्न नभो न भूमि-
नसीत्तमो ज्योतिरभून्न चान्यत् ।
श्रोत्रादिबुद्ध्यानुपलभ्यमेकं
प्राधानिकं ब्रह्म पुमांस्तदासीत् ॥ १,२.२३ ॥

There was neither day nor night, nor sky nor earth, nor darkness nor light, nor any other thing, save only One, un-apprehensible by intellect, or That which is Brahma (Vishnu) and Puman (spirit) and Pradhana (matter)

CREATION AND DISSOLUTION

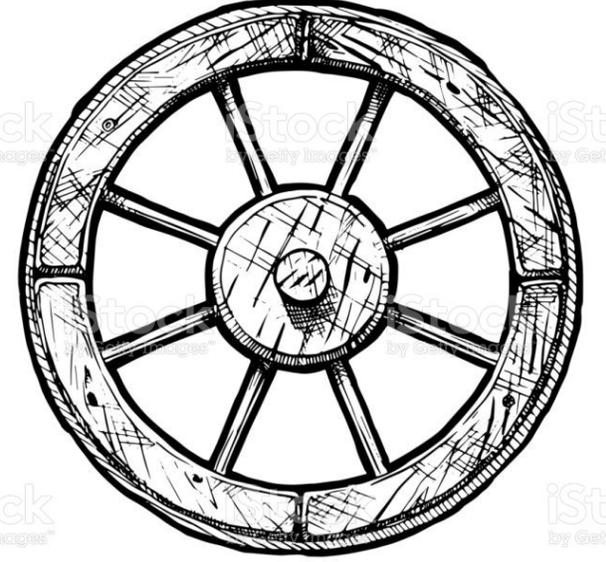
Time in between

विष्णोः स्वरूपात्परतो हि तेऽन्ये
रूपे प्रधानं पुरुषश्च विप्र ।
तस्यैव तेऽन्येन धृते वियुक्ते
रूपान्तरं तद्द्विज कालसंज्ञम् ॥ १,२.२४ ॥

These two aspects of Vishnu - Pradhana and Purusha - are different from his true nature. Their coming together is creation and their separation is dissolution. In between them is Time.

अनादिर्भगवान् कालो नान्तोऽस्य द्विज विद्यते ।
अव्युच्चिन्नास्ततस्त्वैते सर्गस्थित्यन्तसंयमाः ॥१, २. २६ ॥

Time has no beginning and there is no end to it. Due to this, creation, maintenance and destruction occur repeatedly like waves.



Wheel of time

NINE TYPES OF CREATIONS

1. Primary creation

1. महत्सर्गः – Creation of Mahat, also called Brahma
2. भूतसर्गः – Creation of Tanmatras or five elements
3. ऐंद्रियक सर्गः – Creation of Ahamkara and senses, also called वैकारिक सर्गः

2. Secondary Creation

4. स्थावर सर्गः/ प्राकृत सर्गः – Creation of inanimate bodies
5. तिर्यग्योन्य सर्गः – Creation of lower beings
6. ऊर्ध्वस्रोतस सर्गः – Creation of Gods
7. अर्वाक्स्रोत्रस सर्गः – Creation of humans
8. अनुग्रह सर्गः – creation of both Satwik and Tamasic Devatas

