

UPANAYANAM

The Sacred Thread Ceremony
and
The Unification of Hinduism

by

His Holiness Shri Datta Swami



This book is being published by Shri Venkata Lakshmi Kanth and Smt. Aruna on the occasion of the sacred thread ceremony of their son Venkata Karthikeya Shankara Datta.

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Shri Datta Swami, known as Shri Venu Gopala Krishna Murthy Jannabhatla, in the earlier stage of His life, is a world-renowned Master of divine spiritual knowledge. He is also a retired Professor of Chemistry. By the age of 16, He had authored a 100 philosophical books in Sanskrit and by 19, He earned a doctorate in chemistry. His works in Sanskrit mainly bring unity among the philosophies of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva. Additionally, in past two decades, He has given discourses on a variety of topics in spiritual knowledge. These discourses have been compiled into more than 26 volumes and are being published. Some of His notable books are Shri Datta Veda, Shri Datta Guru Bhagavad Gita, Shri Dattopaniṣat, Shri Datta Vedānta Sūtras, Shri Datta Vedānta, Shri Krishna Bhāgavatam and Shri Dattātreyam. He is an ardent devotee of Lord Dattātreyā and His closest disciples believe Him to be an Incarnation of Lord Dattātreyā, who has come down to bring peace in the world.

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Introduction

In Sanātana Dharma, which is commonly known as Hinduism, a young boy undergoes a ritual called the sacred thread ceremony or the *upanayanam* before beginning his traditional education. In present times, it is conducted as a big function in which family and friends are invited. In that ritual, the boy is taught the Gāyatrī Mantra, which is a hymn from the Veda. He is also given the sacred thread (*yajñopavītam*), which is a three-stranded thread that he has to wear cross-wise across his shoulder. From that day onwards, the boy is supposed to perform a traditional form of worship called *sandhyā vandanam*, at least twice a day and recite the Gāyatrī Mantra during the worship. In olden days, after this ritual, the boy would be sent to a Vedic school to learn the Veda and other scriptures from the Guru, for more than a decade. Of course, in modern times, most children continue to stay with their parents and go to regular schools with other children.

Unfortunately, this *upanayanam* or sacred thread ceremony is the fundamental cause of the various divisions in Hinduism on the lines of caste and gender. Hindu society is classified into four castes namely, *brāhmaṇas* (brahmins), who are the priests and scholars, the *kṣatriyas*, who are the rulers and warriors, the *vaiśyas*, who are the businessmen and the *śūdras*, who are farmers and workers. Each caste is associated with their respective duties as mentioned above and each of them are

equally important in contributing to the overall well-being of society. This system was originally established by divinely-inspired sages in the ancient Vedic times. People were divided into the various castes based on their qualities and capabilities of performing the respective duties. In its original form, this system was excellent and perfectly fair. However, as we shall see further in this book, people began to misuse this system and commit injustice, later on, during the middle ages. This led to divisions and conflicts between castes and the *upanayanam* ritual is at the centre of the conflicts.

The *upanayanam* ritual is performed only for the males of the three so-called upper castes in Hinduism, which are *brāhmaṇas* (brahmins), *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*. The fourth caste of *śūdras* is not privileged to undergo this ceremony. The fifth caste of untouchables or *pañcamas*, which developed later on, is also not privileged to undergo this ceremony. Along with them, the women of all castes are denied this privilege too. Consequently, the males of the three ‘upper’ castes developed a sense of superiority over the so-called lower castes and over all women. A person’s respect in Hindu society, thus became dependent on the caste and gender into which one was born. This has naturally, caused a lot of discontent over generations. **A person’s respect in society should be linked to the person’s good qualities, actions and great achievements, irrespective of caste and gender.**

Another cause for division in Hindu society is the issue of vegetarianism. Vegetarian food is considered to be superior to non-vegetarian food on ethical grounds. Killing innocent and gentle-natured animals for the sake of food, when plenty of vegetarian food is available, is unethical. *Ahiṃsā* or non-violence is a highly cherished principle in Hinduism and forms the very basis of justice (*Ahiṃsā paramo dharmah*). Hence, non-vegetarianism is considered sinful. Yet, traditionally, only the *brāhmaṇas* (brahmins) have been strict vegetarians, while non-vegetarianism is common among all the other castes. This is an additional division in Hindu society, which is based on diet. The sin-free vegetarian diet of the *brāhmaṇas* became another reason for the superiority of the *brāhmaṇas* over the other castes. The other castes had to face the guilt of following the sinful non-vegetarian diet.

Coming back to the issue of *upanayanam*, it is not correct to confine the concept of *upanayanam* to a particular ritual. Its actual meaning will be explained in detail later. But having confined *upanayanam* to a particular ritual, further confining that ritual only to male *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* and denying it to women and *śūdras*, is worse. The *brāhmaṇas* were supposed to be the devoted scholars and priests in society. They were not supposed to make unjust divisions in society. The *brāhmaṇas* were supposed to learn the eternal divine scripture, the Veda (*Veda adhyayana*) and according to it, guide the public on the path of justice and devotion to God. But in the middle-ages, *brāhmaṇas*, instead of understanding the deep knowledge of the Veda, reduced the meaning of Vedic learning (*Veda adhyayana*) to the mere memorization and recitation of the Veda. The true and purifying meaning of the Veda was forgotten. The ignorant middle-age *brāhmaṇas* then made misinterpretations that allowed them to occupy a position of power and privilege in society and discriminate against the lower castes.

The public felt that the unjust actions of the middle-age *brāhmaṇas* were part of the original religion. They thought that the religion itself, as originally established by the sages, contained the unfair divisions and discrimination. The public felt that the *brāhmaṇas* wanted to dominate over society. They felt that the *brāhmaṇas* had extended the privilege of the *upanayanam* ritual only to those members of society who would help them maintain their own position at the top of the social hierarchy. They had allowed the *upanayanam* ritual for the *kṣatriyas* since the *kṣatriyas* were powerful rulers, who could protect them. They allowed it for the *vaiśyas* since the *vaiśyas* were rich businessmen, who could provide them with wealth. The others were denied the privilege since the *brāhmaṇas* wanted to dominate over them. The misinterpretations of the scriptures made by the *brāhmaṇas* and the actions of the *brāhmaṇas* raised numerous doubts in the minds of the public. The *brāhmaṇas*, finally, lost the trust of the public and the public revolted against them on several occasions. The *śūdras* and even more so, the fifth caste of untouchables became enemies of the *brāhmaṇas* since they felt discriminated against due to their exclusion from the *upanayanam* ritual. Their hatred and jealousy for the *brāhmaṇas* broke the unity of Hinduism. The women of the *brāhmaṇa* caste alone kept

silent, due to their fear and respect towards their fathers and husbands, even though they too had been denied the privilege of *upanayanam*.

The original and ancient tradition of Hinduism, as established by the great ancient sages, was excellent and fair. It was corrupted only by the middle-age *brāhmaṇas*. But once the lower castes developed an enmity towards the male *brāhmaṇas*, they also began to hate the great ancient sages, just because the sages too happened to be male *brāhmaṇas*. Ultimately, Hindu society reached its present condition of deep divisions on the lines of caste and gender. These divisions are serious diseases that have greatly weakened Hinduism.

Since the lower castes were treated to be inferior and discriminated against, they felt deprived and insulted. This was the main driving force for the conversions of large numbers of people from these under-privileged castes to other religions. Since these other religions do not have a caste system, there was no fear of facing discrimination on the basis of caste, after converting to those religions. Also, non-vegetarianism is not treated as a sin in those religions, so the converts could continue with their non-vegetarian habit, without any guilt. Non-vegetarianism is, of course, the norm in Christianity and Islam. But interestingly, it is also common in Buddhism. Actually, Buddha was a very strong supporter of vegetarianism and the *ahiṃsā* principle (non-violence). But even during the time of Buddha, some of His disciples used to consume non-vegetarian food. In the course of time, almost all Buddhists became non-vegetarians. The people who converted from Hinduism to other religions, felt somewhat compensated for the discrimination faced by them in Hinduism.

Religious Conversion is Meaningless

Fundamentally, there can be no objection to religious conversion since God is only one and He is the common source of all religions. There is no loss to a devotee on the spiritual path, if the devotee converts to another religion. But, of course, there is no gain either. Due to the lack of adequate efforts made by Hindus to prevent conversions, the conversions have continued. Hindus have not succeeded in removing the discrimination based on caste, gender and food habits, which is the main driving force behind the conversions. As a result, Hinduism still stands divided and greatly weakened.

I assuredly tell all of you that all religions are equally good and no religion has any extra merit or extra defect. Defects exist in every religion. But all those defects are only due to some ignorant, egotistic and conservative followers. They are not the original features of the religion. Every religious follower must properly analyse the defects in his or her own religion and realize that those defects were not originally present in the religion, but were created later on. Using sharp analysis and some common-sense, one can easily filter out the defects introduced in the religion by certain conservatives, from the original pure religion, as given by God. When one's own pure religion can be obtained so easily, an intelligent person finds no purpose in giving up his or her own religion. Once the defects of all religions are intellectually filtered out, you will be astonished to see all the religions shining like pure diamonds, without any difference between them. This is the reason why Lord Krishna has said that you should never leave your religion, at any cost and that you should follow it till your very end (*Svadharme nidhanam śreyah—Gita*).

Swami Dayananda brought many reforms in Hinduism in order to stop these conversions from Hinduism to other religions. He pleaded that a person's caste is not decided by birth and that the sacred thread ceremony should be extended to every human being, irrespective of caste and gender. Such reforms were effective in stopping many conversions, but the approach has a disadvantage. The disadvantage of these reforms is that we are indirectly implying that the original tradition established by the sages was wrong and that we are now rectifying it. It means that all the past generations of the under-privileged castes and women, from the very beginning of the religion, faced injustice due to the mistake of the originators of the religion. This is not true. The truth is that the original ancient tradition established by the sages was correct. It was twisted and corrupted only in the middle ages by ignorant and selfish priests. The tradition, as we see it today, is the corrupted version and not the original correct version. Of course, Swami Dayananda should be appreciated for taking immediate action to stop the conversions. It was an emergency situation in which large sections of society were about to revolt against the religion and Swami Dayananda prevented it. But with sharp analysis, done with a cool mind, the misinterpretations made by certain ignorant conservatives can easily be

removed. Such misinterpretations have led to many misunderstandings among the public about the religion. The analysis clearly reveals that the ancient sages were not unjust towards any caste or gender. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the present tradition is a twisted form of the original tradition, in denying the privilege of *upanayanam* to certain castes and women, no injustice actually took place for any generation, at any time. This might seem surprizing, but it is true and is explained below. To fully understand it, let us begin by understanding the general context of this issue.

Sages, Scholars and Reciting Priests

In ancient times, the *brāhmaṇas* were sages. They were called *ṛṣis* (*rishis*) which means, ‘those who see the truth’. These sages, developed the Hindu religion, based on the primary Holy Scripture, known as the *Veda* or the *Śruti* and assisting scriptures called the *Smṛti*. As time passed, the quality of the *brāhmaṇas* gradually diminished. But the *brāhmaṇas* were still scholars (*paṇḍitas*), who mainly focused on the assisting holy scripture (*Smṛti*). They even expanded the knowledge of the assisting holy scriptures. Up to this point, the tradition was still pure and excellent since both the ancient sages and the later scholars gave top priority to understanding the knowledge of the scripture, through sharp analysis. But, unfortunately, in those ancient times, there were no facilities to preserve the holy scripture by printing. Hence, the sages had the additional duty of preserving the scripture through the sophisticated system of oral recitation. Even though the method of writing on palm leaves was already developed in the time of the sages, it was not the preferred method for preserving the scripture. Writing by hand was a slow process and only one book could come out at a time by the efforts of an individual. Unlike present times, mass printing was not possible. The few copies of hand-written books on palm leaves could easily be corrupted by insertions and deletions made by others. They could also easily get damaged by fire, water or insects and they could even get stolen or destroyed by invaders. Thus, there was a great risk of losing the original purity of the scripture or even the entire scripture. Hence, the sages adopted the system of recitation of the scripture.

The system of recitation required the memorization of the scripture. The memorized scripture would be recited by the teacher and

learned by students. It was a highly sophisticated system in which the exact pronunciation, pitch, stress and so on, of each syllable was fixed. It allowed the transmission of the scripture from the teacher to students, over generations, in a remarkably accurate manner. Insertions and deletions were almost impossible since at any given time, thousands of sages and scholars had the entire scripture memorized. Sages and scholars from various places would periodically meet and recite the scripture together and discuss its meaning. So, any pollution of the scripture could easily be caught. Recitation was thus an essential requirement of that time. But the important point to be noted is that along with the recitation of the scripture for the sake of its preservation, the sages and scholars were involved in an in-depth study of the scripture too.

Further, if the whole Veda were to be memorized by each person, it would take an extremely long period of time. The person would have to spend his entire life in simply memorizing it, leaving no time for studying it and understanding its meaning. This is not good since blindly reciting the scripture throughout one's life makes the mind dull and incapable of any analysis. So, the Veda was divided in to several parts (*śākhā*) and subparts (*upaśākhā*) and only one subpart was allotted to one group of sages and scholars. This greatly reduced the quantum of recitation. It allowed the sages and scholars to spend the major portion of their time and energy in studying the meaning of the scripture and the recitation took only a small portion of their time.

The age of sages and scholars passed and the present Kali Yuga or the dark age of materialism started. In these recent times, *brāhmaṇas* do not learn the Sanskrit language and so they do not know the meaning of the scripture since the scripture is in Sanskrit. They are totally ignorant of the spiritual knowledge contained in the scripture. But the practice of recitation has continued to the present day. The only benefit of the continued recitation is that it enabled the transmission of the scripture to us over the generations. But the *brāhmaṇas* could not communicate the meaning of the scripture to us since they themselves did not know it. Most *brāhmaṇas* in present times, only start reciting the Veda without understanding even a single word in it. They spend a long time in the blind recitation and their brains remain inactive for all that time. After so much time of inactivity, the brain loses the power of analysis and

gradually it even loses common-sense. Such *brāhmaṇas* are not only ignorant but also egotistic that they are born in the high caste of the sages. The word *brāhmaṇa*, in the sense of the actual meaning of the word (*yogarūḍha*) cannot apply to them since they do not propagate the spiritual knowledge. They are said to be *brāhmaṇas*, only in the conventional sense (*rūḍhi*).

There are two ways in which words are used. They are *yoga* and *rūḍhi*. *Yoga*, in this context, means the root-meaning of the word (etymology) and *rūḍhi* means convention. When the root-meaning of a word is justified in a certain object, using that word to indicate that object is according to *yoga* (*yaugika prayoga*). When the root-meaning of a word is not justified in a certain object, but, just by convention, the word is used to indicate that object, the use of the word is only by *rūḍhi*. The *rūḍhi* use of that word for that object is arbitrary since the root-meaning of the word has no relation with that object. An example can be taken here of a person named Satyahaṛiṣṇa, who is actually a liar. King Harishchandra was famous for his vow of always speaking the truth (*satya*). Clearly, the name Satyahaṛiṣṇa is not justified in this liar, as per *yoga*. He has simply been named so in an arbitrary manner and hence, his name is an example of *rūḍhi* alone. If the word used for a certain object is justified based on its root-meaning and is also fixed by convention to usually mean that object, then the usage is *yoga-rūḍha* or *yoga-rūḍhi*. That is, both *yoga* and *rūḍhi* are applicable.

Brahman means God. *Brāhmaṇa*, as per *yoga* (root meaning), means “of God”. It can refer to a person who is a devoted follower of God (*Brahmaṇi carati iti brāhmaṇaḥ*). It can also refer to a person who leads others to God (*Brahma nayati iti brāhmaṇaḥ*). The ancient sages were devoted followers of God. By preaching spiritual knowledge to society, they were leading people to God. So, using the word *brāhmaṇa* to refer to them is justified as per *yoga*. By *rūḍhi* or convention too, they were known as *brāhmaṇas*. Thus, they were *brāhmaṇas* in the *yoga-rūḍhi* sense. It means they were called *brāhmaṇas* and they actually were *brāhmaṇas* based on the root-meaning of the word *brāhmaṇa* (devoted followers of God). The *brāhmaṇas* of recent times, however, are only *brāhmaṇas*, as per *rūḍhi*. They are only called *brāhmaṇas*; they are not actual *brāhmaṇas*. Since they do not understand the spiritual knowledge given by God in the divine scripture, how can they follow

God? How can they lead others to God? They do not even understand the language of the scripture, which is Sanskrit! All they do is recite the scripture blindly. The Veda says that such *rūḍhi-brāhmaṇas* cannot be called *brāhmaṇas*. The sages were true *brāhmaṇas*, in the *yoga-rūḍhi* sense. The present-day *rūḍhi-brāhmaṇas* only belong to the dynasties of those *yoga-rūḍhi-brāhmaṇa* sages. They can only be called *brahma bandhus*, which means that they are relatives of the real *brāhmaṇas* (sages). The Veda also scolds them by calling them animals of the angels (*Devānām paṣurahaḥ*). An animal also hears the sound of our speech, but it does not understand anything of what is spoken. It is just like these so-called *brāhmaṇas* who only hear the sound of the Veda, without understanding the knowledge contained in it. The scripture also compares such people to a porter carrying a box of gold on his shoulder for a few rupees-worth of wages, with no knowledge of the immense value of the burden he is carrying (*Svarṇabhāraharaḥ...*).

These priests who blindly recite the Veda should have at least kept quiet about the meaning of the Veda, knowing their own ignorance. But they started propagating wrong knowledge due to their ego. The combination of ignorance and ego is indeed very dangerous! That wrong knowledge propagated by them gave birth to several bad traditions, which have caused divisions in Hinduism. The public thought that these bad traditions were part of the original religion, as established by the ancient sages and hence, they started criticizing the sages too. The public believed the misinterpretations of these priests since the public was also ignorant. They too, had no knowledge of Sanskrit. These priests who merely recited the Veda, could have at least corrected the error by sending their own children to study Sanskrit. At least their children would have understood the meaning of the Veda and moved closer to God. But they did not send their children to study Sanskrit. Perhaps, they wanted to harm their children since they had been harmed by their fathers!

