



# SANATANA DHARMA PARICHAYA

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## LESSON 1

### INTRODUCTION TO SANĀTANA-DHARMA



सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तमद्वयमखण्डानन्द-नादं परम्  
शुद्धं ब्रह्म यतो निवृत्तमखिलं ब्रह्माण्डमत् प्रापकम्।  
यस्यैवाच्युतशङ्करप्रभृतयश्चित्रोदयाश्रायया  
तस्य प्राप्तिकृते सनातनमिदं धर्मांशुतं सेव्यताम् ॥

*satyaṁ jñānāmanantamadvayamakhaṇḍānanda-nādaṁ param  
śuddhaṁ brahma yato nivṛttamakhilam brahmaṇḍamat prāpakam,  
yasyaivācyutaśaṅkaraprabhṛtayaścitraodayāścāyayā  
tasya prāptikṛte sanātanamidam dharmāṁṣutaṁ sevayatām.*

This verse states that, to reach and realise ‘That’, one must follow and practise Sanātana-dharma, which is amṛta. ‘That’ here is Brahman, which is satya, ananta, advaya, akhaṇḍa-ānanda, para, śuddha, and so on. Once one realises Brahman, one gains the entire universe. Clearly, to attain Brahman, one has to drink the nectar of Sanātana-dharma – that is, one must live Sanātana-dharma.

Sanātana-dharma is not the religion of a particular society; it is a universal religion. In ancient times, it was practised everywhere. With the passage of time, however, these practices either stopped, dissolved, or became divided into many smaller practices. Yet Sanātana-dharma is eternal—it was, it is, and it shall be forever. It is present everywhere, though in different expressions.

The mission of Sanātana-dharma is beautifully expressed in the dictum: “आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगत्-हिताय च” (*ātmano mokṣārtham jagat-hitāya ca*) – Sanātana-dharma is meant for uplifting oneself and for the welfare of all.

## How to Study Sanātana-dharma

As the subject of Sanātana-dharma is of ādhyātmika nature, it is not studied in the same way as material topics. The study of śāstra is considered **catuṣpāda** (fourfold). Only when all four aspects are covered is the study deemed complete.

## The Four Aspects of Śāstra Study

1. **Adhīti** – Study. Total attention, with the mind fully focussed on the teaching. The mind should be attuned to that of the Ācārya, not missing even a single word.
2. **Bodha** – Understanding. Mere listening is not sufficient. One must reflect upon what has been taught and understand it thoroughly.
3. **Ācaraṇa** – Practice. Understanding alone is not enough; what has been learnt must be put into action.
4. **Pracaraṇa** – Propagation. Knowledge is not complete until it is shared with others. Teaching and spreading wisdom is essential.

When all these four steps are undertaken, the study of the śāstra becomes complete.

To study Sanātana-dharma is our duty. While there may be variations in certain practices due to differences in cultures and traditions, the foundation remains the same:

“यत्र विश्वं भवति एकनीडम्।”

*yatra viśvaṃ bhavati ekanīḍam.*

Where the whole world becomes like one nest.

In ancient times, our dharma had no specific name, as there was only one dharma everywhere. However, with the passage of time, other dharmas such as Bauddha, Jaina and so on appeared, and then various terms began to be used to denote our dharma.

## 1. Ārṣa-dharma

In the beginning, it was called Ārṣa-dharma. The term ārṣa means ‘ṛṣeḥ ayam’ – that which belongs to ṛṣi or comes from ṛṣi.

There are various meanings of the term ṛṣi:

- a. **Mantra-draṣṭāraḥ** – To whom the mantras are revealed. The mantras are seen by the ṛṣi. There are different levels of Consciousness and four levels of speech (vāk) – parā, paśyantī, madhyamā, vaikhari. Vaikhari is the speech we use and hear. At the parā level, one is connected to the Supreme. Words heard at parā vāṇī are śuddha and divya. One who is in union with the Supreme with a calm and quiet mind and who hears, sees, and feels the mantras is a ṛṣi. Such a person can listen to the inner voice.  
*ṛṣayo mantra-draṣṭāraḥ na tu kartāraḥ* – The ṛṣi is the seer of the mantra; and not its creator.
- b. **Samyak darśinaḥ** – Who has the right vision and sees Truth in its essence.
- c. **Atīndriyārtha-darśinaḥ** – Who can see the artha (meaning) in objects that are not seen or perceived by the indriyas. Dharma and Brahman are atīndriya topics, not perceived by any of our senses.
- d. **Ṛṣyati prāpnoti sarvān mantrān jñānena** – One who perceives all or becomes one with all; one who can connect with all the beings. Ṛṣis could do so because they were studying the subject not as observers but as subjects.
- e. **Tapasā ṛṣam iti ṛṣiḥ** – One who, with penance, has overcome all the lower negative tendencies.

## 2. *Vaidika-dharma*

The term 'vaidika' has four meanings:

- a. **Vedāt jātam** – That which is born out of or originated from the Vedas.
- b. **Vede uktam** – That which is stated or said in the Vedas.
- c. **Vedena vikasitam** – That which is elaborated or explained through the Vedas.
- d. **Veda-pramāṇagatam** – That which is known through the Veda-pramāṇa.