3. Primary and secondary creation

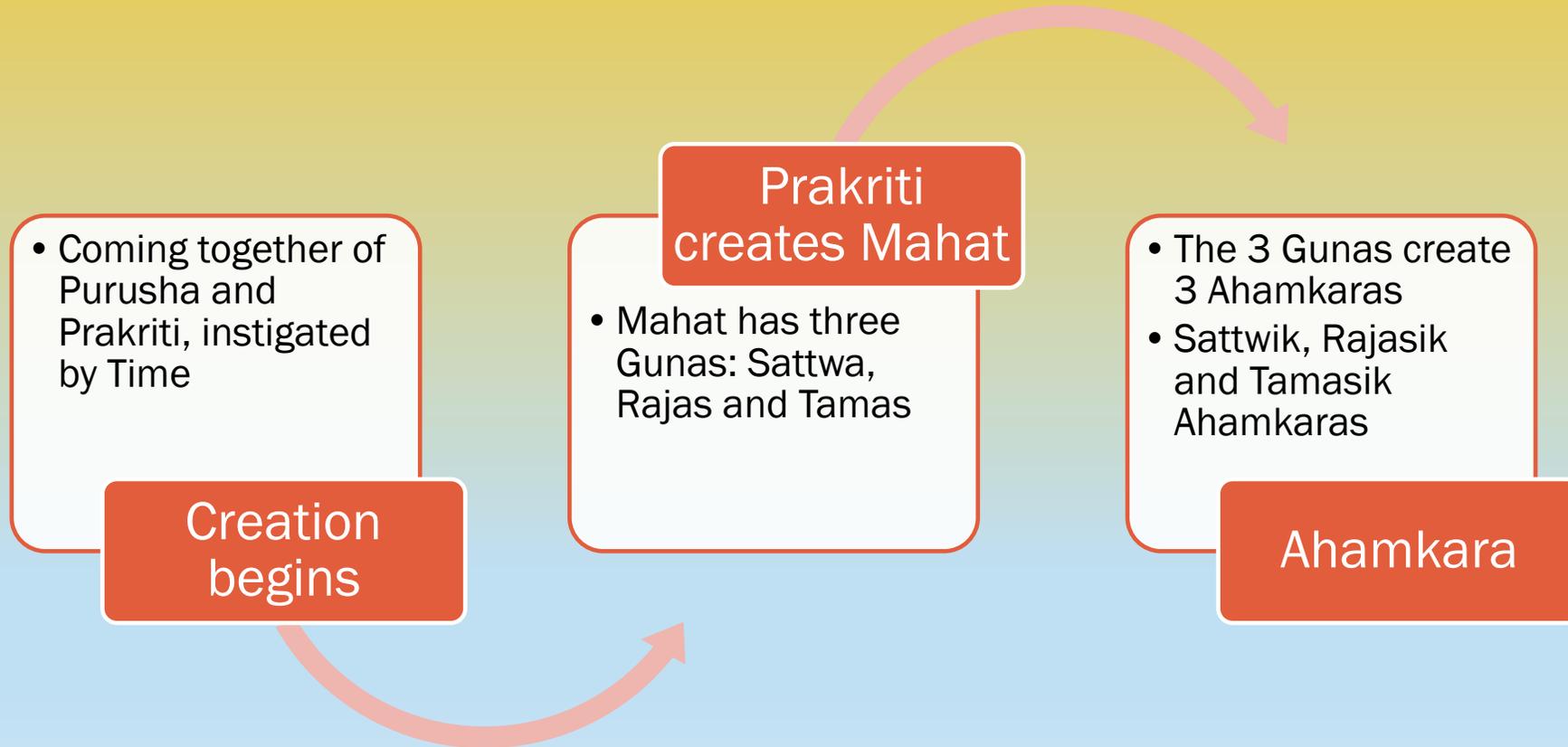
9. कौमार सर्गः -



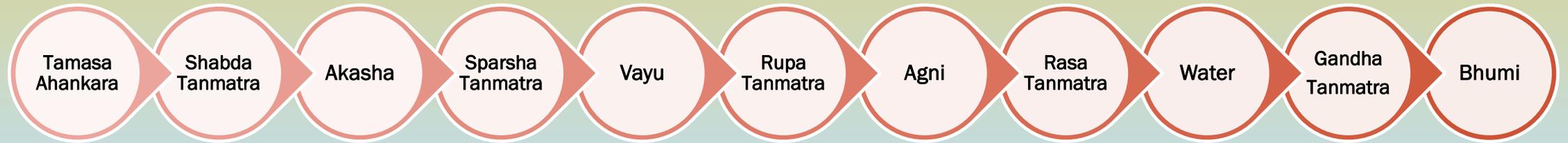
PRIMARY CREATION

1. Mahat Sarga
2. Bhuta Sarga
3. Aidriyaka / Vaikarika Sarga

1. MAHAT SARGA

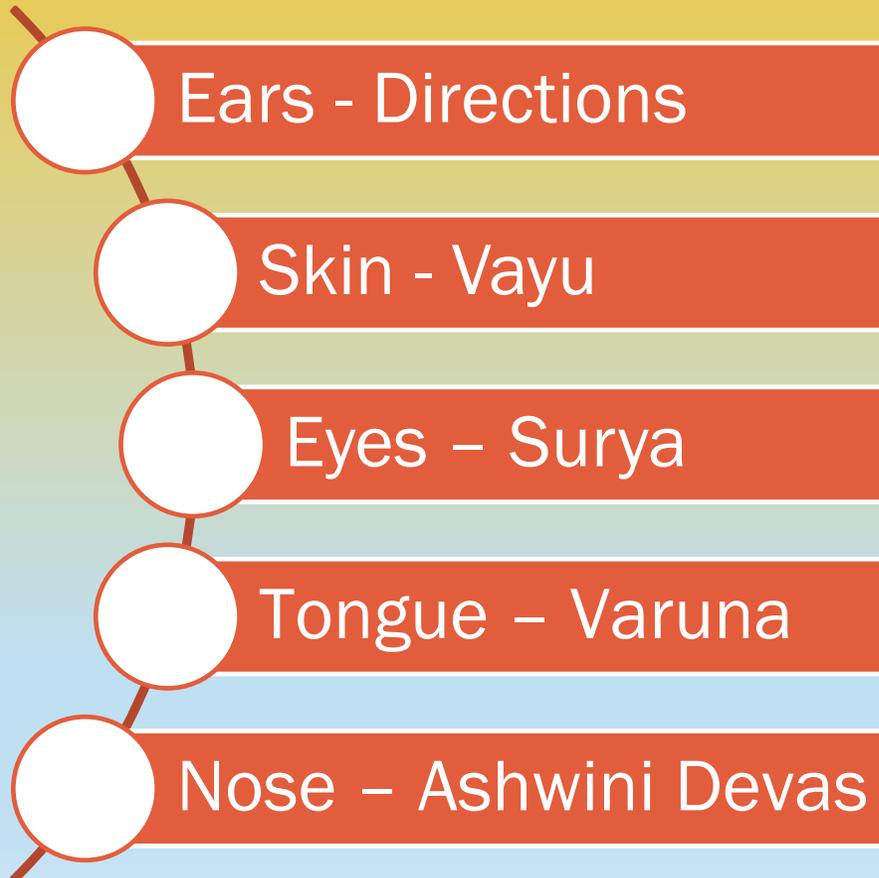


2. BHUTASARGA (FROM TAMAS-AHANKARA)

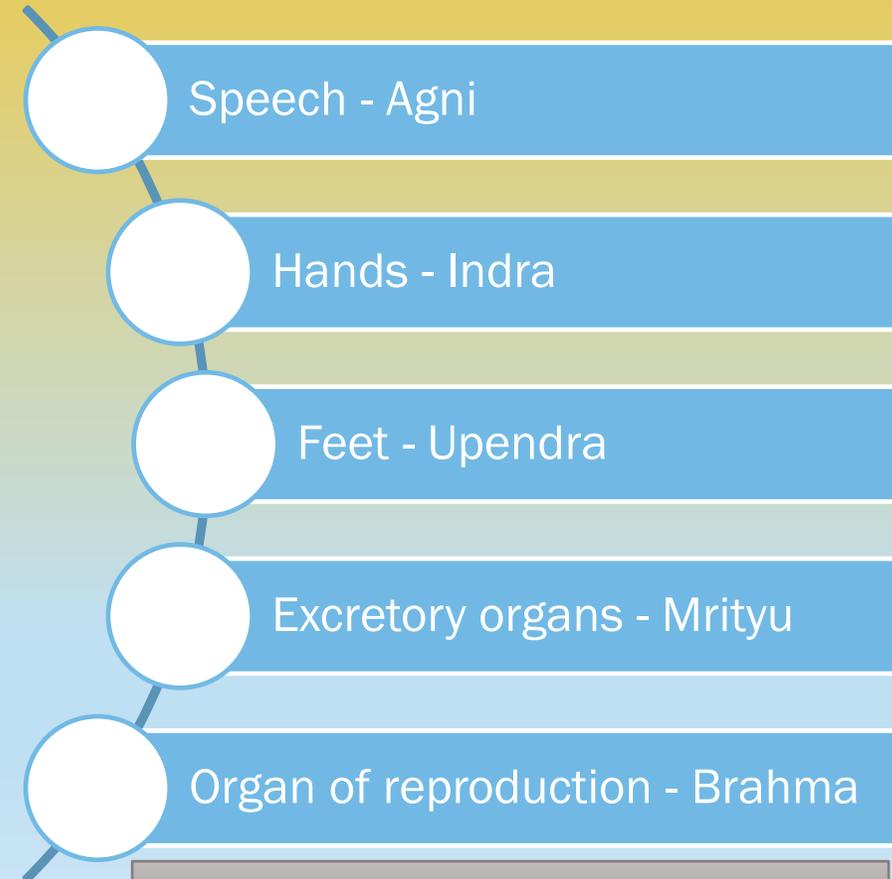


3. AINDRIYAKA / VAIKARIKA SARGA (1/2)

Rajasa
Ahankara

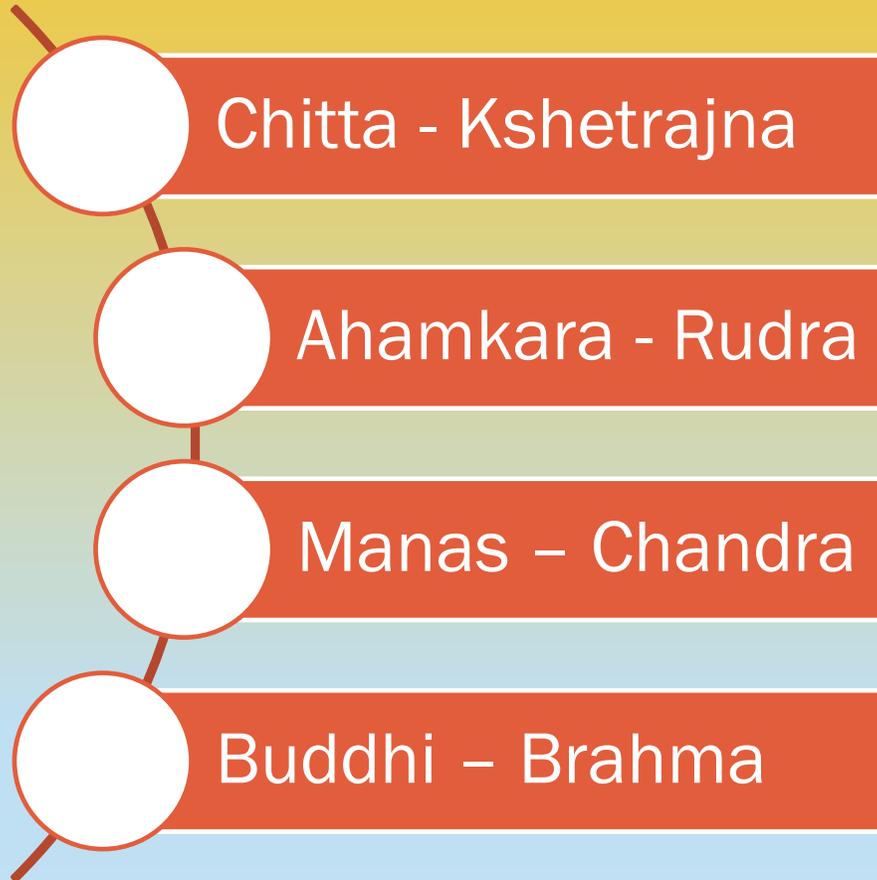


Jnanendriyas and their dities



Karmendriyas and their dities

3. AINDRIYAKA / VAIKARIKA SARGA (2/2)



Pancha Bhutas, together with Purusha, Prakriti and Mahat – produced a golden egg - Brahmanda with Hiranyagarbha (Vishnu himself) in it.

Mountains such as Meru as well as Oceans and Dvipas were in it including the Nakshatras and other luminaries

SECONDARY CREATION

1. स्थावर सर्गः/ प्राकृत सर्गः – Creation of inanimate bodies (वृक्ष, गुल्म, लता, वीरुत्, तृण)
2. तिर्यग्योन्य सर्गः – Creation of lower beings – पशु-पक्षि-मृगादि
3. ऊर्ध्वस्रोतस सर्गः – Creation of Gods – those who do not have to take food inside their bodies, and those who do not touch the earth, greater proportion of Sattwa Guna and hence happy in nature
4. अर्वाक्स्रोत्रस सर्गः – Creation of humans who live on earth by consuming food (those who grow by eating food)