The priests invented a false concept that there is no need to understand the meaning of the Veda since the divine sound of the Veda itself pleases God. With this false concept, they had indeed reached the most pathetic stage. Owing to this idea, the meaning of the Veda got totally buried. The Veda is not mere sound or a mere holy book. It means the knowledge existing in those words or in that book. The very

word ‘Veda’ means knowledge. But these people only took it to be sound or a book. The Veda itself again tried to explain that one must study the meaning of the Veda (*adhyayana*). But these priests took this word ‘*adhyayana*’ to only mean the blind recitation that they were used to doing. Actually, the word *adhyayana* means knowing the meaning of the text and not blind recitation. The scripture again warned, for the third time, that the knowledge of the Veda should be understood (*Vedo adhyetavyo jñeyaśca*). Further, the scripture declared a priest to be the worst, if he did not know the meaning of the Veda (*Anarthajñah...pāṭhakādhamah*). But the priests continued with their blind tradition of the recitation of the Veda without knowing its meaning.

Caste is Based on Qualities and Actions Alone

In the ancient times of sages and scholars, the caste system was based on people’s qualities and actions, which was as per the original will of God (*Guṇa-karma vibhāgaśah—Gita*). Here, quality means the individual’s intense interest in a particular profession. Action means the duty related to that profession, which is efficiently performed by the individual. Caste was not decided by birth, at all. It was not necessary for the son to follow the father’s profession. Moreover, no caste was inherently superior or inferior to the other.

The Veda says that the four castes became different parts of the divine body of the same divine father. Firstly, it means that all human beings are the children of the same divine father, as said in the Gita (*Ahaṃ bījapradah pitā*). The children of the same father cannot have different castes unless the same father has multiple castes simultaneously, which is not possible. The divine father (God) has no birth and hence, He cannot have any caste. The children of a casteless father must be also casteless. Hence, the word caste (*varṇa*) used in the scriptures does not have the same meaning as is commonly understood today. In present times, people think of caste as something that is fixed by birth and something that is inherited from one’s parents. This is a misunderstanding. The real meaning of caste is the individual’s specific interest (quality) and the corresponding action. Children of the same father may have different interests and capabilities in performing their different duties. In that sense, people belong to different castes. It is this

difference that is indicated when it is said in the Veda that each of the castes became different parts of the same divine body of God. The role or function of those different parts of God's body were allotted to these different groups of people, who are all equally the children of God.

The *brāhmaṇas* became the face of God (*Brāhmaṇo'sya mukhamāsīt*). The *kṣatriyas* (rulers and warriors) became the hands of God (*Bāhu rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ*). The *vaiśyas* (businessmen) became the thighs of God (*Ūru tadasya yad vaiśyaḥ*) and the *śūdras* (workers) became the feet of God (*Padbhyāṃ śūdro ajayata*). The face indicates the communication of knowledge to society, the hands indicate protecting society by fighting enemies, the thighs indicate economic support for society and the feet indicate public service. Human society is thus broadly classified into these four castes based on individual interests and actions alone. Human society, thus classified, resembles the divine father Himself since the child is said to be the reflection of the father (*Atmavai Putranamāsi*—Veda). There is particular point of detail here. In the Veda, the first three castes are said to have become the respective body-parts of God after their creation. But the fourth caste (*śūdras*) was said to be born from the feet of God. Since the majority (three out of the four castes) is said to have become the respective body-parts, after their creation, the fourth caste should also be understood to have become that body-part after its creation. In other words, the *śūdra* caste too was created and then allotted to (perform the role of) the feet of God. The birth of that caste from the feet is said in the sense of a figure of speech. After the allotment of the fourth caste to the body-part (feet), it appears as if it were born from that part. When the son is also a powerful orator like his father, he is said to have come out from the mouth of his father. It does not mean that the son actually came out from the father's mouth. Nowhere is it seen that a child comes out from a specific part of the body of the father. If the son walks fast like his father, he can be said to have come out of the legs of his father, just as in the above case. In this manner, the talent of the child can be associated with the respective part of the father's body.

Just because it is said that the *śūdras*, which is one (minority) of the four castes, was born from the feet of God, the same cannot be extended to the other three (majority). The reverse alone can be said. That is, we can say that since the first three castes were first created and

then allotted to a certain body-part of God, the same must be true of the fourth caste of *śūdras*. This interpretation can also be supported by logic based on the Gita. The Gita says that the classification into the four castes was based on the qualities and actions of the human beings who were already created. This clearly means that human beings were first created and then the classification into the four castes was done by God, based on their qualities (interests) and actions. You cannot say that from the very beginning, human beings were created as four castes and therefore, caste was decided by birth itself. The Gita says that the classification was created by God. It does not say that human beings were created, already divided into the four castes. Each caste performs a certain duty (action) in society. Those castes (duties) were created by God only according to the interests of the already-created human beings. This means that caste is another name of the interest of the individual. Every individual has full freedom to develop any interest and then perform action corresponding to that interest. God neither created that interest in the person nor did He force any person to develop a particular interest (*Na kartṛtvam...*—Gita). At the very beginning of creation, the created human beings themselves selected the different duties (castes) according to their own interests.

You cannot ask why no such freedom exists today and why only the son of a brahmin can perform the specific duty of the brahmin caste. The question is not correct because the government has not made any such law to obstruct the freedom of an individual in choosing any particular duty. The basis of your blame itself is false. Even in ancient times, Sūta (Romaharṣaṇa), a person belonging to a so-called low caste (*sūta*), was made the president (Brahmā) of a ritual-sacrifice performed by sages, based on his exceptional knowledge of the Vedas. It means, he got the status of a *brāhmaṇa*. This not only shows that individual freedom of choice was not obstructed, but that it was actually encouraged. You should not say that quoting this single example is negligible. The positive encouragement clearly establishes that there was at least no prohibition in choosing one's duty (caste). The reason why we do not find many other similar examples is because of strong economic factors. In ancient times, carrying out the duty of propagating spiritual knowledge, which was done by *brāhmaṇas*, was filled with hardship. There was no remuneration in this profession. The

person was supposed to meet his livelihood by begging or gathering grains fallen in the fields (*uñchavṛtti*), so that he would not develop an ego of wealth, while being in this profession. As a result, only a single person like Sūta (Romaharṣaṇa) was attracted to this duty, in spite of its lack of materialistic benefits. His interest must have indeed been associated with his soul from previous births. Such cases can only constitute a minority since they are so rare. **The majority, in ancient times, as well as in present times, is only interested in comfortably earning their livelihood and becoming rich.** Hence, you only have to blame that majority, which did not come forward to face hardship for the sake of propagating spiritual knowledge. Due to the hardship and the difficulty in meeting one's livelihood, very few came to the spiritual line, in the past. For the same reason, even today, brahmins are a minority.

Highest Respect to Brahmins

Let us take the case of brahmins. When it is said that they were allotted to the face of God, it does not mean that some people were produced from the face of God since God had already decided that they were going to be brahmins. It only means that some people from the already-created humanity selected the profession related to the face of God. The face of God indicates the profession of communicating spiritual knowledge to society and those who had chosen that duty were called brahmins. Thus, from the beginning of creation, a group of people were made brahmins, based on their interest towards the propagation of spiritual knowledge in society. **This community of brahmins received the highest respect because of the importance of their duty.** Communicating spiritual knowledge to the public is of utmost importance because, when spiritual knowledge is well-established in the minds of people, they naturally develop a strong fear of being punished for their sins by God in hell. This fear results in an inbuilt resistance to sin in them. Running the administration of a country with such citizens having a strong inbuilt resistance to committing sins is very easy.

The situation of today is the opposite. Spiritual knowledge is given least importance in society today. Since spiritual knowledge is not established in people's minds, they have no inbuilt resistance to sin. In spite of numerous laws, courts and policemen in the country, controlling

corruption, crime and various other sins in society is largely ineffective. This is because, people believe that if they can somehow escape the law and order system in this world, they have permanently escaped from the punishment. According to them, there is nothing after death. The spiritual concepts of the soul surviving death, facing judgment and punishments for its sins are not well-established in their minds. The only thing preventing them from committing crimes is the law of the land. But escaping from the law and order system of any country is easy since the people constituting the system themselves are members of society and they too are corruptible. When the majority of the public is self-controlled due to an inbuilt resistance to sin, there will only be a few criminals. Then, the law and order system can easily succeed in punishing them and maintaining justice and peace in society. But if the majority lacks the inbuilt resistance to sin and controlling sin in society entirely depends on an external control in the form of the law and order system, justice and peace can never be established. Corrupt administrators and keepers of justice can never remove corruption from a corrupt society. So, the secret key to maintaining justice and peace in society is ensuring that all citizens have that inbuilt resistance to sin as a result of their learning spiritual knowledge. By preaching spiritual knowledge, the *brāhmaṇas* were doing the single most important task for maintaining justice in society. Hence, they were given the highest respect.

The first generation of every caste, at the beginning of creation, was formed by selecting human beings based on their interest in performing the duty related to that particular caste. Afterwards, the issues (children) of the first generation too became most efficient in that profession as a result of the exceptional care taken by their parents in training them. Naturally, parents have the highest love for their children and take the maximum possible care in training their own children. If we again take the example of the brahmins, the children of the first generation of brahmins were excellently trained by their parents and hence, they too became brahmins. This continued generation after generation. The future generations of the brahmins were brahmins, not only by birth, but also by their interest and efficiency in performing the duties of a brahmin. It was all the result of the training given by their parents. Thus, the son of a brahmin was called a brahmin, as a result of

his efficiency in performing the duty of a brahmin and not simply due to his birth in a brahmin family. Since his being born in a brahmin family incidentally coincided with his efficiency in performing the duty of a brahmin, the two became inseparable. A brahmin (*brāhmaṇa*) means he who performs the duty of leading the public closer to God (***Brahma nayate iti Brāhmaṇaḥ***). Leading people closer to God means strengthening their faith in God through the propagation of spiritual knowledge. In ancient times, all the children born to the brahmins in each generation, satisfied the meaning of the word *brāhmaṇa* by efficiently performing the duty of propagating spiritual knowledge.

As discussed before, the root-meaning of a word is called *yoga*. When the meaning of a word is justified in the object that the word is used for, the usage is called *yaugika* (as per *yoga*). The same word may also be used to indicate many different objects, wherever the root meaning of the word is applicable. All such usages are also *yaugika*. For example, the word *paṅkajam* means ‘that which is born from mud’ (root-meaning). It may mean the lotus flower. But it may also mean a conch-shell. The root-meaning of the word *paṅkajam* is justified in both these objects. Thus, the same word can indicate many objects in a *yaugika* usage. Sometimes, there may only be one object that fits the root-meaning of a certain word. In that case, that word is also fixed by convention (*rūḍhi*) to mean that particular object. Hence, it is both *yaugika* and *yogarūḍha*. For instance, a human being propagating spiritual knowledge is the only *yaugika* object for the word *brāhmaṇa*. So, the word *brāhmaṇa* is fixed to indicate the person propagating spiritual knowledge and is *yaugika* as well as *yogarūḍha*. When there are two or more objects that satisfy the meaning of a certain word, using that word for all those objects is a *yaugika* usage. But by convention, the word can be fixed to most commonly indicate only one of those objects. Using the word to mean that object becomes a *yaugika* and *yogarūḍha* usage. The word can still be used to indicate the other objects in whom its meaning is justified, but they remain *yaugika* usages. The word *paṅkajam* can be used in a *yaugika* sense to mean a conch-shell, lotus flower, algae etc. But one of them—the lotus—can be fixed as its most common meaning, which becomes *yaugika* and *yogarūḍha*. The others remain only *yaugikas*.

The word *brāhmaṇa* to mean a person who leads others to God is a *yogarūḍha* usage, since there are no other objects that satisfy the meaning of the word *brāhmaṇa*. This meaning was applicable to every member of the *brāhmaṇa* caste, in ancient times. Hence, the word *brāhmaṇa* to mean any individual of that caste was a *yogarūḍha* usage. *Brāhmaṇa* to mean the entire caste was also a *yogarūḍha* usage since the caste and individuals of the caste are inseparable. In a similar way, the words *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra* were applicable to the respective castes, as well as to every individual within each of the castes, in a *yogarūḍha* sense. The public, in those times, completely understood this and there were no mutual grudges or conflicts between castes.

Sacred Thread Ceremony

Upanayanam, by *yogarūḍhi*, means nearing God through worship and hence it is applicable to all human beings. It is applicable to any form of worship of God involving the three steps of knowledge, devotion and practice. The step of knowledge involves identifying the Sadguru or Human Incarnation of God who is the goal of worship (*jñāna yoga*). The step of devotion involves praising Him through emotional songs (*bhakti yoga*). The step of practice involves serving Him in different ways including cooking and offering food to Him (*karma yoga*). *Upanayanam* by *rūḍhi* or convention alone, means a specific ritual guided by the present so-called brahmins, who only recite the Veda without understanding the meaning of the verses or the ritual. Such brahmins are mere *rūḍhi* brahmins, whereas the ancient true brahmins were *yogarūḍhi* brahmins. In the conventional *upanayanam* ritual (by *rūḍhi*), the young boy receives initiation in the ‘*Gāyatrī*’. *Gāyatrī* is thought to mean a specific Vedic hymn, which the young boy is supposed to recite every day, from the day of that ritual onwards. The hymn is composed in the Vedic meter called *gāyatrī* (***Gāyatrī chandaḥ***). It is also thought that *Gāyatrī* is a deity, but it is not true since the deity worshipped through that hymn is *Savitā*, which means the Creator (God) of the world (***Savitā Devatā***). The hymn is called the *Gāyatrī* hymn only because it is the most popular hymn in the *gāyatri* meter. Since God is the Father of every human being, as said in the Gita, every human being has an equal right to approach God, irrespective of caste and gender

(*Striyo vaiśyah...*). Śaṅkara also said the same at the very beginning of His commentary on the Brahma Sūtras.

Actually, this particular ritual is not the actual *upanayanam*, in a *yogarūḍhi* sense. Its purpose is different. It is actually a training programme for the *yogarūḍhi* brahmins. Its purpose was to give information to the young brahmin boys (*jñāna prakaraṇam*) about the form of God to be worshipped and the way to worship and serve Him. This ritual by itself, is not a prayer (*upāsana prakaraṇam*) to please God in a special way. Unfortunately, every bit of this ritual is unknown to the priests (*rūḍhi* brahmins) and also to the public due to their lack of knowledge of Sanskrit. The priests (*rūḍhi* brahmins) propagated a wrong idea that the Gāyatrī hymn initiated during this ritual is a special prayer to please God. Today, all the priests and the public are blindly reciting this hymn, thinking it to be a special prayer. Actually, it is only a verse that gives the information about the form of God who is to be worshipped through any other prayer-song.

Gāyatrī by *yogarūḍhi* means any prayer-song to God. It can be in any language, preferably a person's mother tongue and it is applicable to every human being in this world. Gāyatrī by *rūḍhi* i.e. by convention alone, without satisfying the root meaning; means the specific hymn in the Gāyatrī meter that gives information about the form of God to be worshipped. The consequence of this terrible misunderstanding of the ritual and of Gāyatrī is that the males of the first three castes alone could practice the chanting of this hymn repeatedly every day. The fourth caste and women of other castes were not allowed to chant this hymn. This is a wrong tradition established by the priests (*rūḍhi brāhmaṇas*), who were in the habit of reciting the Veda without understanding its meaning. The real meaning of Gāyatrī is that any human being, irrespective of caste and gender, can sing songs in praise of the God and please Him through their theoretical devotion. Theoretical devotion must also be accompanied by practical devotion, which is nothing but service done for God. It is done by lighting a fire and cooking food on it, so that the food can be served to God. This is done in the *agni-kāryam* part of the ritual.

Meaning of the Gāyatrī Hymn

The form of God to be worshipped is the Sadguru, who is the contemporary Human Incarnation of God, from whom one should learn spiritual knowledge. This is the information conveyed by the hymn in the Gāyatrī meter, if you carefully understand the meaning of this hymn. This Gāyatrī hymn was chanted again and again by the *yogarūḍhi brāhmaṇas* because it conveys the main concept in spiritual knowledge which is to be propagated to society. Note that the hymn only gives information; it is not a prayer. Of course, Gāyatrī by *yogarūḍhi* means that all your prayers must be songs and such songs sung in prayer to God will bring the protection of God upon the devotee. A song always attracts a person's mind. A prayer that is sung as a song causes the person's mind to get fully absorbed in devotion to God. Hence, prayers sung as songs please God the most. The Veda is divided into four parts, namely the Ṛg Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda and the Atharva Veda. Among them, the Yajur Veda is prose, the Ṛg Veda is poetry and the Sāma Veda is song. God says that He is the Sāma Veda (*Vedānam Sāma Vedo'smi...*—Gita) in the sense that He is pleased by the Sāma Veda (singing) most. Of course, information or instructions provided need not be sung. For instance, when you are told to sing a prayer, you need not sing the instruction "Sing a prayer". Similarly, the Gāyatrī hymn, which gives information about the God to be worshipped, need not be sung as a song. Given below is the Gāyatrī Mantra followed by its word-by-word meaning:

***Oṃ bhūḥ bhuvah suvaḥ | Tat Savituḥ vareṇyam |
Bhargo Devasya dhīmahi | Dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt |***

Oṃ = the absolute unimaginable God

Oṃ or *aum* denotes the absolute unimaginable God as per the Brahma Sūtra (*Tasya vācakah...*). It is composed of three syllables, A, U and M, which indicate God's three powers of creation, maintenance and destruction. These three functions are carried out by the same single God through the three different forms of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, respectively. The three syllables represent these three deities, who are different forms of the same unimaginable Creator.

***Bhūḥ bhuvah suvah* = the three *vyāhrtis*.**

The *vyāhrtis* indicate the three components of the imaginable creation. *Bhūḥ* (*Bhū Loka*) means the material world. It indicates inert matter, which is one of the components of creation. It also represents Lakṣmī (the deity of material wealth), who is said to be the divine power and wife of Viṣṇu. It means that God as the Maintainer (Viṣṇu) of creation, requires material wealth (Lakṣmī) to maintain it. *Bhuvah* (*Bhuvan Loka*) is the world that is close to the material world. It is also called *Dyu Loka* or *Jyotir Loka*. It represents inert energy which is the second component of creation. It represents Pārvati (deity of power), who is the wife of Śiva. It means that God as the Destroyer (Śiva) of creation, requires power or energy (*Pārvatī* or *Śakti*) to destroy the world. *Suvah* means heaven. It is also called *Suvar Loka* or *Svar Loka*. In heaven, various desires are fulfilled. The various enjoyments in heaven are different forms of the three basic attributes (*guṇas*) of awareness. *Sūvah* thus represents awareness, which is the third component of creation. It also represents Sarasvatī, who is the wife of Brahmā. It means that since God (Brahmā) wished to create creation, He must possess awareness (Sarasvatī), even though His awareness is not the same as our awareness. Our awareness is imaginable and is a converted form of energy in the nervous system. Whereas the source and mechanism of His awareness is unimaginable to us. However, when the unimaginable God incarnates in creation, He is found in a medium (body) that possesses awareness. In other words, He incarnates in the form of the living Human Incarnation for the sake of human beings on earth. The Creator (Brahmā) is thus associated with a body possessing awareness (Sarasvatī). *Bhūḥ bhuvah suvah* are matter, energy and awareness, which are the components of the entire creation. They are also the three components of the human body. It is in this three-component human body that the unimaginable God enters. He enters and identifies with one particular human body, selected by Him to propagate divine knowledge, which is meant for the upliftment of devotees.