So the dharma which originated from and is stated, explained, and known through the Vedas is Vaidika-dharma.

### 3. Ārya-dharma

The term 'ārya' has been misconstrued due to the divide and rule policy used by the British. They differentiated between Ārya and Drāviḍa and propagated the belief that Āryans invaded India. However, there is extremely weak external and no internal evidence at all to support this theory.

The term 'drāviḍa' comes from draviṇam which means wealth, and it indicates the land where there is lot of wealth. Ārya means a person who is – *prāptum āśrayitum gantum योग्याह* – fit to take refuge in, one whom you can believe in, who will never cheat you.

कर्तव्यमाचरन् कार्यम् अकर्तव्यमनाचरन् ।

तिष्ठति प्रकृताचारे स वा आर्य इति स्मृतः ॥

*kartavyamācaran kāryam akartavyamanācaran,  
tiṣṭhati prakṛtācāre sa vā ārya iti smṛtaḥ.*

A person who always does his duties – that is, the person who always practises dharma and will never do adharma, even if he dies, one who is firmly established in dharma (*Bhagavad-gītā* – “*svadharme nidhanam śreyaḥ*”) – that person is Ārya.

The word Ārya-putra is often found in Saṁskṛta literature. In olden days, when the wife was not supposed to utter the name of the husband, she used to refer to him as Ārya or Ārya-putra. Here too, the term denotes a person in whom she can put her faith.

Thus, the term 'ārya' is not a race as propagated by the British, but indicates the qualities, the characteristics of the person.

Amarakośa (Saṁskṛta dictionary) describes the word 'ārya' as mahākula (born in great lineage), kulīna (one who protects dharma and kula), sabhya (decent – *'sabhāyān sthātum योग्याह'*), sajjana (who has pure heart), sādharmaḥ (who will never deviate from the path of dharma).

So the dharma practised by Ārya is Ārya-dharma, which inspires him/her to never deviate from the virtuous path.

#### 4. Bhāratīya-dharma

The term 'bhāratīya' means 'bhāratasya idam' – that which is of Bharata.

There were four Bharatas (भरत) in our country:

- a. **Bharata** – the brother of Prabhu Rāmacandra. Rāma was the idol of dharma – *rāmo viḡrahavān dharmah*. Bharata is said to be the Self of Rāma. So here Bharata is the manifestation of Dharma.
- b. **Bharata** – the son of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā – a great virtuous king. His name was Sarvadamana (one who controls everyone). Earlier, the entire land was one, later divided into dvīpas. Jambūdvīpa, which has Bhārata, was further divided into nine khaṇḍas. King Sarvadamana made Bhārata- varṣa/ khaṇḍa into a kingdom and came to be known as Bhārata. Hence, this Bharata denotes artha (wealth).
- c. **Bharata Muni** – one who wrote Nāṭyaśāstra and brought art and aesthetics into the land to which he belonged. It is the kāma aspect of life. Kāma here does not mean lust, but beauty in its entirety, whether through singing, painting, acting, or the 64 kalās which are art forms. Bhagavān Śaṅkara and Pārvatī are called Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī (embodiments of beauty). Here, Bharata represents Kāma.
- d. **Bharata** – the great son of Rṣabhadeva, the first tīrthaṅkara of the Jains, believed to be an avatāra of Bhagavān Viṣṇu. There is a story in the Bhāgavata about Bharata. Here, Bharata represents mokṣa.

Thus, Bhārata is a place for Dharma, artha, kāma, and Mokṣa.

There is another definition of Bhārata – '*bhāsi prakāśe ramate*' – land where people are automatically attracted and interested in absolute light. 'Bhā' means light. The light here is the light of wisdom, Mokṣa-prakāśa. Thus, Bhārata is a land that revels in light – the light of wisdom, knowledge, and freedom. It is '*mokṣāṇām sthānam*', place of Liberations.

Thus, Bhāratīya-dharma is dharma which holds each and every being, at whatever stage he is, and slowly raises him up. It is a land wherein all

puruṣārthas (Dharma, artha, kāma, and Mokṣa) are fulfilled and one can reach the pinnacle.

## 5. Hindu-dharma

The meaning of the term 'Hindu' can be understood as per external evidence as well as internal evidence.

### a. External Evidence

In languages such as Persian, Arabic and so on, the syllable 'sa' is pronounced as 'ha'. Hence, Sindhu river was referred to as Hindu river. People on the banks of Sindhu river and situated beyond the river were termed as Hindu.

### b. Internal Evidence

The term 'Hindu' is explained in our śāstra at different places.