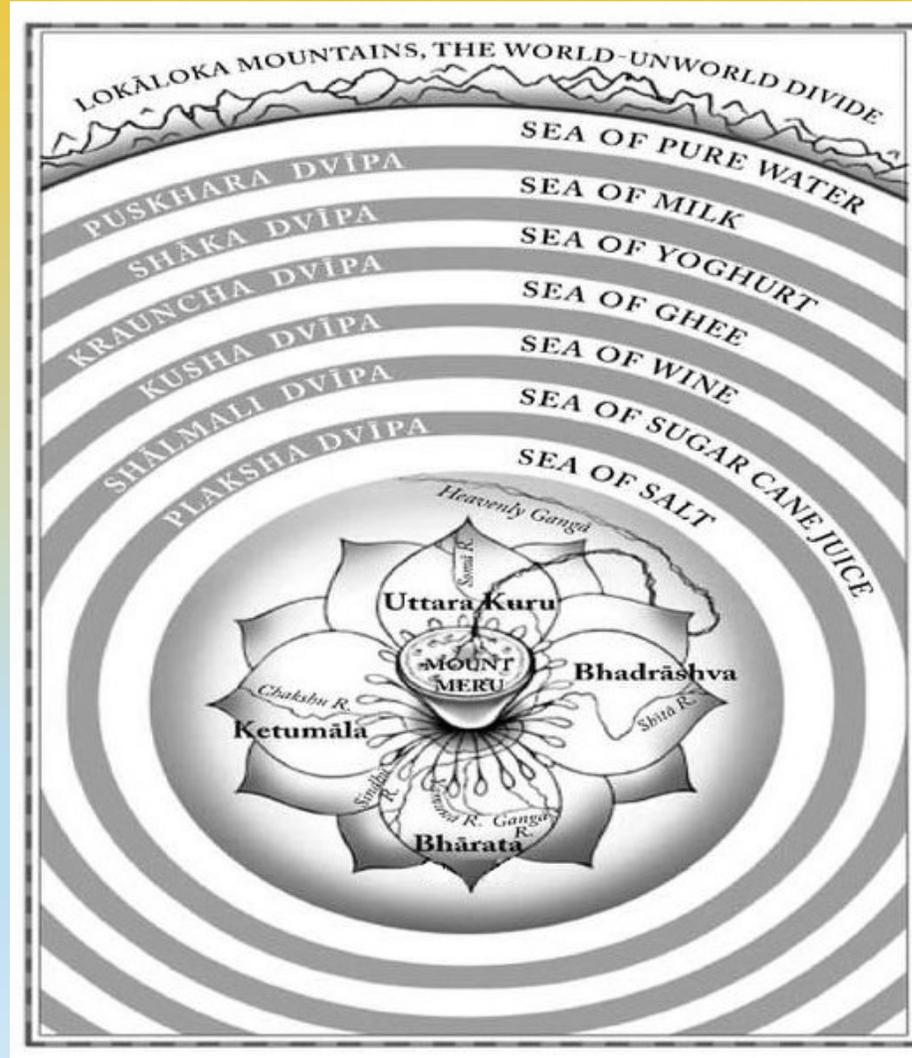


STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE

BHU MANDALA: THE CIRCLE OF EARTH



Bhu-mandala is a disk that bisects the sphere of the Brahmanda, and it has the same diameter as this sphere