***Dhīmahi* = we meditate upon**

***Vareṇyaṃ bhargah* = the greatest part of the creation.**

The word *bhargah* means radiation, energy or power of God (*Savituh*). It refers to God's creation. Thus, *bhargah* means creation. *Varenyam* means the greatest. *Varenyam bhargah* is the greatest creation or the greatest part of creation, which is awareness or *parā prakṛti*, as told in the Gita. But the awareness does not exist independently. It is always found in a living body. This awareness has already been indicated by the above-mentioned word *Suvah*. The inert body containing this awareness is made of matter and energy which are indicated by the words *Bhūh* and *Bhuvah*. Actually, even if *Suvah* (awareness) alone is mentioned, *Bhuh* and *Bhuvah* (matter and energy) are automatically included with it since awareness cannot exist without matter and energy. But matter (*Bhūh*), energy (*Bhuvah*) or matter and energy together can certainly exist, independently of awareness (*Suvah*). Hence, whenever awareness is mentioned it always means awareness along with the inert body containing it.

Tat Savituh= (The greatest creation) of that Creator.

The word *Savitā* by *yoga* means Creator. The same word by *yogarūdhī* means the sun. To indicate that the sun is not implied in this hymn, the word 'that' (*Tat*) is used. That (*Tat*) is a word that indicates God in the Vedānta philosophy. *Tat Savituh* (That *Savitā*), means 'that' God and not 'this' sun.

***Devasya* = (That Creator) who created this world for His divine play or who is the source radiating the power which is creation.**

The first sense of playing refers to the ultimate aim of creation, which is the entertainment of God as told in the Veda (*Ekaki...*). The second sense refers to the fact that God is the source of the power which appears as creation. God is like the sun, which is the source. Creation is God's power, which is like sunlight (*Janmadyasya...*—Brahma Sūtra).

The meaning of the hymn from what we have seen so far is that the unimaginable God always enters into a living body, which becomes the medium for His entry. He identifies with that medium. This means that God will not enter any inert objects, which have no awareness (*Natasya pratimā*—Veda). Inert objects can, however, be worshipped by beginners as representative models (*pratīka*) of God. But their worship is not the direct

worship of God. Only the worship of the specific living human body in which God exists, is the direct worship of God. The conclusion so far is that you cannot meditate upon, worship or serve the unimaginable God directly. You can only worship the medium (*bhargah*) into which God has entered and identified Himself with.

Yah (*yo*) = who (the unimaginable God)

Pracodayāt = inspires or stimulates

Nah = Our

Dhiyah (*dhiyo*) = Intelligence or the faculty of the intellect.

The intellect conducts a sharp analysis of the knowledge heard and makes true conclusions. This last part shows that a mere living being like a bird or an animal cannot be the medium for God's entry. This is because the purpose of God's entry into a medium (Incarnation) is preaching spiritual knowledge to human beings. Other living beings are not capable of giving knowledge. Knowledge can only be given by a human being. So, God only enters and identifies with a selected human being, as said in the Gita (*Mānuṣīm tanum...*). But any ordinary human being can only give ordinary knowledge; not excellent divine knowledge. Excellent divine knowledge (*prajñānam*) can only be given by that specific human being in whom God has entered, such as Krishna, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva etc. That specific human being in whom God exists is called the Sadguru. **The Sadguru inspires or stimulates our intellect by preaching spiritual knowledge to us.** The *upanyanam* ritual is also performed just before sending the child to the Sadguru or spiritual preacher, which supports this interpretation. **The knowledge given by the Sadguru is highly analytical and it satisfies everybody's intellect.** Such knowledge is called *prajñānam*, which means special and excellent knowledge. The Sadguru or God-in-human-form is to be identified as the possessor and giver of such special and excellent knowledge (*Prajñānam Brahma—Veda*).

Essence of Gāyatrī Hymn

In order to understand the essential meaning of the Gāyatrī hymn we can divide it into two parts: (1) **Om...suvah** and (2)

Tatsavituh...Pracodayāt. Let us try to understand these two parts separately:

- 1) **Aum...suvah.** The existence of the unimaginable God is inferred from His creation, control and destruction of this world (**Janmādyasya yatah**—Brahma Sūtra). This is the inference in which the existence of the cause is inferred by observing its effect. From a long distance, you see smoke rising from the top of a hill. The smoke does not give you any information about the characteristics of the fire. It only allows you to infer the existence of the fire. Here, the fire has not entered the smoke and has not got identified with it. Hence, no part of the smoke is the fire. Similarly, only the existence of the unimaginable God is known from creation. No characteristic of God is known. The reason is that God has not entered the whole world and no item of the world is God (**Neti neti**—Veda). There is another Vedic statement which seems to say that the entire world itself is God (**Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ Brahma**). This statement is to be understood in the sense that the whole world is under the control of God. As per Sanskrit grammar, an item controlled by a controller can be said to be the controller itself (*tadādhīna prathamā vibhakti*). The Vedic statement does not literally mean that the world itself is God because such an interpretation is in contradiction with another Vedic statement which says that no item in creation is God. In any case, by observing the world, the unimaginable God cannot be perceived; His existence alone can be inferred.
- 2) **Tatsavituh...Pracodayāt.** This second part means that the same unimaginable God enters the best part of the creation, which is a specific human being. That specific human being becomes a Human Incarnation of God, in order to satisfy the desires of devotees who want to see, talk, touch and live with God (**Pratyag ātmānamaikṣat**—Veda). This God-in-human-form is also called the Sadguru since He preaches excellent divine knowledge. In this case, the unimaginable God has actually entered and identified with that specific human body. Therefore, if one sees the Sadguru, one has indirectly seen God. No such entry and identification with the medium has occurred with the world, as a whole. Hence, seeing the world is not seeing God. But seeing the Sadguru or the

Human Incarnation of God, is a case of indirect perception of the unimaginable God.

The Vedānta philosophy preaches about the unimaginable God. The devotees of Śakti, however, praise Śakti. Śakti means the Divine Power or the Divine Mother, which is creation. It is only through the Divine Mother that it is possible to reach the Divine Father. Here, the Divine Father means the unimaginable God. It means that you can see the unimaginable God indirectly only when He identifies with a particular human body. The human body is a part of the world (creation). The human body is the microcosm (*pinḍaṇḍa*) and the world is the macrocosm (*brahmaṇḍa*). They both differ only in quantity. Qualitatively, they are the same. Both are *prakṛti* (Śakti) which consists of nine parts, namely the five inert elements and the four mental faculties. As per the Gita, the first eight parts are counted as *aparā prakṛti* and the last (awareness, *cit*) is called *para prakṛti*. All these components of *prakṛti* equally exist in the world and the human body. It is only through the human body of the Incarnation, which is part of creation, that one can indirectly see the unimaginable God.

Meaning of Prayer Verse on Gāyatrī

The meditative verse called the Gāyatrī Dhyānam “***Mukta vidruma...***” describing Gāyatrī as a goddess, is composed by relatively recent learned scholars. It is composed in the poetic meter called Śārdūla Vikrīḍitam, which is a non-vedic meter. Hence, it was certainly not composed by the ancient Vedic sages. But it has been composed by learned scholars of the Vedas. These scholars were not the priests of the middle ages who would only blindly recite the Veda. The meaning of this verse is in line with the philosophy of the ancient Vedic sages. This verse describes Goddess Gāyatrī as a personification of the concepts conveyed by the Gāyatrī hymn. It describes the five faces of Gāyatrī, which indicate the five elements. The three eye-sights (*trikṣaṇaiḥ*) described, indicate the three attributes or *guṇas* of awareness. Both the faces and the eye-sights constitute the medium of God made of inert matter, inert energy and awareness. It does not represent an ordinary human body but the specific body of the Incarnation (Sadguru) because

it is said that a crown with various gems sits on the head of the deity along with the moon (*Indunibaddha ratna makūṭam*). The moon represents the mind that creates doubts. The gems in the crown are the brilliant concepts and analytical conclusions drawn by the intelligence. It indicates the special divine knowledge preached by the Sadguru in words (*Tattvārtha varṇātmikam*). Up to this point, we see that the verse describes knowledge (*jñāna yoga*) indicated by the intellect and devotion (*bhakti yoga*) indicated by the mind. They constitute the theoretical worship of God-in-human-form, which the boy is supposed to do. It can also be called theoretical service.

But in the final stage, practical service to God-in-human-form (*karma yoga*) is also to be done. This practical service alone yields practical fruits in return. This practical service or action is indicated by the ten hands of Goddess Gāyatrī, which stand for the five sense organs of perception and five organs of action. These ten are always involved in any action. The three strands of the sacred thread (*yajñopavītam*) stand for the three qualities of awareness. Awareness is naturally associated with the inert human body, which is the medium for entry of the unimaginable God. No one can ever meditate upon the unimaginable God directly since He is unimaginable. By holding the three-stranded thread in the hand while saying the prayers, indicates that one must hold on to the Human Incarnation, in whom the unimaginable God exists. The priests who blindly recite the Veda do not know the purpose of holding the sacred thread in the hand while praying. It means that it is impossible to even imagine the unimaginable God and so, one must worship the God who exists in a medium consisting of the three *guṇas* (matter, energy and awareness). These priests simply do not know this meaning. The only use of the sacred thread for them is pulling it back and forth with both hands to scratch their backs!

Savitā Means God; Not the Sun

Some people think that the word Savitā in the Gāyatrī hymn means the sun. They feel that the hymn suggests worshipping the sun as God as also suggested by another Vedic statement (*Adityam Brahma iti—Veda*). They feel that the hymn is instructing us to meditate upon the light of the sun (*bhargah*) since it is very difficult to look at the sun directly. This is a misunderstanding. The hymn does not suggest

worshipping the sun as God since the sun or sunlight cannot give us spiritual knowledge like the Sadguru gives us. The other Vedic statement quoted is also equally misunderstood. That statement only suggests worshipping the sun assuming the sun to be God. It does not say that the sun is actually God. The word '*iti*' indicates that we are being asked to make an assumption. If the sun were actually God and if the Veda were telling us to worship him, the word *iti* would have been absent. Moreover, the Veda also says that this sun, which is worshipped by you, is not God (*Nedam tat...*). The sun can be worshipped by a beginner assuming it to be God and such worship is representative worship. The sun stands as a model (*pratīka*) representing God, even though it is not actually God. There is no issue of not being able to look at the sun directly. The sun can easily be seen and even photographed through special lenses, as much as one wants. It cannot be compared to the unimaginable God, who cannot be directly seen and who cannot even be imagined. The word Savitā in a *yogarūḍhi* sense certainly indicates the sun. Darkness induces sleep and ignorance, but when the sun rises, it removes all the darkness. Sunlight thus, favours the process of learning knowledge from the Sadguru. In that sense, the physical sunlight inspires the intellect (*pracodayāt*). So, this *yogarūḍhi* sense of Savitā can be accepted as a side-meaning. But the main meaning, of Savitā should only be taken as the Creator or God. It is a *yaugika* meaning (as per *yoga*) of the word and hence, is permissible. The overall meaning of the hymn thus becomes receiving knowledge, at the time of sunrise, from the Sadguru, who should be worshipped and served.

Praying in the Mother Tongue

All the prayers which are part of this ritual called *upanayanam* are in Sanskrit since Sanskrit was the mother tongue of the ancient sages, throughout India. But even at that time, there were other countries in the world where languages other than Sanskrit were spoken. But *upanayanam*, in its basic sense of getting closer to God by singing devotional songs and serving the spiritual preacher, is common to all people in any country. God is the Creator of the entire earth and He is not partial to any particular language. He knows all languages due to His omniscience. So, the universal procedure of getting closer to God, the Universal Father, applies to anybody, in any country. That universal

procedure is singing prayer-songs for God in one's own mother tongue and serving Him practically. If praying only in Sanskrit were necessary to please God, God would have made sure that Sanskrit stood as the single universal language in the world, from the very beginning of creation. Just as people in different countries in the world speak different languages, people in different states in India too, speak different languages. The same universal policy applies to them too. They all can worship God by singing prayer-songs in their respective mother tongues. The traditional *upanayanam* ritual involving prayers in Sanskrit was appropriate for olden times when Sanskrit was the mother-tongue of people throughout India. The advantage of the prayers and songs being in people's mother-tongue is that they can understand the meaning of the prayers completely.

In present times, there are only two choices, either perform all prayers and rituals in your mother-tongue or learn Sanskrit and continue to perform all the prayers and rituals in Sanskrit. Either Mohammad must go to the mountain or the mountain must come to Mohammad. Since the second option is impossible, the first option must be inevitably chosen. Similarly, since learning Sanskrit in order to understand the scriptures in that language is a bit difficult, it is better to perform all prayers and rituals in your mother-tongue, using good translations. Whichever option you follow, you must understand whatever you are uttering and doing. **Remember that God is omniscient and He knows every language with equal proficiency. There is no need to think that God only knows Sanskrit.** After the *upanayanam* ceremony, it is better to send the child to learn Sanskrit and various scriptures, so that the child can gain a perfect understanding of spiritual knowledge. There is no point in foolishly wasting time in the blind recitation of the Veda. Now the Vedas are printed in the form of books and there is neither the fear of the loss of the Vedas nor even the fear of insertions and deletions in it. As a result, memorization and recitation of the Veda is no longer needed. Even a priest can read the Veda from a printed book and explain it, as is done in other religions. The explanation is most important.

Lighting the Fire (*Agni Kāryam*)

After recognizing the Sadguru through His excellent knowledge and worshipping Him with devotion by singing prayers, you have to

serve Him practically. Knowledge and devotion are both theoretical, while service is practical. All three are important since theory alone results in practice and the practice alone fulfils the theory. The necessity of practically serving the Sadguru is taught to the child through the ritual of *agni kāryam*, which is part of the *upanayanam* ritual. *Agni kāryam* means lighting a fire for cooking food and serving it to the Sadguru. In olden days, lighting a fire by rubbing sticks together was very difficult. The Veda says that one should approach the Sadguru with dry firewood in hand (***Sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇih...***). Theory produces practical service and the practical service alone yields fruit. The fire produced with the firewood is physical fire and is called *laukikāgni*. The digestive fire or the hunger-fire in the stomach is called *devatāgni* or *vaiśvānarāgni*. The real *yajña* or fire-sacrifice is cooking food on the physical fire and offering it into the hunger-fire of hungry people. Among all hungry people, the Sadguru is the most deserving. So, *yajña* means worshipping the Sadguru by practically offering Him cooked food. The root-word *yaj* means worship. *Agni* means fire. The word *agni* comes from the word *agri*, which means ‘the beginning’. It indicates that you should worship the Sadguru by serving food to Him, in the beginning. The Sadguru preaching divine knowledge is Himself called *Agni* (***Agneyo vai...***) by the Veda. The first hymn of the first Veda (Ṛg Veda) also says that *Agni* means the priest or the deity to be worshipped in the fire-sacrifice (***Agni mīle...***). The Yajur Veda also starts praising the wood that is used to light the fire for cooking food (***Iṣe tvā...***). It is said that *ghee* (clarified butter) should be offered to *Agni*. It means that food cooked using plenty of *ghee* should be served to the Sadguru. Here, the word *ghee* does not literally mean *ghee* alone, but it means food cooked with plenty of *ghee*. This meaning is derived from the concept of *lakṣaṇā* mentioned in the scripture. Hence, scriptural knowledge in Sanskrit is essential to understand correctly.

Meaningless Division Based on Gender

Discrimination based on gender is even more ridiculous than the discrimination based on caste. The caste system was based on the qualities and actions of human beings. So, classifying people on the basis of caste is somewhat understandable, even though discriminating between people on that basis is not fair. But the classification and

discrimination based on gender is totally meaningless since it is only based on the differences in certain external muscular modifications of the body.

The word *puruṣa*, as used in the scriptures, is a highly misunderstood word. It is commonly thought to mean a male human being. When it is said in the scriptures that the study of the scriptures is meant for *puruṣas*, it was misunderstood to be meant only for male human beings. Actually, *puruṣa* means the all-pervading awareness in the body, which is called the individual soul (***Puri śete iti***). *Puruṣa* is the individual soul pervading all over the human body, irrespective of the minor differences in the muscular modifications between men and women. Hence, any human being can be called *puruṣa*.

Awareness is the finest part of nature (*prakṛti*). It is called *parā prakṛti* (finer nature) or *puruṣa*, which is the individual soul. The remaining part of the nature, other than awareness, is called *aparā prakṛti* (grosser nature), which is represented by the physical body. Note that the human being consists of the individual soul, which is awareness and the physical body i.e., its constituents are awareness, matter and energy, which are also the constituents of nature, as a whole. *Aparā prakṛti*, which is grosser nature or inert nature is also simply called *prakṛti*. Both these parts of nature—*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*—together constitute creation. The Creator, who exists beyond this creation is called *Puruṣottama*. This is one type of classification. In another type of classification, the Creator or *Puruṣottama* alone is called *Puruṣa*. Awareness is only called *parā prakṛti* and not *puruṣa*. Thus, both *parā* and *aparā* parts of nature become only one part called *prakṛti* or creation. The other part is only *Puruṣa*, which means the Creator, as per this classification.