- **Mādhava-digvijaya** – This famous text (grantha) states that:

ॐकार-मन्त्र-मूलाढ्याः पुनर्जन्म-दृढाशयाः ।

गोभक्तो भारतो गुरुः हिन्दुर्हिंसन-दूषकः ॥

*omkāra-mantra-mūlādhyāḥ punarjanma-dṛḍhāśayāḥ,  
gobhaktō bhārato guruḥ hindurhimsana-dūṣakaḥ.*

Hindu is a person who takes up Omkāra as mantra – as base of his existence, who believes in punarjanma, who always worships cow, who is born in Bhārata, one who is Guru (having great wisdom) and never wishes to harm, hurt, do wrong things – physical, mental or otherwise to anybody.

- **Kalpadruma** – This Saṁskṛta dictionary defines Hindu as:

हीनं दूषयति इति हिन्दुः ।

*hīnam dūṣayati iti hinduḥ.*

One who opposes adharmā, who would even give up his life to uphold dharma and to destroy adharmā.

- **Parāśara-smṛti**

There are 18 smṛtis and 18 upasmṛtis. Smṛtis are like lawbooks laying down rules and regulations for living.

**Parāśara-smṛti states:**

हिमालयं समारभ्य यावत् इन्दु-सरोवरम्।

तं देव-निर्मितं देशं हिन्दुस्थानं प्रचक्ष्यते ॥

*himālayaṁ samārabhya yāvat indu-sarovaram,*

*taṁ deva-nirmitaṁ deśaṁ hindusthānaṁ pracakṣyate.*

The land starting from the Himālaya and extending up to Indu-sarovara – the ocean created by God (Indian Ocean) – is termed Hindusthāna.

• **Meru-tantra**

In Meru-tantra, during Parameśvara–Pārvatī saṁvāda (conversation), Parameśvara explains to Pārvatī:

हिनस्ति दुष्टान् हीनं च दूषयत्येव हिन्दुः इति उच्यते।

*hinasti duṣṭān hīnaṁ ca dūṣayatyeva hinduḥ iti ucyate.*

A person who opposes wicked people and adharmā (wickedness) is called Hindu.

• **Vyāghra-upaniṣad**

A minor Upaniṣad known as *Vyāghropaniṣad* states:

हकारेण सूर्यः स्यात् इन्दुरिति चन्द्रमाः सूर्य-चन्द्र-वंश-जातो हिन्दुः इति भण्यते।

*hakāreṇa sūryaḥ syāt indur-iti candramāḥ*

*sūrya-candra-vaṁśa-jāto hinduḥ iti bhāṇyate.*

Here, the term Hindu is broken as ‘h + indu’, wherein ‘ha’ is Sūrya (sun) and ‘indu’ means Candra (moon). A person who is born in either Sūryavaṁśa (of Prabhu Rāmacandra) or Candravaṁśa (of Śrī Kṛṣṇa) is known as Hindu.

The term Hindu is also defined as:

आसिन्धुसिन्धुपर्यन्ता यस्य भारतभूमिका।

पितृभूःपुण्यभूश्चैव स वै हिन्दुरिति स्मृतः ॥

*āsindhusindhuparyantā yasya bhārata-bhūmikā,*

*pitṛbhūḥ puṇyabhūścaiva sa vai hinduriti smṛtaḥ.*

A person who believes that the land from Sindhu river on west to Gaṅgā-samudra on the east, is his land – motherland, is Hindu. This means that the person should have a feeling of belonging to the culture, to the traditions of the land to be called as Hindu.

## 6. Sanātana-dharma

Proclamations regarding the term Sanātana-dharma are found at various places.

*Matsya-purāṇa*, chapter 143, verses 13–32; *Bhāgavata*, skandha 7, chapter 11, verse 2; and *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa*, chapter 2, verses 33–38 discuss Sanātana-dharma.

The term ‘sanātana’ is derived from the indeclinable (avyaya) ‘sanat’. Certain pratyayas, such as ‘an’, are added to form the word sanātana. The meaning of sanat is nitya – eternal. The word indicates that it is not created at any point in time and that it is beyond time. It is akhaṇḍita – cannot be broken or destroyed.

सनात् अखण्डिताभ्याद्वा स्वतपसा दानतः शुभात्।

स्नेहात् परिपोषाद्वा यो धर्मः स सनातनः ॥

*sanāt akhaṇḍitābhyādvā svatapasā dānataḥ śubhāt,*  
*snehāt paripoṣādvā yo dharmāḥ sa sanātanaḥ.*

Śāstra states:

एषोऽनुपस्कृतः प्रोक्तो योऽसौ धर्मः सनातनः।

अस्माद्धर्मात् न च्यवते जनाः सुकृतिनः सदा ॥

*eṣo’nupaskṛtaḥ prokto yo’sau dharmāḥ sanātanaḥ,*  
*asmāddharmāt na cyavate janāḥ sukṛtinaḥ sadā.*

Anupaskṛta (that which is not upaskṛta) means it is not created at a point of time by any person. As per Nyāya (logic), whatever is created or born will eventually be destroyed. This dharma is nitya – eternal, never broken – akhaṇḍita. Those who follow it are blessed – sukṛtinaḥ.

From all these definitions and explanations, it is clear that this dharma helps to achieve all four puruṣārthas and provides the right guidance for whichever goal one prefers to pursue.