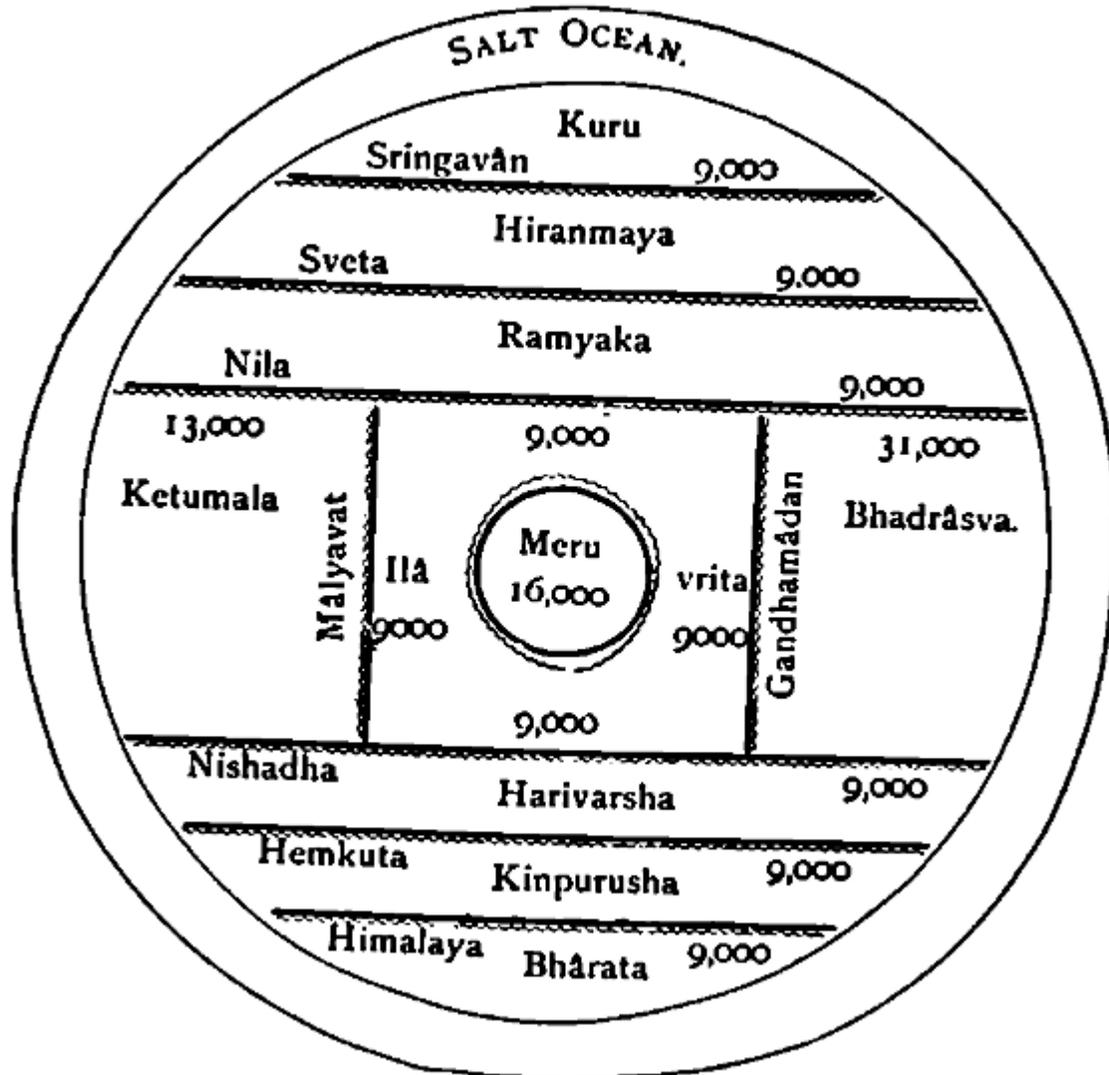
- The Central region of Bhu-mandala is divided into seven annular or ring-shaped “islands” and “oceans” which alternate – called Sapta Dvipa
- The Sanskrit word for island is dvipa which literally means two waters
- Beyond the seven dvipas are circular mountain ranges – Lokaloka mountain
- Clearly, this is not geography in the familiar modern sense of the term. However, the geography of Bhu-maldala encodes a combination of astronomical and geographical maps which is both rational and scientific.

SIZES OF THE CIRCULAR FEATURES OF BHU-MANDALA

N	Thickness (1000 Y)	Geographical type	Sanskrit name
1	100	Island	Jambudvipa
2	100	Ocean	Lavanoda
3	200	Island	Plakshadvipa
4	200	Ocean	Ikshurasoda
5	400	Island	Shalmalidvipa
6	400	Ocean	Suroda
7	800	Island	Kushadvipa
8	800	Ocean	Ghritoda
9	1600	Island	Kraunchadvipa
10	1600	Ocean	Kshiroda
11	3200	Island	Shakadvipa
12	3200	Ocean	Dadhimandoda
13	6400	Island	Pushkaradvipa
14	6400	Ocean	Svadudaka