As per both these classifications, the minor muscular modifications of the body which are the only differences between men and women are not given any consideration. *Puruṣa* is the individual soul existing in either a male or female human body. The Gita says “How can a *puruṣa* (warrior) kill anybody? (***Katham sa puruṣaḥ pārtha...***)”. It means, “How can a person (warrior) kill anybody?” It is absurd to take the word *puruṣa* to only mean a male warrior and not a female warrior. Hence, the word *puruṣa* and other words of masculine gender such as *ātmā*, *jīvaḥ* and so on, which indicate the individual soul, refer to any human

being, irrespective of gender. Only foolish scholars say that the philosophy is only meant for male human beings! As per the second classification, every human being, irrespective of gender, is *prakṛti* since both the *parā* and *aparā prakṛti* are parts of *prakṛti* alone. No human being can be called *puruṣa*, as per this classification since *Puruṣa* means God alone.

The Veda even says that the so-called men among human beings are also women and the wives of God (***Striyah satīh...***). In this context, it is nice to recall the conversation between Tulasidas and Meera. Tulasidas denied shelter to Meera saying that women were not allowed to sleep in his cottage, since it was only meant for men. Then Meera asked “So far, I was thinking that God Krishna alone is the *Puruṣa*. Are there *puruṣas* also among us, human beings?” As per both the above classifications, God is denoted by the word *Puruṣa* or *Puruṣottama* because the unimaginable God incarnates in human form (*puruṣa*) in this world. That visible Human Incarnation of God alone can be shown as the address of God. As such, the original, absolute God can never be shown since He is unimaginable.

Women like Gārgī, Maitreyī, Sulabhayoginī etc., were famous as great scholars in the Vedic philosophy. Unfortunately, for the foolish gender-biased priests, even the deity of knowledge, Goddess Sarasvatī, is a woman! Moreover, in the *upanayanam* ritual, the Gāyatrī hymn has been praised in the meditative verse called Gāyatrī Dhyānam, in which the deity Gāyatrī is depicted as a Goddess. How can you restrict women from meditating upon the Goddess Gāyatrī, who is also a woman? While performing the traditional sixteen-step worship of the Divine Mother, do you not offer her the sacred thread (*yajñopavitam*)? If the Divine Mother wears the sacred thread, how can you deny the same sacred thread and the whole *upanayanam* ritual to women? In the Rāmayaṇa, there is a verse which describes Hanumān saying that Sītā would come to a certain lake for performing her evening worship or *sāyam sandhyā vandanam* (***Imaṃ śivajalāmeti...***). This particular worship is performed only by persons who have passed through this ritual of *upanayanam*. Scriptures say that in very old times, women also would pass through this ritual (***Maunji bandhanamiṣyate***). In that case, why were women denied this privilege later on?

The sages only made this change at the beginning of this Kali age. In the previous ages, people's lives were very simple. Most of the food people ate was fruits, roots etc., and cooking was rare. Hence, both husband and wife had equal leisure time. When the occasional cooking was done to prepare certain dishes using grains, both husband and wife participated in it. It was called *yajña* and was meant for feeding great guests. Both husband and wife would spend equal time participating in *yajña* and daily worship. Later on, as the Kali age progressed, cooking every day became compulsory and household duties also increased greatly. This meant that one of them had to completely attend to those duties and that person could not perform worship with a peaceful mind. Women, being more patient, opted for taking up the entire responsibility of managing the household duties, doing even their husband's half share of duties. Men opted to take up the entire responsibility of performing the worship of God. To indicate this taking up the responsibility of worshipping God, even on behalf of his wife, there is an interesting practice during the traditional wedding ceremony. The father-in-law hands over a sacred thread to the groom. The groom is supposed to wear it on behalf of his newly-wedded wife, in addition to the sacred thread worn by him for himself. Each three-stranded sacred thread indicates the person's commitment to worshipping God-in-human-form. Half of the worship he does, is on behalf of his wife since she has taken up his share of household duties. So, obviously, half of the fruit of the husband's worship goes to the wife.

A similar provision is also seen in the event of the sickness of a person. As per tradition, when a person who has passed through the *upanayanam*, ritual falls sick, he is unable to perform the regular worship which he is supposed to do in the morning and evening. In that case, a close relative of the sick person performs that worship on the sick person's behalf. Even when a soul departs from this world, his or her heirs perform the death rituals, which are essentially prayers to God for the welfare of the departed soul. The general principle is that when the other party is unable to worship God directly, but is providing some service to you, so that you can worship God, a proportional share of the fruit of your worship goes to that party. This principle applies within a family or within society as a whole since society is like a big family. So, *śūdras* were benefited by the divine worship performed by the brahmins

because they were involved in serving the public, including serving the brahmins.

There is a misconception regarding the impurity of women during their menses. It is said that, during their menses, women of all castes, are equal to untouchables (fifth caste). As a result, they are prohibited from performing any Vedic rituals during those days. This false belief is connected to a story from the *purāṇas*. In the story, Indra, the lord of angels, killed the *asura* Vṛtra and incurred sin. Being the lord of angels, he could not bear the sin upon himself as it would have affected his duties. So, the sin was distributed equally among four items in creation, namely, women, water, earth and flowers. As a result, women began to menstruate, the earth developed scent, water developed froth and flowers began to give off pollen. Thus, women's menses are said to be the result of that quarter share of Indra's sin. Treating women to be untouchables for this reason is not logical. If women, who bore a quarter of that sin are untouchable, the other three items, which also bore a quarter of the sin each, must be equally untouchable. But you do use scented soil to prepare the Vedic altar in the ritual. Here, scent means the natural scent that comes from the soil. You also use water which froths for washing the divine statues and flowers with pollen to worship God. If these three items remain sacred at all times and are used in Vedic rituals, how can women in their menses alone be untouchable?

The real reason for this 'untouchability' imposed on women is to ensure that they take complete rest during their menses. During those four days of the cycle, the woman is bleeding and is in pain. She is like a patient needing complete rest. Even when a man is bleeding and is in pain, he is a patient and is forced to stay in bed. If you reveal the truth, that women are not actually untouchable, but that they are simply to be given rest during those days, the matter will not be taken seriously. Women will not get the rest they need and they will have to participate in the household duties, as usual. To forcibly prevent them from getting overburdened during their menses, this lie (*arthavāda*) is told. A lie that does good, is not a sin. The other three partners in the sin are non-living. Hence, they do not need any rest. So, rest is only given to women in the name of this false 'untouchability', for their own benefit. In any case, one cannot prohibit women from participating in Vedic rituals on this basis.

Non-Violence, the Highest Justice

There is nothing wrong with the classification of the public into four castes. But the high or low status given to any caste is totally wrong. Every caste, which is associated with a certain profession has its own dignity and should be respected. The face, hands, thighs and the feet of God represent the *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* respectively, as per the Veda. All the parts of the body are equally important and if any part is injured, all the other parts also experience pain. Selfishly killing a living being for food, even though plenty of grains and vegetables created by God are available, is the highest sin. Non-violence is treated as the highest justice (*Ahiṃsā paramo dharmah*). Conversely, the violence involved in killing living beings is considered to be the highest injustice. The higher or lower levels of respect for castes is based on this point. Actually, based on this point of non-violence towards living beings, *kṣatriyas* should have been in the third place since they eat non-vegetarian food. But they were given the second place of respect since they are the rulers of society. A ruler must be given extraordinary respect if the country is to be effectively governed. Some people argue that since the rulers have to fight battles, they need non-vegetarian food for good strength. This is not a correct justification because the components of food that provide nutrition and strength like proteins, minerals and vitamins are available in sufficiently large quantities in vegetables. Medical science also says that primary proteins from vegetarian sources are far better than synthesised secondary proteins from animal sources. Paraśurāma, a pure vegetarian, was the greatest warrior and He defeated all the non-vegetarian warriors. Hence, there is no compromise on this point. *Śūdras* are the most important machinery of any society since they are the workers who serve society. A *śūdra* resembles the housewife who is always engaged in various household duties. Human society is compared to a big home. *Śūdras* were given the option of serving the public just as the housewife has chosen the option of family service. Just as the housewife gets her share of the fruit of the divine worship performed by her husband, a *śūdra* also gets his share from the fruit of the divine worship performed by every brahmin. Thus, everybody in society gets blessings and divine protection from God. Upon completing the worship of God, a *brāhmaṇa* says that the fruit of his worship should protect everybody (*Sarve janāḥ*

sukhino bhavantu). The *kṣatriyas* and the *vaiśyas* perform their own worship, due to which their families are already protected. So, by the worship performed by the *brāhmaṇas*, the women of the *brāhmaṇas* and both the men and women of the *śūdras* are protected.

The Fifth Caste

The practice of untouchability is thought to be unjust. Actually, untouchability is misunderstood. You will be surprised to know that Śabari, who was supposed to be an untouchable, is one of the greatest devotees and is highly respected. Untouchables form the fifth caste, while the Veda only speaks about four castes. It means that there was no fifth caste, originally. Then how did this caste arise? Serious sinners from all the four castes were expelled from society and they became the untouchables or outcastes. Untouchability was not a form of vengeance. It was only a way of rectifying and reforming sinners. If a student is very mischievous and does not get reformed in spite of punishment, the teacher expels the students from the class. The expulsion is not done out of vengeance. It is only a sincere effort made by the teacher for the reformation of the student. Once the student gets reformed, he or she is allowed back into the class with full love and respect. The devotee like Śabari was such a reformed soul and hence, she is worshipped, even today, by all.

Again, the middle-age priests who blindly recited the Veda, established the false practice of untouchability by birth, irrespective of the qualities and actions of those people. Actually, the son of an untouchable need not be untouchable. In olden days, killing a buffalo or a cow after drinking its milk or killing an old bull or a he-buffalo after getting work done from it in agriculture, was considered to be the greatest sin. Such serious sinners who lacked even the least bit of compassion or gratitude, irrespective of the caste they belonged to, were expelled from society and they became the untouchables. But such a punishment was not permanent and if the person got reformed, he or she was allowed back into society. Moreover, the child of such an untouchable could certainly not be untouchable by birth. This was the ancient tradition of the sages. But it was totally misinterpreted by the ignorant and egotistic priests, who blindly recited the Veda. Killing any living being for food itself is the highest sin and killing a living being

which has served you is an unimaginable sin. Such an unimaginable sin committed by a person belonging to any of the four castes, was punished in a very serious way by expelling the sinner from society. It was a punishment for a certain sin and it was not meant to be carried forward from generation to generation.

One should not bring the theory of genetics to claim that the child of an untouchable will also be untouchable. This is not acceptable. Only if the child of the untouchable commits a similar sin, can he or she also be regarded as an untouchable. But if the child of an untouchable does not commit any sin, the child is not an untouchable. This is the reason why devotees born in an untouchable family were honoured by the sages. The priests who merely recite without understanding, extended the punishment of sinful parents to their future generations. They could not clearly correctly analyse this matter because they did not have the knowledge of the Vedas. The wrong and ridiculous traditions of these ignorant priests cannot be attributed to the ancient sages, who were real Vedic scholars. They respected the merits of all people, at all times.

Blind Recitation and Misinterpretations

The reciting priests who did not know Sanskrit, could not understand even a word of the Vedic verses recited in the *upanayanam* ritual or in any other ritual. They are the ones who propagated wrong traditions. An employee in the health department sees a booklet or a training manual that contains the details of the training programme to be conducted for employees. It explains how to use the antidote for malaria. It contains the information that the health department employees should give to the public to prevent malaria. But neither the training manual nor the training programme is the actual antidote for malaria. This ritual called *upanayanam* is like that training manual. It provides the information about the antidote that cures the tendency to commit sinful actions in the world. That antidote is spiritual knowledge. In order to receive that spiritual knowledge, one must approach the Sadguru, who is God-in-human-form, express devotion to Him and serve Him. The antidote is actually taking spiritual knowledge from the Sadguru, being devoted to Him and serving Him, which the public must do on their own. The mere information about the antidote cannot cure the disease of sinfulness. So, the *upanayanam* ritual will not cure the

public at all. The Gāyatrī hymn taught to the child during the *upanayanam* ritual only conveys this concept in spiritual knowledge. Thus, the Gāyatrī hymn is not a prayer. In the sense of *rūḍhi* or mere convention, Gāyatrī means the Gāyatrī hymn taught in the *upanayanam* ritual. This hymn explains that the God who is present in the medium of a human body, should be worshipped. Of course, this is not real meaning of the word Gāyatrī, in the *yogarūḍhi* sense. The *yogarūḍhi* meaning of Gāyatrī is that one should sing the praises of God with devotion so as to get divine protection from God. There is no restriction whatsoever of caste or gender, in practicing this real Gāyatrī, which is the actual antidote.

The *agni kāryam* part of the ritual is the training to light a fire, which is meant for cooking food and offering it to the Sadguru. The *upasthānam* hymn indicates serving the Sadguru by offering Him drinking water. Since the reciting priests could not properly understand the Gāyatrī hymn to be a description of the contemporary Human Incarnation, they mistook the word Savitā in the hymn to mean the sun in the sky. Actually, it is very difficult to accept another human being as God since each person possesses an ego and feels jealousy towards fellow-human beings. So, not understanding the real meaning of the hymn and misunderstanding Savitā to mean the inert sun was convenient for the public. Due to the misunderstanding, the public began worshipping the inert sun. Even though Savitā means the Creator (God) and not the sun, the sun can be taken as a model (*pratīka*) representing the Creator. Thus, the public's worship of the sun was representative worship (*pratīka upāsana*), which is acceptable in the beginning. It is especially suitable in the absence of the Sadguru, who ought to be the real goal of the worship.

This entire *upanayanam* ritual is thus, only a training manual that contains information about the training programme. The training programme is practicing how to pray to the Sadguru and serve Him, so that one can receive spiritual knowledge from Him. That spiritual knowledge is meant to be propagated to all of society. None of the steps in the ritual is the actual antidote of malaria. The actual antidote is the spiritual knowledge which says that everybody should sing songs in praise of God and serve the contemporary Human Incarnation of God (Sadguru). This antidote is distributed to every human being.

If the employee in the health department does not know English he will not understand the training manual or the subsequent training programme since both are in English. He will foolishly spread the false idea that the training programme itself is the medicine for malaria. He will say that only those who attend the training programme will get cured and that only the employees in his department will get the medicine. He will say that others are not eligible to get the medicine. This will naturally enrage the general public. The reality is that attending the training programme does not cure anybody. The training program is only relevant for the health department employees and not for the public. Be it the health department employees or the general public, both can get cured only when they take the medicine.

The ignorant reciting priests made the same mistake in Hinduism. They preached totally wrong ideas. They said, “*This Gāyatrī hymn is a special prayer to please God and this ritual called upanayanam is restricted only to pure and virtuous males like us, who are born in the three upper castes. If you are not male and you do not belong to these three upper castes, you are not pure and hence you are not eligible to perform this ritual*”. This attitude hurt all the others and they developed enmity towards male brahmins.

The wrong interpretations of Gāyatrī and *agni-kāryam* (lighting the fire) have completely destroyed the whole sanctity of the ancient tradition of sages. The misinterpretation resulted in confusion. Gāyatrī in the *rūḍhi* sense was taken to be Gāyatrī in the *yogarūḍha* sense. This means that the Gāyatrī hymn, which gives the information about the mediated God, was mistaken to be a prayer to God. Since the reciting priests could not understand the meaning of any word in Sanskrit, both the *rūḍhi* and *yogarūḍhi* meanings of Gāyatrī were utterly lost. The *rūḍhi* meaning was lost since nobody even inquires about the meaning of the Gāyatrī hymn, which actually contains the essence of the entire spiritual knowledge. The *yogarūḍhi* meaning was also lost because no song in praise of God was sung. The misinterpretation by the priests, owing to their ignorance, destroyed everything. It is as horrible as the misinterpretation made by the health department employee who attended the training programme conducted in English, when he could not understand a word of English!

The reciting priests misinterpreted the *agni-kāryam* to be the mere lighting of the physical fire from firewood. They also misunderstood the word *ghṛtam* (ghee) to mean pure *ghee*, instead of its correct meaning as food containing plenty of *ghee*. They developed the totally wrong idea of pouring pure *ghee* into the wood-fire and burning it in the name of *yajña* or sacrifice. The very first hymn of the first Veda, the R̥g Veda, clearly defines the word *Agni* using five different terms. *Agni* is said to be the *Purohita* or the priest. *Agni* is said to be *Yajñasya Deva* or the deity to be worshipped through the sacrifice of serving cooked food. *Agni* is said to be the *Ṛtvik* or the guide of the sacrifice. *Agni* is said to be the *Hotā* or the person offering *ghee* into the fire. It means *Agni* is a person and not the physical fire. The *Hotā* is indeed the Sadguru who offers the *ghee*-containing food into the hunger-fire within His own stomach. In simple words, the *Hotā* is the Sadguru who eats the *ghee*-containing food. Finally, *Agni* is said to be the *Ratna Dhātama*, which means the best source of the gem-like concepts in spiritual knowledge. Even though *agni* literally means fire, all the five terms used to define the word *Agni* clearly point to the Sadguru who is a person and not the physical fire.

Due to their ignorance of the definition of the term *Agni*, the priests began to serve the inert fire by offering *ghee* into it. **Service must always be done to a living being.** They further thought that angels consume the food offered into the fire (*Agnimukhaḥ...—Veda*) and are pleased by the offerings. All these wrong conclusions were the result of misunderstanding *Agni* to be the physical fire. As seen above, all the five definitions from the R̥g Vedic hymn refer to the Sadguru as *Agni*. Since all angels dwell in Him, they are pleased when He is pleased. The Veda says that the Sadguru, knows the meaning of the Veda (*Vedavidī*) and the ultimate spiritual knowledge (*Brahmaṇe*). It says that He is the refuge of all angels (*Yāvatīrvai...*) and that if He is worshipped, all the angels are automatically worshipped.

Another misunderstanding is related to the word *tailābhisheka* (oil bath). It actually means applying oil on the head of the Sadguru. When the head of the Sadguru gets heated after delivering deep spiritual knowledge, applying oil on the head has a cooling effect. *Tailābhisheka* was foolishly misinterpreted to be the pouring oil on the head of an inert statue. **All inert food materials are created by God only for the sake**

of consumption by living beings. But remember that a living being is not created as food for another living being, especially not as food for human beings who are blessed with intelligence and can analyse.

Burning *ghee* and food in the physical fire, in the name of sacrifice (*yajña*) is a terrible waste of food. It also leads to a lot of pollution and damage to people's health. People think that such wasteful and polluting sacrifices bring rain. This is totally false. In fact, man-made pollution and the emission of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere cause the rains to stop. Such people who perform such misinterpreted sacrifices, are real demons who destroy humanity with such pollution. In the Bhāgavatam, sage Kapila, who was a Human Incarnation of God has condemned the burning of *ghee* in fire. In the same scripture, we also see that certain foolish brahmins were going to burn food in fire in the name of sacrifice (*yajña*). Lord Krishna went to their wives who were cooking the food which was to be burnt in the fire and advised them to instead, serve the same food to His friends who were hungry. Krishna also says in the Gita that food is to be offered into the hunger-fire called *vaiśvānara*, which is none other than Himself (*Aham vaiśvānaro...*). The physical fire is certainly not the object of worship (*upāsya*). It is only instrumental in performing the sacrifice (*yajña sādhanam*) since it is used to cook the food that is to be offered in the sacrifice.

Śūdras and Mlecchas

Some people use twisted logic to conclude that the scriptures have been deliberately unjust to the *śūdras*. They claim that, as per the scripture, a *śūdra* is decided by birth, whereas, a brahmin is decided by this sacred thread ceremony (*Janmanā jāyate śūdraḥ karmaṇā jāyate dvijaḥ*). They also make another horrifying claim that the scripture recommends molten lead to be poured in the ears of *śūdras* and *mlecchas*.

Such twisted interpretations are false. If you say that the sacred thread ceremony alone is the sign of a brahmin, brahmin girls do not undergo this ceremony. Then by your logic, all brahmin ladies are also *śūdras*! It also means that all male brahmins have had inter-caste marriages, since their wives are *śūdras*! Their children too cannot be brahmins! These ridiculous conclusions show that your interpretation of the verse from the scripture is totally wrong. The correct interpretation is

that everybody is a *śūdra* by birth and everybody becomes a brahmin by this ritual. Here, the word brahmin only indicates the duty or the profession of propagating spiritual knowledge in society. The word *śūdra* means anybody who is worried about his or her livelihood in worldly life (**Śocate iti śūdraḥ**). In the verse, the word used is *dvija* and not *brāhmaṇa*. *Dvija* is a term that applies to *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*. *Dvija* means the person has two births or two lives. One is the materialistic life in this world and the other is spiritual life. Everybody is primarily worried about his or her livelihood and hence is a *śūdra*. This word *śūdra* should be taken in the *yogarūḍha* sense of anybody who is worried. It should not be blindly taken in the *rūḍhi* sense of a particular caste. Similarly, the word brahmin (*brāhmaṇa*) in the *yogarūḍha* sense means anybody who leads society to God. The same word in the *rūḍhi* sense means a specific caste. Krishna was not a brahmin by birth (*rūḍhi*) but was actually the greatest brahmin (*yogarūḍhi*) since He lead society to God through His preaching of the Gita. Similarly, *upanayanam* in the *yogarūḍhi* sense means any prayer and service to the Human Incarnation of God. The same word means the specific ritual by *rūḍhi*. *Gāyatrī* by *rūḍhi* means the particular verse which is composed in the *Gāyatrī* meter, while it means any prayer-song sung for God by *yogarūḍhi*.

Women and *śūdras* (*rūḍhi*) could not participate in propagating spiritual knowledge to society due to lack of time. They were completely engaged in serving their home and society, respectively. A *śūdra* (*yogarūḍhi*) being only interested in worldly life, disregards the spiritual scriptures and discourages others from following it. A *mleccha* is an atheist who criticizes the divine scripture (**Nāstiko Vedanindaka**). Both are not eligible to hear the scripture (**Na mlecchati...—Veda**). Hence, it is said that their ears should be blocked by a small metal ball of lead, which will not let them hear the sound of the scripture. It means that they should not be allowed to listen to the scripture. If they listen to it, they will criticize and abuse the scripture, spoiling the sacred atmosphere. They should be kept away from the scriptures, so that the propagation of spiritual knowledge is not disturbed. People who are fond of splitting the Hindu religion have misinterpreted this isolation of the *śūdras* and *mlecchas* from the scriptures, as the physical pouring of molten lead in their ears. Only Śaṅkara, a divine Human Incarnation,

could withstand drinking molten lead. Ordinary human beings have no such capacity.

Encourage the Real Sūta

Some people argue that people from castes other than brahmins should be allowed to become priests since they are interested in priesthood. They say that if Sūta (Romaharṣaṇa), a low caste person (*sūta*) by birth, was allowed to be a priest in the past, why not give the same encouragement to others, in present times? The argument is not correct because, in olden times, there was no remuneration for priests. So, nobody from any other caste was interested in priesthood. In spite of the lack of remuneration for priests, Sūta learned a lot of spiritual knowledge and propagated it to society. The case of the present people interested in priesthood is different. Today, priests charge fixed prices for conducting various rituals, which is a practice started by the middle-age reciting priests. So, the people from other castes who wish to become priests today are attracted to the remuneration in the present times of unemployment. They are not attracted to the sacred duty of propagating spiritual knowledge. In olden days, priests demanded no remuneration from the hosts. The hosts could give money as per their capacity (*yathā śakti*) and as per the value and respect they had for the priest (*yathā bhakti*). The reciting brahmins of the middle-ages spoiled this ancient good tradition of performing rituals in two ways: (1) They began to recite to the Veda without explaining the meaning of the verses, which makes the whole recitation pointless. (2) They fixed the charges for each ritual, like professional charges in business.

Apart from wanting to become a priest for the sake of their livelihood, some people are eager to jump at the opportunity, in order to pacify their vengeance and jealousy towards brahmins. The case of Sūta (Romaharṣaṇa) was totally different. He became a priest for propagating spiritual knowledge to society, due to his deep interest in spiritual knowledge which he had carried forward from his previous births. He became a priest in times when priesthood was not at all remunerative. He did not become a priest due to jealousy or out of vengeance for the sages. Even today, if somebody from another caste becomes a priest exactly like Sūta, he should certainly be encouraged and honoured as per the tradition of the ancient sages. Today's environment, is that of blindly

reciting the Veda, without explaining its meaning, just for the sake of money and livelihood. In this environment, any encouragement or discouragement to people of other castes wanting to become priests is a total waste. It is like adding sugar or salt to seawater.

Ways to Develop Talent

There are only two ways in which an individual develops a certain talent. One is the training given by elders in the present birth and the second is the intense interest (*samskāra*) carried forward by the soul from previous births. Other than these two ways, the third way of transmission of the talent through genes is not acceptable since genes are responsible only for the transfer of physical characteristics. Sūta's interest and talent in spiritual knowledge came by the second way, from his past births. If people develop a talent by the first way and continue performing their duty based on that talent efficiently, you should not blame the establishment for it. Such blame is clearly due to a wrong inference. For example, let us say that the government conducted a test to select candidates for the posts of teachers. Only the children of teachers got selected for those positions. There were two reasons for this: (1) Since the salaries of the teachers were low, most candidates did not care to attend the test and (2) The children of teachers, who were trained well by their parents, attended the test and they fared well. Without properly observing and analysing these two facts, you should not blame the government saying the government has made a rule that only the children of teachers are eligible to write the test.

Allegations Answered

1) Why is this Gāyatrī Mantra chanted only by brahmins, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas? The chanting of this or any other *mantra* (hymn) again and again is *japam*. *Japam* of this *mantra* is only meant to remember the main concept in spiritual knowledge conveyed by this *mantra*. That concept was supposed to be propagated by brahmins throughout society. In olden times, Sanskrit was the mother tongue of people in the entire country. So, the meaning of the *mantra* could be understood by people when explained. So, no one misunderstood the brahmins for chanting this *mantra*. But it should be noted that chanting this *mantra* is not at all the actual Gāyatrī. The actual Gāyatrī is singing

prayers and praises of God and every human being has an equal right to it. The duty of the propagation of spiritual knowledge was given only to a certain community called brahmins based on their interest from the beginning. To remember the main concept to be propagated to society, they chanted this *mantra*. There is no treasure hidden in this duty. So, there is no need to raise an objection that some treasure has been given to only a certain community. There is no materialistic benefit granted for doing the duty of spiritual propagation. It is only done to please God.

2) Why were women and people of other castes, even in ancient times, only allowed to speak regional languages (*prākṛtam*)? Why were they prohibited from speaking Sanskrit? This is statement not correct. In ancient times, everyone spoke Sanskrit. The mentioned bad tradition only arose later on. If the same bad tradition had existed even in ancient times, how would the low-caste Sūta, be made the president of the sacrifice? How could he have become an exceptional scholar of the Vedas which are composed in Sanskrit? Also, what about the famous lady-scholars of the Veda like Gārgi, Maitreyi etc.? It is clear that people of all castes and genders spoke Sanskrit in ancient times.

3) Balarāma, a Human Incarnation of God, killed Sūta since Sūta did not respectfully stand up upon His arrival, even when the sages stood up. Does this not show the ego of the forward castes? This story is from the Bhāgavatam. A person called Romaharṣaṇa was born in the low caste of *sūtas*. *Sūtas* were the drivers of chariots. Yet, Romaharṣaṇa, was selected as the president of a holy sacrifice in the Naimiśa forest by all the sages due to his exceptional spiritual knowledge. Romaharṣaṇa was also called Bhūrishravā, which was the name given to him owing to his quality (*gauṇa nāma*). Sūta means one who has heard a lot of spiritual knowledge. Romaharṣaṇa had heard (*śravaṇa*) a lot (*bhūri*) of spiritual knowledge from his preacher, Sage Vyāsa (*Karṇābhyām bhūri viśruvam*—Veda). Even Balarāma, later on mentioned this point of Romaharṣaṇa having heard a lot of spiritual knowledge from sage Vyāsa. During that holy sacrifice, Balarāma, the Human Incarnation of God arrived on the scene. All the sages stood up respectfully and saluted to Balarāma. But Sūta (Romaharṣaṇa) did not get up. Balarāma, thinking that Sūta had insulted Him, got angry and killed him. Actually, the president of a holy sacrifice is not supposed to leave his seat during the sacrifice and is not supposed to salute to

anybody. The sages explained to Balarāma that He had committed the sin of killing a real *brāhmaṇa* since Sūta was a real *brāhmaṇa* by qualities and deeds. Balarāma realised His mistake and brought back Sūta to life. He also blessed him with a boon that his son, Ugraśravā would also become a true *brāhmaṇa*. The name Ugraśravā means the one who has heard and grasped spiritual knowledge with the climax seriousness.

The story shows that Balarāma realized His mistake and He also rectified it by bring Sūta back to life. Nobody supported this mistake of Balarāma. Why do you simply want to further grind the powder, which has already been finely ground? You must also note that Balarāma Himself was born in the caste of shepherds (*Yādava*), which is a backward caste and not a forward caste. Balarāma, as God, was beyond all castes. He only enacted a role here to preach that one should realize and rectify one's mistake. It also shows that you should not act hastily when you do not have the capability of rectifying your mistakes.

Caste is Never by Birth

The teaching community is given the duty of educating the public. The other communities like engineers, doctors, soldiers, businessmen, agriculturists etc., also coexist in society with equal dignity. Of course, the teaching community is given some special respect by society since they performed their duty with low remuneration, until recent times. If you are only fond of that respect and not money, you can join the profession of that community. When the option of teaching as a profession is open, why are most people fond of professions other than teaching? Is it not obvious that people care more about money? God said that the duty and the associated caste, is assigned to different groups of people, not by birth, but by their qualities (intense interest) and action. Sūta, born in a low caste, was made the president of a great sacrifice in the Naimiṣa forest by sages, as said in the Bhāgavatam. The great devotee, Śabarī, who was an untouchable, is worshipped by brahmins, even today. Her pictures are to be found in the prayer rooms in the houses of brahmins. The feet of the statutes of Rāma and Krishna, who were non-brahmins are washed by brahmins every day. Rāvana, a brahmin by birth, is condemned as a demon due to his sinful qualities

and actions. This is our real Hindu tradition, established by the sages, who were brahmins.

You cannot say that the brahmins confined the *upanayanam* ritual only to their caste. The reason is that brahmins extended this ritual to the castes of *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* also. You also cannot say that the brahmins did an injustice by denying this ritual to the *śūdras* and untouchables. You should realize that the ritual was also denied to the ladies of their own caste. If there were really some hidden treasure in this ritual, would they have hidden it from the people of their own caste? The truth is obvious that the ancient sages, who were brahmins, never showed any partiality whatsoever, when they established our sacred tradition. This ritual was only a training in the subject-matter, which is to be propagated in society. The duty of propagating the subject of spiritual knowledge to society was given only to some interested people. This ritual is only relevant to that group of people, since it is a training for their future duty. The subject of this ritual, which is worshipping God-in-human-form (Sadguru) by singing prayerful songs and by practically serving Him by cooking food for Him and so on, was never denied to anybody. Everyone has the right to receive this knowledge and practice it.

Only the interested people are selected and given training to propagate information about using the antidote for malaria in society. Due to their effort of propagation, the public uses that antidote. Citizens only complain, if the antidote has been denied to them. No citizen complains that the opportunity to propagate the information about fighting malaria was not given to him or her! In fact, nobody comes forward to join the training for the propagation or to actually carry out the duty of propagation of the information because, it interferes with their jobs. By merely propagating about the use of the antidote, the fruit of being protected from malaria is not obtained. The entire fruit of being protected from the disease is obtained only when the antidote is used as per the information propagated. So, there is no need to hiss at the brahmins or the ancient sages for not giving other castes the opportunity to propagate the information about the form of God and the mode of worship. It is only as a result of their efforts in propagating spiritual knowledge that everybody can today understand that the form of God to be worshipped is only the contemporary Human Incarnation and that He

can be worshipped by singing prayers and by serving Him practically. Everybody thus, has got the fruit of the propagation efforts, which is the antidote. It is the fruit that is important and not the propagation of the information about the fruit.

There is no need to misunderstand the fact that that the ritual was only extended to *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* and not to *śūdras*, untouchables and the women of all castes, including brahmin-women. The reason is that women of all castes are engaged in their household duties and *śūdras* are engaged in the duties of serving the public in society. As per the Manusmṛti, which is the ethical scripture of Hinduism, the duties given to the *śūdras* and the other castes, in the beginning of creation, were according to their interests. Both women and *śūdras* do not have the leisure to do work of propagating spiritual knowledge to society. Untouchables are eligible to participate in such propagation, once they get reformed and if they are interested. Of course, even while they are still untouchables, they are eligible to the fruit of propagation, like others. It means, they can sing prayers to God and serve Him. Caste is just another name of the duty in which one is interested. It is not something that is forced by anybody. Incidentally, caste also may mean the chain of generations of people interested in doing a specific duty. But no one in the chain belongs to that caste just by birth. One belongs to a certain caste only by his or her continued interest in fulfilling that duty. Because of the coincidence of the interest and birth in the cases of many generations of people, one should not mistake caste to be decided by birth, instead of by quality and duty performed.

Spirit of the Ritual to be Restored

The less respect given to *śūdras* is only a constant reminder of their non-vegetarian food habit, which is a sin. The lower respect is only to rectify them and not to insult them. As far as the ladies are concerned, ancient sages always respected women and the Manusmṛti says that angels are pleased if ladies are respected (*Yatra nāryastu...*). We should understand that respect is always linked to good and bad action. Of course, the middle-age scholars linked the respect of a person with his or her birth in a certain caste. It is the result of their foolish and ignorant ego of caste and they are to be condemned for it.

We are not simply trying to convince *śūdras* and untouchables with sweet words. You might feel that brahmins have cheated *śūdras* who belong to another caste. But why would the brahmins cheat the women of their own caste too? If the brahmins have cheated the *śūdras* and untouchables, by denying this ritual to them, have they not simultaneously cheated their own women too? At the beginning of the Kali age, the sages established a fair and genuine system that ensured a proportionate share of the fruit of the worship of brahmin men to their wives and to the *śūdras* and untouchables who served them.

Therefore, no injustice was done to any caste, at any time, if you understand *upanayanam* in its real and broader sense. So, there is really no need of meaninglessly running after this ritual alone, assuming that some divine treasure is hidden in it and that the treasure is being enjoyed only by certain castes. In fact, if you examine carefully, the ritual done by today's brahmins is not true *upanayanam* at all. It does not truly bring the child closer to God, since it does not involve the true Gāyatrī Mantra, which is singing songs in praise of God. It is simply conducted as a big ceremony like a marriage. Perhaps, it is only justified to call such a ceremony as the thread ceremony and not *upanayanam* (nearing God). There is no singing of any divine prayer and women are not allowed in the ceremony. A hymn from the Veda written in the Gāyatrī meter is called the Gāyatrī Mantra. That hymn is just read, murmured or chanted. There is no harm in chanting it, but the point is that it is not sung. The effect of singing is that the mind spontaneously gets absorbed in it and the person's devotion for God grows. This important positive effect of singing is missed since the hymn is not sung. Besides, a person's devotion grows upon singing a devotional song, provided the meaning of the song is understood. But in the ritual, no one even pays attention to the meaning of the so-called Gāyatrī Mantra. The meaning of the hymn is actually the main concept of spiritual knowledge which is meant to be propagated to society. Unfortunately, in the present-day *upanayanam* ritual, the mind of the little boy is not at all absorbed in God due to the absence of a sweet divine song (*bhakti*). There is also no understanding of the meaning of the Gāyatrī hymn as the main concept to be propagated to society (*jñāna*). Neither does the boy understand that the lighting of the fire is meant for cooking food for the Sadguru, which is part of his service to the Sadguru (*karma*).

In fact, it is the mother of the boy who should initiate him into the real Gāyatrī Mantra by teaching him to sing a sweet and melodious song in praise of God. But due to the foolish tradition of the reciting priests, who are proud of their male gender, both the mother and the song have disappeared from the ritual. Hence, the ritual is no longer the sacred activity of taking the child closer to God (*upanayanam*) through a sweet prayer. It neither provides the knowledge of identifying the Sadguru nor does it provide the knowledge of how to serve the Sadguru. A child is always attracted to a song and not to the mere recitation of the prayer. There is no prayer here since the Gāyatrī Mantra is not a prayer, but a hymn that provides divine knowledge. That knowledge too is not understood at all!

Imagine a proud brahmin chanting the Gāyatrī Mantra. Since he does not know its meaning, he is unable to grasp the knowledge of the form of God conveyed by the hymn. Then compare him with his wife who is worshipping God through sweet songs sung in her mother tongue (*vratham*). Putting your hand to your heart, tell Me, My dear friend, which of these two forms of worship is the real *upanayanam* (nearing God) through the real Gāyatrī Mantra? Indeed the real Gāyatrī is present with the women who sing sweet devotional songs in praise of God. After all, by your own interpretation, Gāyatrī is also a female deity. When you left out women from the *upanayanam*, you also unknowingly left out Goddess Gāyatrī, who too is a woman. The proof of the fact that Goddess Gāyatrī is not with you is that you are not including songs in your worship, even though you know that singing is the most attractive form of worship. What is the reason why your rigid mind is not allowing this idea to enter your brain? The only reason is that the divine mother Gāyatrī has cursed you and left you when you left women out of *upanayanam*. The woman is the basis of sweet music and sweet songs. Thus, you have denied the basis of the Gāyatrī itself. The real *upanayanam* involving the real Gāyatrī is only found among people, who, irrespective of caste and gender, sing divine songs on God, in their mother tongue. Their minds are absorbed in the song because they understand the meaning of the song and their hearts are filled with the nectar of devotion. If you see a brahmin boy chanting the Gāyatrī Mantra without knowing its meaning, he does not develop any interest in spiritual knowledge. Since he does not sing any devotional song, he

does not taste even a drop of devotion. He is only eager to finish chanting the Gāyatrī hymn, the prescribed number of times, so that he can join his friends at play, on the very day of this ritual!

I, therefore, request the present brahmins to realise the truth and modify the ritual in such a way that at least some traces of the essence of the real *upanayanam* can be brought in it and it actually benefits the child. With the present mechanical practice in the ritual, you are not creating any devotion to God in the mind of the child. Instead, you are making the child allergic to God, at the very beginning!

The child's lack of knowledge of the meaning of Gāyatrī is nothing but a reflection of the blind tradition of the reciting priests, who just recited the Veda, without knowing its meaning. It cannot be the reflection of the original tradition of the ancient Vedic sages. The sages understood the Vedas and they debated on the concepts in the Veda to a great depth, in order to bring out the real concepts revealed by God. But in present times, after performing this *upanayanam* ritual, the boy is sent to a Vedic school for about 10 years, where he again recites the Veda blindly, without understanding its meaning. It is similar to his recitation of the Gāyatrī hymn. This blind recitation of the Veda, once again reflects the practice of the reciting priests, who themselves spent a lot of time in blind recitation. It is a highly laughable point that you call such a person who blindly recites the Veda as a *Veda paṇḍita* or a Vedic scholar! *Paṇḍita* means a person having knowledge of a particular subject. When you say that a person is a great scholar in Hindi, does it mean that such a person blindly recites sentences in Hindi, without knowing the meaning of any word in Hindi?

The present situation gives a lot of pain to My heart because the very word Veda indicates the knowledge. All the statements of the scripture stressing on learning the meaning are useless before such people. They do not even understand these statements since the statements are in Sanskrit. All these efforts of the scripture are useless, like blowing a conch before the deaf! Devotion comes to your heart only when you know the meaning of what you recite. Neither the boy, nor the father of the boy, nor the priest, nor any person attending the *upanayanam* ritual knows the meaning of even an alphabet of what is being recited. Do you not think that such a ritual is 100% useless? Of course, you have to perform it in order to escape the criticism of your

foolish relatives. **I assuredly tell all of you that every paisa spent on such a ritual is useless and a waste.** At best, the function is a get-together of all your relatives, where you do your business of exchanging gifts. The real *upanayanam* and Gāyatrī are done on that day, whenever the child of any caste and any gender is instructed about the Sadguru, who is the contemporary Human Incarnation of God. It is done on that day, whenever the child is initiated into singing prayers in praise of God and is trained to serve the Sadguru practically. This is the real spirit of *upanayanam*. The present ritual, which is without this spirit of the real *upanayanam* is like a dead body without life!

REFUTING CRITICISM FROM LEFTISTS

April 29, 2020

Dr. Nikhil asked: Padanamaskarams Swamiji, Your book on *Upanayanam*, indeed provides excellent insights. However, some of the points are not acceptable to leftists, who strongly argue for social equality. They generally have no sympathy for any attempt to prove the greatness of the Vedic culture. Given below are some questions that arose from my own conversations with some leftists and from some views expressed by some public speakers. I apologize for the fact that some of the arguments are a bit confrontational, in spite of my moderating them considerably. Their actual arguments are far harsher. I bring these questions to You in the hope that the universal divine knowledge and the universal divine love of God for mankind should be seen clearly by all. Your servant. Nikhil.

1. Why should the caste of one's birth be given any consideration at all in deciding one's profession or lifestyle today?

[You have explained that the ancient Vedic society was organized in a fair manner in the form of the caste system and that the system got corrupted only in the middle ages. But that is hardly relevant in the present context. The caste-segregated and gender-segregated Hindu society of the past does not exist anymore. Today, men and women born in all castes are found in all fields and professions. Practically, there is no evidence that people born in a certain caste or gender alone are capable of pursuing a certain profession. Any such claim is quite unscientific and backward. Today, men and women from the lower castes are shining in every field including research, engineering, sports, medicine, military, politics, space exploration and even spirituality. They are in no way inferior or less capable than the so-called higher castes. The constitutions of most progressive and democratic countries in the world, including that of India, guarantee a certain minimum set of individual rights to every citizen. Thanks to the present democratic system, we are not at the mercy of some ignorant and biased religious leaders anymore. So, how caste and the related profession was decided in the ancient past is irrelevant to us today.

Today, what is relevant is knowing how an individual can choose his or her profession. Can a person born in a so-called lower caste not become an officer in the military (kshatriya) or a politician (kshatriya), or start his or her own business (vaishya) or even become a preacher (brahmana)? The fact is that people are already doing all this. No permission from any biased religious authorities is necessary for them and no orthodox religious restrictions are capable of stopping them anymore. But what is necessary today is for religious leaders to be honest and frank enough to accept the defect of their religious traditions. But acceptance alone is not sufficient. They should further condemn the injustice done in the name of

their religion, to millions of people, over innumerable generations by discriminating on the basis of caste, gender, race and so on. They should equally encourage people born in any caste to choose their professions on the basis of their qualities and capabilities. They should encourage eligible people born in lower castes to become preachers.

In Your book, You seem to have avoided making a clear and strong statement in this regard. In fact, You have clearly not supported anyone from a lower caste wanting to become a preacher. You have claimed that people from lower castes want to become priests due to their interest in earning money. That might be true in some cases, but not in all cases. However, is the average son of a brahmin, today, not interested in money too? Yet, how come no one questions his right to become a priest? If a man or woman from a lower caste has better spiritual knowledge, is more devoted than the average brahmin of today, why should he or she not be allowed to become a priest? By sincerely learning and preaching spiritual knowledge, his or her interest in money can gradually reduce, due to God's grace. On the other hand, no such progress might take place in the uninterested and undevoted brahmin who is only working as a priest for money. Besides, a certain minimum interest in earning money is also required in present times. Society is so selfish that they will not support the sincerely devoted person. In fact, the devotee's own parents will not support the devotee! So, having a moderate interest in earning money should not be considered as a disqualification.

What is the harm in boldly and clearly stating that the ancient caste system is simply not relevant to the society of today? Trying to prove that it was fair and useful in olden times is simply not relevant today. If the caste system is allowed to continue in present times, it will do more damage than good since people will invariably misuse it for their own selfish ends, as they have been doing in centuries past. In present times, the caste system should be totally demolished or at least ignored. All that people should be concerned with is a person's eligibility in terms of qualities and capabilities to perform the required jobs. In fact, this is the universal truth, which was the original basis of the ancient caste system. If a person is found to be suitable for a certain profession on the basis of this universal eligibility criterion, no consideration whatsoever should be given to other factors such as gender, religion, caste, parents' occupation etc.]

Swami replied: You have unnecessarily been hasty in understanding the points expressed by Me. I have only explained the reason why the son of a person having great expertise and talent in a certain profession also becomes an expert in the same profession. The careful training by the father and the influence of the surrounding community of similarly-talented people cause children to develop the same professional talents as their fathers. But people wrongly thought that the reason for a brahmin's son developing similar talents as the father was having brahmin blood.

They thought that the brahminical qualities were transferred from father to son by blood. Based on this, they developed a false theory that the essential prerequisite for becoming a brahmin was being born to a brahmin. Everyone believed it because they practically found the sons of brahmins invariably developing the same talents as their fathers. I analyzed the situation and established that the actual cause for the sons of brahmins showing the talents of their parents was not having brahmin blood, but that it was only parental training and the influence of the community of brahmin relatives around them since childhood. It is but natural for a growing child born in a brahmin family to observe and pick up the qualities and talents of the elders and develop interest in the brahmin profession. Similarly, a child born in the family of *kṣatriyas* will develop an interest and talent in fighting with a sword and with a bow and arrows. The son of a brahmin family does not develop any interest in fighting because he was never exposed to the atmosphere of fighting and battles as is found in *kṣatriya* families.

By precisely identifying the reason why the son of a brahmin becomes a brahmin or why a child born in any caste picks up the talents and qualities related to that caste, we can clearly discard the wrong idea that caste and the related qualities are determined by birth. You are criticizing this wrong idea discarded by Me, assuming that I am in support of it and this shows the lack of precision in your analysis. Your criticism of My position implies that you are criticizing the genuine concept that children develop the qualities of their parents, due to the training from their parents and the influence of the community of relatives and elders.

Today, it is clearly understood and universally accepted that one caste cannot own a certain set of qualities and no one can claim that those qualities cannot appear in other castes. So, the development of a certain set of qualities in a child due to the influence of the surrounding community is perfectly true. Imagine that a child is born to a couple working as lawyers and that all the close relatives of the child are also lawyers. The child will naturally develop interest in the legal profession alone. Upon growing up and completing his or her education in law, the person will undergo practical training in the profession by working as an assistant under a senior lawyer. Here the person will develop and strengthen the practical talents of that profession. Now suppose the senior lawyer guiding the junior lawyer working as his assistant happens to be the biological father of the junior lawyer. Will the senior lawyer who is the father, not give extra attention to the training of his own son or daughter, due to the

tremendous natural fascination that a father has for his own child? Will he not transfer all his hidden skills to his child without any reservation? Due to such careful and complete training received from his father, the son or daughter will naturally become a talented lawyer. So much so, that people will feel that the father passed on his professional skills to his child through his blood (genes).

Today, we have a separate colleges for law, engineering, commerce, agriculture, oriental studies and so on. In these colleges, the theoretical knowledge pertaining to each field can be learnt, after which one has to do internships and assistantships in the respective professional fields to gain practical skills. But in olden days, there were no separate colleges for different professions. The son of a brahmin would learn both the theoretical subject and the practical professional skills in that line, straight from his father and relatives alone. That is all the more reason why the children picked up the qualities of their parents and elders. So, people who could not properly analyze the actual cause, naturally thought that the parents' qualities and skills are transmitted to their children by blood. Even today, some people believe that the qualities of a caste are passed on from generation to generation through genes! The reality is that genes only carry physical traits and not mental qualities. An individual soul acquires its various qualities from the surrounding environment in which it was brought up, over the long chain of previous births. The point that the surrounding environment will influence a soul and cause it to develop interest in the qualities that it is exposed to, remains a very powerful truth. Hence, one should be extremely careful in selecting one's company because one's mind will invariably be influenced by the people with whom one associates. By associating with good people, one will develop good qualities, while by associating with bad people, one will develop bad qualities. So, the wrong theory of determining caste or profession by birth which you oppose is also opposed by Me.

You have also opposed Me on another point. I said that some people born in castes other than brahmins, are interested in the profession of brahmins mainly for the sake of earning money. You said that not all are interested in money alone. I agree with you, but I can say that indeed, many are precisely like that. I traced the background history of the caste system from the beginning of creation to investigate why it has degraded to its present state. I said that, in the beginning, all the souls created by God were equal and that they had full freedom to select the profession of their choice. Some people who were not much interested in materialism

and were greatly interested in spirituality, selected the profession of preaching spiritual knowledge to society. The purpose of spiritual preaching is that when people realize that God exists and that His administration always maintains justice by punishing bad deeds and rewarding good deeds, they will follow justice. They will be self-controlled and remain just even in the absence of an external law and order. The reason for their remaining within the boundaries of justice could be the fear of God's punishment or the love for God, or a combination of the two. In any case, preaching spiritual knowledge in society is the best and most essential way of maintaining justice and peace in society. This task was carried out selflessly by brahmins in ancient times and materialism was totally absent in them. Brahmins were required to be free of the aspiration for any materialistic earnings and were supposed to live by collecting grains fallen in the fields after the harvest (*uñcha vṛtti*). Only a very small number of people, who were really interested in spiritual knowledge, came to this line. The qualities and deeds of those people in this divine spiritual line characterized the brahmin caste.

The caste system by itself is not wrong, whether it is adopted in ancient times or even present times. In fact, it was given to mankind by God Himself (*Cātur varṇyam mayā sṛṣṭam*—Gita). There is nothing wrong in classifying fruits like mangoes, oranges, bananas, apples etc. The problem arises only when you say that the mango is the highest and the apple is the lowest. There is nothing such as greater or lesser in the caste system. The four castes are simply different. Of course, since ancient times, brahmins were respected by other castes because they were trying to lead the entire society towards God and justice, without even worrying about their own livelihood. This attitude of selflessness and sacrifice of the brahmins made them dear to God (*Bhagavān Brāhmaṇa priyaḥ*—Skānda Purāṇa). Be careful and do not misunderstand Me again on this point. I have only said that the caste called brahmins was respected by the whole of society and was even dear to God due to their quality of selflessness. I never said that the son of a brahmin must be a brahmin. I say that the caste system was originally established by God on the basis of people's qualities, including their inherent interests and their corresponding deeds (*Guṇa karma vibhāgaśaḥ*—Gita). If this crucial point is not carefully understood, it will easily lead to misunderstanding which will divide Hinduism. The brahmin caste is respected because the selfless duty carried out by them is highly respectable. It does not mean every person born in that caste deserves that respect, irrespective of his qualities and deeds.

Even in ancient days, extremely few people opted for this profession of brahminism since people with immense interest in spirituality and a lack of material aspirations are rare. So, from the very beginning, the brahmin caste was always quite small. Today, people of some other castes are also following this profession of the *brahmana* caste, not because they are really interested in spirituality, but because of their ego and jealousy. They too want to enjoy the greatness and respect associated with the brahmin caste and they cannot tolerate the fact that only people born as brahmins are enjoying it. Their ego and jealousy is the result of their misunderstanding that caste is determined by birth. If they realize that caste is determined by qualities and deeds, there is no need for ego and jealousy.

In the course of time, materialism crept into even this sacred profession. Today the brahmin profession has degraded to such an ugly level that brahmin priests are demanding fees for doing their duty. They have turned it into a business! It is only because it has now become a business that people of other castes have become so interested in this line. What I mean is that today, the so-called brahmin priests, irrespective of the caste they were born in, are in the profession either for materialistic reasons or their ego and jealousy, which is the result of their misunderstanding that caste is determined by birth. **I criticise the fall of this divine profession to this low level. Today, the grip of materialism on people's minds is so strong that even the people born in the brahmin caste are not following the brahmin profession. They are more attracted to other professions which promise greater materialistic benefits.** Finally, I request you to very carefully and sensitively follow the subtle sense of every point presented by Me, keeping in mind the past and present context of this issue.

The ancient brahmins, who were sages, always concentrated only on spirituality without even thinking about material things. They were responsible for preaching to all of humanity, communicating to them the ideal code of conduct and thereby maintaining justice in society. These ancient brahmins, who were selflessly dedicated to this task were rewarded by God in the form of plentiful donations made by kings. Kings would grant them plenty of lands and villages as gifts called *agrahārams*. God always blessed such true brahmins, in every aspect. But today's brahmins have fallen to a very low level by performing rituals without knowing the meaning of even a single word from the Veda. The brahmin priests just behave like tape-recorders, reciting the Veda without explaining its

meaning. Since their intellectual standard and attitude has fallen to this horrible level, they have also materially fallen to the most pathetic level. Brahmins have now become the poorest in society. It shows that even God does not want to be their patron. **When the priests used to perform their duties properly by promoting spiritual knowledge and devotion among the public through the performance of rituals, God Himself had become their patron.** Those ancient brahmins had full faith in God and His patronage and they were not worried about their material earnings. As a result of their full faith, God placed them at the highest position even materially. As their faith in God fell lower and lower, instead of depending on God for fulfilling their material requirements, they began depending more on human beings to support them in the form of fees. Corresponding to the fall in their faith, they also experienced a fall in their material wealth to become the poorest in society. When a person runs after the money, which is like a shadow, the shadow will race ahead of him and he will never be able to catch up with it. But if the person turns his back on the shadow and walks towards God, who is like the sun, the shadow of material wealth will run after him like a dog!

I examined the caste system as it existed in ancient times, which was most perfect since it based on the policy of God that caste is to be decided by qualities and deeds and not by birth. This was the time when the meaning of the Veda was clearly and correctly understood by all the sages, unlike the present tape-recorder priests who do not understand even a single word of the Veda. We feel that present times are better than the past due to modern development. If this were really true, our present system would have been free of the mistakes of the past. This is the benefit of studying history. It enables us to understand the defects and merits of the past and compare them with the present defects and merits. Finally, it enables us to reject the past mistakes and adopt the past merits. At the same time, we must also reject the present mistakes without leaving the present merits. It is told that all that is old is not gold and all that is the latest is not the best. We have to analyse both independently and avoid the defects of both the past and the present and adopt the merits of both the past and the present (*Purāṇamityeva na sādhu sarvaṃ...*).

We have agreed very well that the caste system by birth is wrong and the caste system based on qualities and deeds is correct. Hence, today, this defect of determining caste by birth should be rejected and determining caste by qualities must be followed everywhere. But today, the defect of determining caste by birth is stronger than the past! If we observe the

election process in any country or the selection of candidates for a job, can we say that the candidates are chosen strictly on the basis of their qualities and deeds? Are certain candidates not unduly favored because of who their parents are? Is it not a form of determining caste by birth? Hence, the rediscovery of the past is necessary to eliminate defects and adopt good practices. Defects were never appreciated in the ancient past. If a person born in the *brāhmaṇa* caste did not have pious qualities and did not do pious deeds, the Veda has clearly stated that such a person is not a *brāhmaṇa*, but a *brahma bandhu*. A *brahma bandhu* means a person who is related to the caste of brahmins by birth alone. Saying that a person is a *brahma bandhu* is only like giving his residential address. It merely says that the person is born in the caste of brahmins and is related to brahmins. It does not say that the person himself is a brahmin. The present situation is that we have rejected the defects of the past and adopted some merits only in framing laws. But practically individuals have not changed at all!

- *Upanayanam* means becoming close to God. The main theme of this book called *Upanayanam* is to bring out the universality of this concept, irrespective of caste, gender, region, religion etc. First, one should get close to God in theory, by studying spiritual knowledge and by praising the Lord with devotion. Any soul created by God can study about the personality and behaviour of God through spiritual knowledge. Thus, *Upanayanam* is a universal concept. It is not the mere ritual of putting a sacred thread on the body of a child. The way to become close to God is by praising God with devotion (*bhakti yoga*), which is achieved after studying the personality of God (*jñāna yoga*).
- The Gāyatrī hymn says that one should approach the divine preacher to gain spiritual knowledge. The divine preacher preaches the knowledge, by means of enlightening the disciple's intellect. Enlightening the intellect refers to logical analysis. This hymn is called Gāyatrī only because it is composed in the Vedic meter called Gāyatrī. The hymn does not worship any deity called Gāyatrī as is popularly thought. The deity indicated by the hymn is the first mediated God (Savitā). The first mediated God means the first Energetic Incarnation of the unimaginable God (*Gāyatrī chandah, paramātmā svarūpam, Savitā devatā*). Paramātmā means the unimaginable God. Savitā means the first Energetic Incarnation called Brahmā, who is the Creator of this world. But how can we directly approach the unimaginable God in order to get spiritual knowledge? Since He is unimaginable, it is impossible to approach Him. Neither can we directly approach the first

Energetic Incarnation, Brahmā. One has to do long and severe penance even to get a very brief vision of Him. Then how can we approach God for spiritual knowledge? The answer lies in the sacred thread that is put on the body of the child during the *upanayanam* ritual. The three strands of the sacred thread indicate the three qualities, which are (1) *Sattvam*, which is the relative awareness or the soul. (2) *Rajas*, which is inert energy. *Rajas* literally means dust and it refers to the particle-like quantized nature of energy. (3) *Tamas*, inert matter.

Awareness, inert energy and inert matter are the three components of the body of any human being, which serves as the medium for God's entry. The first Energetic Incarnation has merged into the medium and become identical with the contemporary Human Incarnation of God. But the unimaginable God is already present in a perfectly merged state in the Energetic Incarnation. So, the Sadguru or the contemporary Human Incarnation of God is identical with the first Energetic Incarnation (Savitā) and the unimaginable God (Paramātmā). Thus, the hymn and the ritual indicate that one must approach the Human Incarnation of God. He is the divine preacher or Sadguru who gives spiritual knowledge. Alternatively, a preacher who follows the divine preacher in all aspects without introducing his own imagined concepts in the knowledge, can also be considered to be a divine preacher. After thus acquiring spiritual knowledge from the divine preacher, one must praise God (Human Incarnation) by singing songs, instead of merely reciting prose or poetry (spiritual knowledge or prayers). Poetry (Ṛg Veda) is better than prose (Yajur Veda). But song (Sāma Veda) is better than even poetry. *Gāyatrī (Gāyantam trāyate iti)* means a song sung in praise of the Lord by which God becomes very close to the soul (*upanayanam*). In this way, the main essence of this book is that any human being in the world can become close to God by studying spiritual knowledge and by singing in praise of God. This establishes the universality of this ritual and eliminates foolish ideas like determining caste by birth etc.

The story of Sūta (Romaharṣaṇa), shows us that in ancient times, caste was truly determined by qualities and deeds and not by birth. Sūta, who, in spite of being born in a low caste, was treated as a true *brāhmaṇa* and even made the president of a sacrifice by the sages. [Recall that Romaharṣaṇa, born in the low caste of *sūtas*, who were drivers of chariots, was selected as the president of a holy sacrifice in Naimiṣa forest by all the sages. Romaharṣaṇa was also called

Bhūriśravā, which was the name given to him based on his quality (*gauṇa nāma*) because he had heard a lot of spiritual knowledge from Sage Vyāsa (*karṇābhyām bhūri viśruvam*). Even the Human Incarnation like Balarāma got angry with him and killed him since he did not stand and salute to Balarāma, when Balarāma arrived there. All the sages had stood up and saluted to Balarāma. Actually, the president of holy sacrifice is not supposed to not leave his seat or salute to anybody. But Balarāma realized His mistake since sages told Him that He had committed the sin of killing a real brāhmaṇa (by qualities and deeds). He gave back life to Romaharṣaṇa along with a boon that his son, would also become a real brāhmaṇa. Romaharṣaṇa's son was called Ugraśravā, which means that he had heard and grasped the spiritual knowledge with the climax of seriousness. This story is in the Bhāgavatam.]

On the contrary, Rāvaṇā, the grandson of God Brahmā, who was a born-brahmin, was not considered as a *brāhmaṇa* due to his bad qualities and bad deeds. Śabari, who was born in a low caste was given salvation, whereas, the same salvation was denied to other sages by God Rāma. This shows that the caste system, as it existed in the ancient past, was right and that wrong interpretations and the degradation of the system occurred only from the beginning of the present Kali Yuga, which began about 5000 years ago. It is only in this *yuga* that brahmins turned into tape-recorder priests, by avoiding the effort to learn the real meaning of the Veda. In ancient days, the genuine caste system based on qualities and deeds existed, but truth and justice also existed because people in general, had a strong awareness about God. Today, the false caste system by birth exists in practice, while the genuine caste system by qualities and deeds exists only in theory. If one wants to be in the good books of God, he or she must follow the truth and justice in theory as well as in practice. One must follow the truth and justice in both *pravṛtti* (worldly life) and *nivṛtti* (spiritual life).

May 02, 2020

2. How can You say that all souls born in a certain caste attained expertise in the corresponding occupation due to parental training?

[You have said that the children of brahmins gained expertise in their profession due to the training of their parents. But how can all the children of a person have the same qualities and develop the same expertise of the parent? The training by the parents in the occupation is only one factor contributing to one's

expertise in the profession. The person's inherent capabilities and qualities are equally or more important. How can all the children born in a certain caste get expertise in the corresponding occupation? Such a phenomenon is most unnatural. How can all fruits of a tree be the same size? How can all students in a class be experts in mathematics? Diversity is almost like a law of nature. Or do You claim that God particularly ensures that only souls with the qualities of a brahmin are born in brahmin families? Such a claim would be very problematic because it would automatically justify the determination of caste by birth. Based on practical evidence, we see that there is some probability of souls of matching qualities being born in a family, but there is also some probability of souls of different qualities being born in a family. One has to accept that only some of the children of a brahmin might possess the qualities of a brahmin, assuming that in olden days people used to have many children. At least one child of that brahmin might possess other qualities. The same logic applies to other castes. This means that, in every generation, significant numbers of people would need to change their caste or follow a profession different from their caste. A fair and just society should recognize this basic need. Further, such a society should give full freedom to interested people to change their caste (occupation), as required. It should not try to suppress their inherent qualities and force them into a profession and way of life that they are not suited for. An even more advanced society should have a formal mechanism to enable people to change their caste (and profession). Our present society has such a mechanism. It is called the educational system. All children pass through this system and, based on their eligibility, they can choose any profession and the corresponding way of life. It is not a perfect system and has many defects, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

Whether such a mechanism existed in Vedic times is highly doubtful. The ancient Gurukulas provided education, but they did not facilitate a change in a person's caste. Whether any freedom at all existed to change one's caste is itself doubtful. The unavailability of sufficient examples of people who managed to pursue a profession other than the one determined by their caste are extremely rare. In the thousands of years of the Vedic civilization, there are only a handful of cases such as that of Sūta and Viśvāmitra. Based on the natural diversity in the qualities of children born in the same family, one expects a considerable percentage of the population wanting to change their caste, in every generation. Even if we put that percentage as low as 1 %, it still amounts to hundreds of thousands of cases in every generation. But the Vedic society can only offer a handful of cases! It only proves that changing one's caste was strongly discouraged, if not prohibited. It means that those rare cases were the exception rather than the rule, proving that the Vedic culture was not as open and liberal, as it is made out to be. Instead, it most probably was very rigid and conservative. In that culture, the rights and preferences of individuals did not matter much over religious and traditional customs and suppression was a way of life.

Whatever the case might be, there is no benefit in proving whether the Vedic culture was fair or unfair; ideal or non-ideal. What matters is the stand taken by religion towards the rights of individuals today.

Every individual, in every generation, without any bias, must have the freedom to choose his or her lifestyle and profession, as long as the person stays within ethical boundaries. Just because my father or some unknown ancestor of mine chose to become a cobbler or a carpenter, I cannot be disqualified from being a businessman, soldier, politician or a preacher. My eligibility, in terms of my own physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual qualities and capabilities alone should matter.]

Swami replied: The caste system is based on qualities (*guṇa*) and deeds (*karma*). Professional talents are included in the qualities and professional tasks are included in the deeds mentioned above. But qualities are not limited only to professional talents. Professional talents are called *vṛtti guṇa* and are different from *karma guṇa*. Likewise, deeds (*karma*) are not limited only to professional tasks (*vṛtti*). The words ‘qualities’ and ‘deeds’ are to be understood in a much broader sense. Qualities include all good qualities like being truthful, following justice, being charitable etc., and all bad qualities like telling lies, following injustice, being greedy and avoiding charity even to deserving receivers etc. Similarly, deeds also include good deeds like worshipping God, doing righteous deeds etc., and bad deeds like helping bad people, committing violence towards good people etc. It is not enough for a person to merely have professional talents and do the corresponding professional work. **The human personality has many aspects and so, every person must have good qualities apart from professional talents and must do good deeds apart from professional work.** Everyone must of course exhibit good behavior on the job and follow justice even while carrying out professional duties. For instance, while carrying out one’s professional duties, one should help good people and not take bribes. But qualities and deeds include the person’s entire character and conduct.

The *brāhmaṇa* is said to be the head or face. The *kṣatriya* is said to be the two hands. The *vaiśya* is said to be the two thighs and the *śūdra* is said to be the two feet (***Brāhmaṇo’sya mukham...***—Veda). The head contains the brain which logically analyses every issue and communicates right signals to all the parts of the body. Similarly, a real *brāhmaṇa*, which means a *brāhmaṇa* by qualities and deeds and not by birth, should always be in contact with the entire society. Only then can he communicate correct spiritual knowledge to the entire society. Correct spiritual knowledge includes the concepts of the existence of the unimaginable God

who protects justice and punishes injustice. Only when these concepts are firmly established in society can society function in a peaceful and stable manner. The *kṣatriyas*, represented by the two hands, are always involved in doing important tasks like protecting justice and fighting against injustice. The thighs allow the body to sit comfortably and they represent the *vaiśyas*, who distribute food grains and other items to society through trade and business. The two feet that work constantly, enabling the person to walk, represent the *śūdras*. The *śūdras* are always dynamic as they work constantly to produce food grains through agriculture. Agriculture is the basic service necessary for human existence.

The lower part of the body represents the *vaiśyas* and *śūdras*. This means that the activities performed by them are necessary for the lower path of worldly life called *pravṛtti*. The upper part of the body represents the *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas*, which means that the activities performed by them are necessary for the higher path of spiritual life called *nivṛtti*. The hands are located very close to the head, which means that the rulers must always be closely associated with divine preachers, who are sages. When the rulers rule society under the guidance of divine preachers, no injustice can happen in society and society runs most peacefully. In order to avoid injustice in society, people should fear the punishment given by the unimaginable God for committing sin. The fear of divine punishment, which is given in unimaginable ways by God, is more effective in controlling sin than the punishment given by the court of law. The court's judgment and punishment is given in known ways. So, one can easily find some loopholes and escape from it. The unimaginable ways in which divine punishment is given, means that no one can even think of escaping from it! This makes sinners more fearful of committing sins, leading to an effective and effortless control of injustice. Rulers ruling under the guidance of divine preachers, support the efforts of the preachers in spreading spiritual knowledge and developing devotion or love for God among the public.

Apart from the fear of God, love for God also controls injustice. Devoted souls avoid sinful actions due to their love for God. They know that committing injustice angers God and so they certainly avoid it. *Nivṛtti* is far higher than *pravṛtti* and very few people can follow and succeed in it. In *nivṛtti*, the soul becomes closest to God. For *nivṛtti* too, spiritual guidance is necessary. The followers of *nivṛtti* need to know the greatness of the personality of God, His exact true qualities and how He behaves

with devotees. The real *brāhmaṇa*, who is like the head, provides correct information about both the *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* paths.

If the *brāhmaṇa* merely performs rituals without explaining the spiritual knowledge symbolized by the ritual and without improving the public's devotion through the recited prayers, the entire society goes on the wrong track. The prayers can develop devotion in the public only if the public understands the meaning of the prayers. Thus, if the head (*brāhmaṇas*) does not do its job, the entire body (society) goes on the wrong track. Sage Vasiṣṭha was the head and He gave His valuable guidance to the kings of the Raghu dynasty, who were the hands. So, during that time, society remained in a state of perfect justice and peace.

The interest in a certain profession or in doing some good work certainly comes only from surrounding influences. The association with a certain set of people causes a soul to develop interest in a specific profession and it also causes a person to develop a good or bad character. Within the same basic profession, each person might diversify a little. For instance, in the case of two children brought up in the same community of lawyers, one may develop interest in civil cases while the other might develop interest in criminal cases. But none of them will develop interest in joining the military or doing business or agriculture. If the surrounding influences of elders happen to be a mixture of both good and bad people, one son may become good and the other son may become bad. Today, a pure family-atmosphere is not possible. In an atmosphere of mixed influences, the child having good qualities in its previous births will get attracted to the good people in the family and the child having bad qualities in its previous births will get attracted to the bad people in the family. Each child, by associating with people having qualities that match with its own qualities, will end up strengthening those qualities. If the family influence is totally good, the good qualities of the good child will get intensified and the bad qualities of the bad child will get weakened.

When the family and close community around the children consists of people pursuing a variety of professions, each of the children will develop interests in different professions. The association with people having different qualities is the most important factor that causes a person to imbibe those qualities and develop the related interest. These people with whom the person associates might be within the family or outside. Children and people in general do not associate only with their family members, but they move around in society. As they interact with other people and families having a variety of qualities, people get influenced by

each other. In any case, this association (*saṅga*) with people is the root cause for a person to imbibe different qualities.

In each birth, a soul acquires a certain set of qualities due to the surrounding influences. The specific set of qualities or psychology (*saṃskāras*, *vāsanās*) of each soul is the result of such qualities acquired over a series of past births. The person's specific interests or preferences in any birth are nothing but the person's attraction to his or her inherent qualities, which had been acquired by the person over many past births. A child having a certain set of qualities (*saṃskāras*), when exposed to a variety of influences, will choose his or her profession based on those inherent qualities. For instance, if the child's family has members pursuing different professions, like teachers, police officers, businessmen, agriculturists and so on, the child will choose a profession that matches with his or her own psychology (qualities) that has been acquired over several previous births.

Śaṅkara gives great importance to a person's company and says that the association with good spiritual people will ultimately lead a person to salvation (***Satsaṅgatve...jīvanmuktiḥ***). The duty of a real *brāhmaṇa* (by qualities and deeds and not by birth) is to preach to the entire society about both the paths of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. If he does this duty perfectly, the entire society will run perfectly. If the head is spoilt, the entire body will be spoilt with several diseases, in no time.

In ancient times, the family atmosphere would always be pure, which means that all members of the family had similar qualities and deeds. So, all children from that family developed interests which matched those of their family. Some families developed their children in one specific line while other families developed their children in other specific lines. When the father and relatives train their own children, the training will be done to the climax of perfection because of the fascination of parents towards their own children. The fascination of a person for his or her own child is the strongest worldly bond. Today, families provide mixed influences to their children and so they develop interests in various lines. On the whole, the number of children going into any profession remains the same, whether we are looking at past times or present times. In any case, it is not an important cause of disturbance in society. The propagation of spiritual knowledge in society, so that it reaches every soul employed in every profession, is the main factor that prevents any disturbance of the peace in society. But in the absence of widespread spiritual knowledge throughout society, the peace of society is bound to be disturbed.

Today, it has become very hard to find a real *brāhmaṇa*. Almost all the so-called *brāhmaṇas* (by birth) are merely relatives of *brāhmaṇas* (*brahma bandhus*). **Today, the education system and the government are not encouraging the activity of head. They are only encouraging the activities of the hands, thighs and feet.** Can these limbs ever work properly, if the head is neglected? Unless the existence of the omniscient, omnipotent and unimaginable God is established by the real *brāhmaṇas*, society will crumble to pieces in a very short period. **Since a full-time *brāhmaṇa* is not to be found today, every soul must become a part-time real *brāhmaṇa* by propagating spiritual knowledge in society.** Even in ancient days, as per the ethical scripture, a person of any caste can adopt the profession of another caste in times of emergency for the sake of one's livelihood. Hence, it does not matter at all, which soul follows which profession! What matters is the establishment of justice alone. Justice will be established in society when every soul in society is afraid of committing sin and loves to do meritorious deeds. This can be achieved only when the majority of souls become divine servants and participate in propagating God's spiritual knowledge to society, part-time.

The nervous system spreads to all parts of the body in the form of minute nerves that carry information from the brain (head). Each person in the society should similarly try to become a minute nerve and convey spiritual knowledge to everyone in society. This part-time work of propagation of spiritual knowledge will not only help others, but also the one doing that work. As one propagates spiritual concepts to others, one understands and digests them much better. Thus, propagating spiritual knowledge is a double-edged sword, which helps both oneself and others. Such people serving God by propagating His spiritual knowledge become the closest to Him and they receive His blessings.

Apart from nerves, every part of the body also contains minute blood vessels, which supply oxygen and food to cells. This means that all people in society should also have the knowledge related to their respective professions with which they can fulfill their needs. But mere blood vessels are not sufficient. Nerves are also equally important. Similarly, mere professional education and pursuing one's profession are not enough. Spiritual knowledge is also essential for every soul. Just as people learn their own mother tongue from early childhood, everyone must also learn spiritual knowledge from childhood.

Such a system existed in ancient times. Both worldly education and spiritual education were balanced. Due to the sufficient emphasis on the

spiritual education of all citizens, everyone possessed an inherent or inbuilt resistance against sin. There was hardly any need for external control via agencies such as courts and the police. This made it extremely easy to rule a country. There was hardly any disturbance in ancient society and it ran efficiently and peacefully. Present society is completely opposite to it. In spite of numerous police stations and courts, there is increasing crime and corruption everywhere. There is a lot of disturbance in society constantly. The reason is the one-sided emphasis on professional education and the utter neglect of spiritual education in present society.

May 05, 2020

3. Why have You avoided strongly condemning the injustice done in the name of religion?

[You have said that no injustice was done to women or to the so-called lower castes by denying the *upanayanam* ritual to them. That particular ritual was a training which was relevant only to those who had chosen the profession of a spiritual preacher. The real *upanayanam* of nearing God through devotional songs was always open to all, irrespective of gender or caste.

This claim might be fine in itself. However, it seems to turn a blind eye to the colossal injustice that was done against women and lower castes in Hindu society over countless generations, apart from the issue of *upanayanam*. The issue of *upanayanam*, is probably the most insignificant. Apart from it, unspeakable injustice was done to women, widows, lower castes and untouchables. It included denying food and water to untouchables, enslaving of lower castes, denying them the right to education, property ownership, and due remuneration for their work; burning of widows alive, shaving their heads and physically and sexually abusing widows and other helpless women; female infanticide, and so on. The list is truly endless. Much of this injustice was done on the basis of religion and religious traditions. It was sanctioned and even enforced by religious leaders. How can one deny that the fact that orthodox brahmins, who were the religious leaders of society, had unjust intentions? They wanted to retain power in their hands and maintain their own supremacy. They wanted women and the lower castes to be their slaves.

It is true that the genuine religion given by God neither promotes nor supports such injustice. But if today's religious leaders merely say that religion has nothing to do with that injustice, it is highly unfair and irresponsible. Not condemning injustice is also injustice! When those having religious authority keep silent or avoid the topic of this injustice, it becomes an even greater injustice. The crimes and sins against innocents were committed in the name of religion by people whom religion had placed in a privileged and powerful position. If they abused their power and privilege and committed injustice, they should be strongly criticized and punished for their sins. Basic honesty demands that the enlightened and justice-

loving religious leaders, who have religious authority today, should at least declare those unjust religious leaders as sinners and criminals, even if punishing them is not possible for them. Where punishing them is possible, they should support those who are taking legal action against them.]

Swami replied: In the past, a few sins were committed in society and those few sins have been identified and rectified in present times. As a result of this, you are scolding the past in such a loud voice. But after rectifying those few sins of the past, present society is committing uncountable sins. Surprisingly, you are saying only in a mild voice that the present is generally proceeding in right direction, even though present society is making some mistakes! You have mocked at and scolded the past bullock cart, saying that today, you have a fast-running car. But what you fail to see is that the past bullock cart, even though slow-moving, was traveling in the right direction, whereas your present car is travelling very fast in the wrong direction! What about the horrible sins taking place now like gang rapes, bomb blasts made by terrorists, corruption at every level of the administration etc.? These three represent the main three gates of hell, as said in the Gita (*Kāmaḥ krodhaḥ tathā lobhaḥ...*). In the past, such horrible forms of sins related to these three main gates of hell were never even heard of!

We agree that these few sins did happen in the past and we have never supported them in any way. But remember that the word past has two phases. One is the relatively recent past, when the priests acted as blind tape-recorders and recited the Veda without knowing the meaning of even one word in it. The other phase is the very ancient past, which was the time of the sages. In this ancient past, all the Vedas were thoroughly studied and discussed using thorough logical analysis. The few sins mentioned by you took place in the recent past and not in the ancient past. The recent past started with the beginning of the Kali Yuga, some 5000 years ago. Kali Yuga began just after the departure of the divine world preacher, Lord Krishna, who is the author of the greatest scripture, called the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā. Let us examine the context of those few sins mentioned by you in the ancient past and in the recent past.

1) Practice of Sati: The origin of this practice is the concept of *sahagamānam*, which means that a person, due to the immense love for his or her life-partner (wife or husband), dies of a heart attack immediately on seeing or even hearing of the death of the life-partner. Padmāvati died as soon as she heard the false news of the death of her husband, Jayadeva. King Aja, the father of Daśaratha, died of a heart attack within few days of

the death of his wife, Indumati. The word *saha* means together. *Saha gamanam* means ‘going together’. **It refers to one partner naturally dying immediately after the death of the other partner, so as to travel together to the upper world.** This immense love and mutual commitment between life-partners was merely appreciated in ancient times. There was no force on any person to die immediately after the death of his or her life partner. In more recent times, it degraded to a practice of self-immolation by the surviving partner who would jump into the funeral fire of the dead life-partner. As time passed, it further degraded to the forcing of the surviving life-partner into the funeral fire. Finally, it degraded into pushing only the surviving wife into the funeral fire and not the husband. We certainly accept this as a sin. But killing girl or a lady after gang raping her, which happens frequently in present times, is far far more serious than this! You are using all your strength to scold only the past sin and are treating the present sin as insignificant. You are shooting an arrow at Me, without realizing that it can come right back at you!

2) Treating women as slaves: This is the climax of exaggeration! No woman was treated as a slave as claimed by some foreigners. In ancient times, women were worshipped by men and it was said that God is pleased where women are worshipped (*Yatra nāryastu pūjyante, Ramante tatra devatāḥ*). Great women-scholars of the Veda like Maitreyī, Gārgī etc., were praised in the Vedas. Due to the relatively lower physical strength of women, it was the duty of the men in their immediate family to protect them. In her childhood, a girl was to be protected by her father. In her youth, she was to be protected by her husband and in her old age, she was to be protected by her son. This was all the more important since women would always wear golden ornaments. If they were to go outside alone, there was the risk of being robbed by thieves who were men. So, it was said that women should not go out alone, without the escort of her father, husband or son (*Pitā rakṣati kaumāre...na strī svātantryamarhati*). Here the word *svātantryam* only means that she should not go alone. This word has been misinterpreted as if she has no independence and that she is to be placed under house arrest!

The girl also has equal share in any inherited property. In the context of parents passing on their property to their children, the word *putra* means both son and daughter (*Manuḥ putrebhyo dāyamadāt*—Veda). However, if one issue (son or daughter) is financially weaker than other issues, that weak issue (or weak issues) can be given more property. This modification of the general rule (*dharma*) is called *āpaddharma*. The ethical scripture

also gives a widow (*vidhavā*) the freedom to remarry, so that she is not forced into secret prostitution. In this context, she gets equal rights as a widower (*vidhura*). A woman can remarry in five situations, when her person life-partner (a) is dead, (b) becomes a saint, (c) happens to be impotent, (d) is lost somewhere and does not return at all and (e) becomes diseased as a result of his loose character (*Mṛte pravrajite klībe, naṣṭe ca patite patau, pañcatsvāpatsu nārīnām, patiranyo vidhīyate*). However, the remarriage of the widow or widower depends upon the will of the person and should not be forced.

3) Low castes and untouchability: There were four castes standing in the place of the head, hands, thighs and feet, as described in the Veda. Among these four parts of the body, which is greater and which is lower? Of course, the entire society respected the head and the hands which cause society to be ruled on the lines of justice. The head gives the entire knowledge, which determines the right direction to be taken and the hands implement those perfect plans in the administration. The president of the country is like the king (hands) and is greatly respected by the public. The prime minister of the country is like the head which makes all the plans on the lines of justice and is also greatly respected by the public. In every state of the country too, the governor and the chief minister are respected by the public. But does it mean that the president, prime minister, governor and chief minister alone are great and all other officers and the general public are low? Respect for a person or for a position held by the person is based on the recognition of the greatness of the person or position. It is not forced, but it comes naturally from the hearts of the public. Such natural respect for some persons or positions by the public is common to both the past and the present. But you are twisting this same concept negatively to blame the past by using words like suppression.

The concept of untouchability in ancient times was meaningful. The worst sinners from all the four castes were boycotted by society as untouchables. It is just like debarring the worst students from a school or institute. It was only done for their reformation and not with any vengeance. God created only four castes; not five (*Cātur varṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭam*—Gita). Then, where from did this fifth caste of untouchables come? In the relatively recent past, the concept of untouchability was twisted by the tape-recorder priests. They began to treat the son of an untouchable also as an untouchable. If the father was debarred from school when he was a student, is it right to debar his son from school too? Due to

this wrong practice, deep divisions were created in Hinduism and the religion lost the strength of unity.

Notice that the religion does not support such wrong practices. Śabari, who offered tasted berries to Lord Rāma and Kaṇṇappā, the hunter who sacrificed his own eyes to God Śiva, belonged to untouchable castes, which are now known as scheduled castes. Both these great devotees were given unique salvation and their images are today found in the worship-rooms of every Hindu family, irrespective of their caste. Even so-called *brāhmaṇas* by birth, worship them! Rāvaṇa was a *brāhmaṇa*, but was condemned as a demon because of his sinful qualities and deeds. Rāma was not a *brāhmaṇa*, yet the feet of the statue of Rāma are washed by people of all castes of Hinduism, including the so-called *brāhmaṇas*! Where is the unjust atrocity of the caste system in the ancient past? We agree to the atrocities of caste system in the relatively recent past and condemn them. The cause of those atrocities was the fact that the tape-recorder priests did not care to study the Vedas and understand the essence of the Vedas.

Which religious head said that sin should not be punished? There may be some variations in deciding what is sin and what is not sin. This state exists even now, due to which even the constitution often gets amended. **Atheists are always very hasty and emotional. They must first learn to develop the patience to listen to others with a calm and cool mind.** Whether the sinner is a religious head or an atheist, he can never escape the divine judge (God), even if he manages to escape the human judge in the court. The human judge gives a lot of time even to the criminal to listen to the logical arguments in his defense. God does not need this because He is omniscient. He is ready with the judgment and punishment as soon as the crime done! Yet God gives a lot of time to the sinner to reform himself or herself.

You said that *upanayanam* (sacred thread ceremony) is insignificant. I humbly beg to completely differ with you. *Upanayanam* is most important. It is the life of the entire history of humanity. *Upanayanam* means becoming close to God. But before that, one must accept the existence of the omniscient, omnipotent and unimaginable God. Then, Energetic and Human Incarnations must also be accepted through which God enters the upper worlds and this human world, respectively. Then, spiritual knowledge must be learnt from the Human Incarnation, who is known as the Sadguru or Jagadguru. Spiritual knowledge shows that souls can follow three possible paths: (1) The first and the lowest path is

duspravṛtti, in which the soul commits sins and violates justice. The person neglects rightful worldly bonds due to the fascination for illegitimate worldly bonds. (2) The second and middle path is *pravṛtti*, which is the path of justice in which the soul avoids sins and performs meritorious deeds. The person retains a controlled amount of fascination for legitimate worldly bonds like the bonds with parents, life-partner and children. But the person avoids illegitimate bonds and excessive fascination even for the legitimate worldly bonds, which are the causes of sins. (3) The third and highest path is *nivṛtti*, in which even the fascination for all legitimate worldly bonds is dropped. Note that the soul has already dropped the fascination for illegitimate worldly bonds when the soul climbed up from *duspravṛtti* to *pravṛtti*. So, it need not be mentioned again. While climbing up from *pravṛtti* to *nivṛtti*, only the fascination for one's legitimate bonds need to be dropped. Hence, the Gita only refers to the giving up of legitimate bonds (*Sarva dharmān parityajya...*). **The crucial point here is that the fascination for legitimate bonds is dropped as a result of the tremendous fascination for the divine personality of God.** This fascination for God (*bhakti yoga*) is developed by knowing about the divine personality of God through detailed spiritual knowledge (*jñāna yoga*).

One may doubt if there is any use of *nivṛtti* at all. Is it not sufficient if we only know *duspravṛtti* and *pravṛtti*? If a soul leaves *duspravṛtti* and follows *pravṛtti*; that is, one votes for justice instead of injustice; God should be pleased and should become close to that soul. Is this not enough? Why can we not forget about *nivṛtti* totally? These doubts can be answered in the following way: (1) If *nivṛtti* is absent, God is absent and in the absence of God, nobody cares for justice. People will think that there is no loss in committing sin as long as they can escape from the punishment of the sin given by the courts? Effective control of sin is possible only when every soul recognizes the existence of the unimaginable God who punishes in unimaginable ways, even if one manages to escape punishment from the law of the land. One can leave *duspravṛtti* and follow *pravṛtti* only when one accepts the existence of the unimaginable God. The Human Incarnation performs unimaginable miracles because the existence of the unimaginable God can directly be inferred from the unimaginable miracles alone. Of course, miracles are not to be taken as the only signs to identify God-in-human-form because miracles can also be done by demons, ghosts and black magicians. The indicators of the Human Incarnation of God include miracles along with the excellent divine knowledge given by Him

and His excellent divine love for devotees. (2) The second reason for the necessity of *nivṛtti* is that only when the path of *nivṛtti* is fully explained, can it serve as guidance for the few souls who are interested in *nivṛtti*. If only the path to *pravṛtti* is explained, the souls interested in *nivṛtti* get excluded. By explaining the path to *nivṛtti*, all of humanity is covered. (3) The third reason why *nivṛtti* is necessary, is that defining *nivṛtti* as the highest goal enables the attainment of at least the intermediate goal of *pravṛtti*. Leaving *duspravṛtti* and following *pravṛtti* alone is relevant to the majority of humanity. But even for them, it is necessary to explain the path of *nivṛtti* very well. They should know that *nivṛtti* alone yields the highest fruit (*Nivṛttistu mahāphalā*). People are always attracted to the highest fruit. So, they will put in effort to attain the highest goal, which is *nivṛtti*. Even though all may not succeed in attaining *nivṛtti*, they will at least succeed in attaining *pravṛtti*. If they set the goal of completely giving up all worldly bonds, which includes both illegitimate as well as legitimate bonds, due to the attachment to God, they might at least succeed in giving up illegitimate bonds. They might at least be able to give up the excessive fascination for their legitimate bonds. This itself is the attainment of *pravṛtti*, since one commits sins due to the excessive fascination for one's legitimate bonds and the fascination for illegitimate bonds. If the aim is the highest, which is obtaining 100% marks, one will work hard and may at least obtain passing marks of 40%.

Bhagavān Shri Satya Sai Baba, the most recent Human Incarnation of God Dattātreya always preached about Truth, Justice, Peace and Love as being the four pillars of His divine spiritual knowledge. These four pillars represent the four castes respectively. The caste of *brāhmaṇas* is symbolized by the brain and it represents the identification of the truth by logical analysis. The face or mouth which also symbolizes the *brāhmaṇas*, represents the propagation of true spiritual knowledge in the form of speeches. The mouth is located just below the brain, indicating that after studying the true spiritual knowledge, you must propagate it by preaching. The hands representing the caste of *kṣatriyas* and they are very close to the head, which means that whatever is studied and preached should also be implemented practically in the form of the work done by the hands. The hands must fight against injustice and protect justice. The thighs represent the caste of the *vaiśyas*. The thighs enable a person to sit stably. They indicate settlement and peace in society, which is achieved with the distribution of wealth and essential items in society. The feet represent the fourth caste, called the *sūdras*. Feet are necessary for walking or running

and they represent the dynamism. They represent the hard work involved in serving society with love by producing food for all. *Śūdras* perform this most essential service for the whole society.

Shri Baba would always start His speech with a spontaneous poem, which is the Ṛg Veda. Then, He would give a long speech on spiritual knowledge, which is prose or the Yajur Veda. Finally, He would end the speech by singing devotional songs in His divine sweet voice, which is the Sāma Veda. The final devotional song is the most attractive and it is called Gāyatrī, which is the universal technique of attracting God. *Mantra* means the repetition of the chorus in the song (*Mananāt trāyate iti*). This is the universal Gāyatrī Mantra. This technique was invented by Sage Viśvāmitra, meaning the sage who is the friend of entire universe (*Viśvāmitra ṛṣiḥ*). The word Viśvāmitra can also have the opposite meaning that the sage is an enemy of the universe (*Viśva+Amitra*). Unfortunately, it is this second meaning that the tape-recorder priests established due to their three errors: (1) They misinterpreted a Vedic verse written in the Gāyatrī meter as the Gāyatrī Mantra. (2) They confined this false Gāyatrī Mantra only to the three so-called upper castes. (3) They denied it to the women of all castes and also to the fourth caste of *śūdras*.

Maharshi Dayānanda immediately rectified the errors by extending the ritual to all human beings. This was only an immediate first-aid treatment. People may say that this remedy was useful to them, but this remedy has a problem. People may question how the injustice done to their forefathers by denying this ritual to them can be rectified. This question has been answered by Datta Swami. The sacred thread ceremony only contains the false Gāyatrī and not the real Gāyatrī. The so-called Gāyatrī Mantra was assumed to be the Gāyatrī, but it is not so, in reality. The actual initiation of a child into the Gāyatrī Mantra is to train the child in singing the most melodious prayer-songs in praise of God from their very childhood. To tell you the truth, those conservative priests fell in the pit dug by themselves because what they chant is not the real Gāyatrī Mantra, whereas the others sing songs in praise of God, which is the real Gāyatrī Mantra. So, those who were deprived are the ones who were really benefitted!

Upanayanam, which is becoming close, closer and closest to God, is the essence of the entire spiritual knowledge. By leaving the sinful and unjust path of *duṣpravr̥tti*, one becomes close to God. By following *pravr̥tti*, which is supporting justice and to performing meritorious deeds, one becomes closer to God. Finally, practicing *nivr̥tti* by rising above both

duspravṛtti (illegitimate worldly bonds) and *pravṛtti* (legitimate worldly bonds), in order to have the sole eternal bond with God, one becomes closest to God. The feet and thighs standing for *pravṛtti* are the lower parts, whereas the hands and the face standing for *nivṛtti* are the upper parts. The words like lower and higher are used in the sense of the height from the ground and not in the sense of their importance. The lower foundation is more important than the house built above because the house cannot stand at all without its foundation. Therefore, the caste system based on qualities and deeds never creates any divisions in the Hindu religion or in any other religion.

Hence, instead of discussing about the merits and demerits of the past and the present, let us identify the merits of both the past and the present and leave the defects of both the past and the present, so that we can avoid the horrible sinful situation of the present through the propagation of divine spiritual knowledge. Two persons were quarrelling for a fruit basket and in their quarrel, the fruits fell in the drainage. The quarrel between them still continued and they did not notice that the fruits had already fallen in the drainage. The quarrel is for the past-present basket. But the fruits, which are the practical steps to be taken to spread spiritual knowledge to every soul are being lost in the quarrel!