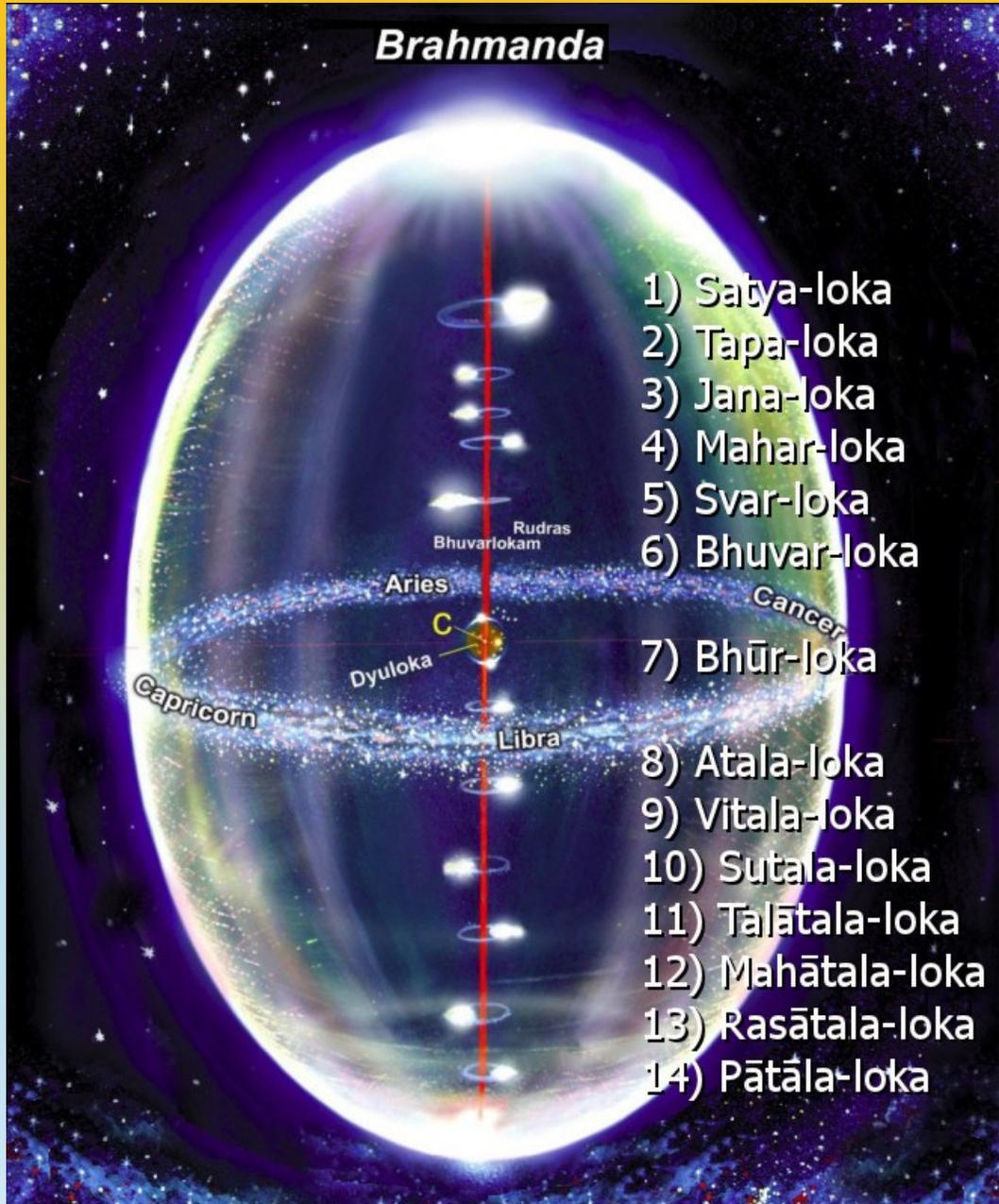
- The features of Bhu-Malala are all defined quantitatively using a unit, called the yojana, which is about 8 miles in length
- Jambudvipa, the innermost island in the form of a disk is 100,000 Yojanas in diameter
- Jambudvipa is surrounded by the salt water ocean which is ring 100,000 yojanas across from its inner to its outer edge
- This ocean, in turn, is surrounded by the ring-shaped island of Plakshadvipa, which is 200,000 yojanas across
- The successive islands and oceans enlarge as indicated in the table
- The rule is that the thickness of an ocean equals the thickness of the island it surrounds and the thickness of that island is twice the thickness of the ocean it surrounds
- The circular Jambudvipa is an exception. It surrounds no ocean and its thickness is its diameter.
- Lokaloka mountain divides the illuminated region of Bhu-mandala from the dark, uninhabited region, called Aloka-varsha, which extends from Lokaloka to the shell of the Brahmanda

JAMBU DVIPA.



JAMBU DVIPA

- Jambudvipa is a disk 100,000 yojanas in diameter situated in the center of Bhu Mandala
- In the centre of Jambudvipa is mount Meru (Sumeru)
- Jambudvipa is divided into 9 Varshas or continents by a series of mountain ranges
- The disk is divided into 7 horizontal strips by 6 ranges that run east to west
- The central strip is divided into 3 Varshas by 2 mountain ranges
- Bharata varsha is singled out as the field of fruitful activities and the other 8 varshas are said to be meant for elevated persons who are enjoying the remainder of their pious credits after returning from heavenly regions



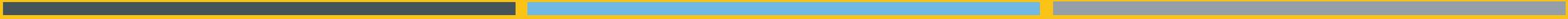
LOKAS

- Above Bhu Mandala which is also called Bhur-loka are 6 lokas and below Bhur-lokas are 7 lokas, a total of 14 Lokas in this Brahmanda
- Bhuvan- and Svar-lokas include the orbits of sun, moon, and the other planets, Saptarshis and upto Pole-star (Dhruva loka)
- Above Dhruva, at the distance of 10 million Yojanas, lies the sphere of Rishis or Mahar-loka, its inhabitants live there throughout a Kalpa or a day of Brahma
- At twice that distance is situated Janaloka, the dwelling place of Sanandana and other pure-minded sons of Brahma
- At four times the distance, lies the Tapa-loka inhabited by deities called Vaibhrajans who are unconsumable by fire
- At six times the distance is situated Satya loka, whose inhabitants never know death

BEYOND BRAHMANDA...

- Around the outer space of Brahmanda flows water, for a space equal to ten times the diameter of the world.
- The waters are encompassed exteriorly by fire, fire by air, and air by Mind, mind by the origin of the elements (Ahamkara); and that by Intellect; each of these extends ten times the breadth of that which it encloses; and the last is encircled by the Pradhana/Prakriti which is infinite, and its extent cannot be enumerated.
- Pradhana is called the boundless and illimitable cause of all existing things; the cause of all mundane eggs, of which there are thousands and tens of thousands, and millions and thousands of millions, such as the Brahmanda that has been described.
- Within Pradhana resides Purusha, diffusive, conscious, and self-irradiating, as fire is inherent in dry wood.
- Pradhana and Purusha both are encompassed by the energy of Vishnu, which causes their separation and combination.
- Their separation is the period of dissolution, their aggregation is the period of continuance of things, and their combination is the period of creation.





LEGENDS

Varaha

Dhruva

Prahlada

Lakshmi

Bharata

Bhagiratha

Krishna

LIBERATION

- In Kaliyuga



PARASHARA TO MAITREYA (1/3)

- It was once a matter of dispute, among the sages, at what Yuga will the least moral merit obtains the greatest reward, and who will display it the most...
- They went to Vyasa to clear their doubts
- They found Vyasa half immersed in the water of the Ganges, waiting for him to complete his ablutions, the sages remained on the banks of the sacred river, under the shelter of grove of trees.
- They saw Vyasa plunging down into the water, and again rising up exclaiming “Excellent, excellent is the Kali Yuga!”
- Again he dived, and again, rising, said in their hearing: “Well done, well done, Shudra! You are happy.”
- Again he sank down and as he once more emerged, they heard him say “Well done, well done, women! They are happy. Who are more fortunate than they?”
- After this, Vyasa finished his bathing, and the sages met him, as he approached to welcome them.

PARASHARA TO MAITREYA (2/3)

- After he had given them seats, and they had proffered their respects, Vyasa asked about the purpose of their visit. They replied:
 - “We came to you to consult you on a subject on which we have some doubt. But that may be, at present, suspended. Explain to us something else. We heard you say “Excellent is the Kali Yuga. Well done Shudra! Well done Women!” we are curious to know why this was said, why you called them repeatedly happy.”
- Vyasa smiled and told them the reason for his exclamations:
 - The fruit of penance, of continence, of silent prayer, and the like, practiced in the Krita Yuga for 10 years, in the Treta for 1 year, in the Dvapara for a month, is obtained in the Kali Yuga in a day and night. Therefore did I exclaim thus.
 - That reward which a man obtains by abstract meditation in Krita Yuga, by Yajna in Treta Yuga, by Puja in Dvapara, he receives in Kali Yuga by merely reciting the name of Keshava.
 - In Kali Yuga, a man displays the most exalted virtue by very little exertion, and that is why I, who knows what virtue is., am pleased with Kali Yuga.

PARASHARA TO MAITREYA (3/3)

- Vyasa continued:
 - The twice-born (Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya) enjoy no independence, and they attain their respective Lokas, only with exceeding pain. There are many restrictions to what they can and cannot practice.
 - The Shudra, on the contrary, more fortunate than they, reaches his assigned station by rendering them service, and performing merely the sacrifice of preparing food, in which no rules determine what may or may not be eaten, what may or may not be drunk. There is the Shudra fortunate.
 - Riches are accumulated by men and there is a great deal of trouble in their acquisition, great care in their preservation, great distress for what of them, and great grief for their loss.
 - A woman has only one to honour her husband, in act, thought, and speech, to reach the same region to which he is elevated; and she thus accomplishes her object without any great exertion. This was the purport of my exclamation.

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स्वस्ति प्रजाभ्यः परिपालयन्तां न्यायेन मार्गेण महीं महीशाः ।
गोब्राह्मणेभ्यः शुभमस्तु नित्यं लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ।

May the rulers of the earth protect the well-being of the people,
With justice, by means of the right path.

May there always be good fortune for cows, Brahmins and all living beings,
May the inhabitants of all the worlds be full of happiness.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace!