Our Sacred Scriptures
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Revealed by God and realized by man, holy texts contain wide-ranging knowledge and a spiritual blueprint for a faith without beginning or end.

There are thousands of Hindu scriptures, beginning with the Rig Veda. The Vedas and Agamas are called sruti, "that which is heard," and are direct revelations from God. The smriti, "that which is remembered," are the secondary scriptures covering every aspect of life. While Hindus differ in their acceptance and use of the vast smriti texts, they all accord primary authority to the Vedas and Agamas. Here and on the next two pages we explore the rich mine of Hindu sacred literature.

Do Smriti and Sacred Literature Differ?

Hindu sacred literature is a treasury of hymns, legend, mythology, philosophy, science and ethics. From among this vast body of writings, each lineage recognizes a select portion as its secondary scripture, called smriti. Aum.

While the Vedas and Agamas are shared as part of every Hindu's primary scripture, shruti, each sect and lineage defines its own unique set of smriti. The sacred literature, punya shastra, from which smriti is drawn consists of writings, both ancient and modern, in many languages. Especially central are the ancient Sanskritic texts, such as the Itihasas, Puranas and Dharma Shastras, which are widely termed the classical smriti. In reality, while many revere these as smriti, others regard them only as sacred literature. Smriti means "that which is remembered" and is known as "the tradition," for it derives from human insight and experience and preserves the course of culture. While shruti comes from God and is eternal and universal, the ever-growing smriti canon is written by man. Hinduism's

sacred literature is the touchstone of theater and dance, music, song and pageantry, yoga and sadhana, metaphysics and ethics, exquisite art and hallowed sciences. The Vedas inquire, "In whom are set firm the firstborn seers, the hymns, the songs and the sacrificial formulas, in whom is established the single seer-tell me of that support-who may He be?"

## What Texts Amplify Vedas and Agamas?

Many texts support the Vedas and Agamas. Vedangas detail conduct, astrology, language and etymology. Upavedas unfold politics, health, warfare and music. Upagamas and Paddhatis elaborate the Agamic wisdom. Aum.

Much of Hinduism's practical knowledge is safeguarded in venerable texts which amplify shruti. The Vedangas and Upavedas are collections of texts that augment and apply the Vedas as a comprehensive system of sacred living. Jyotisha Vedanga delineates auspicious timing for holy rites. Kalpa Vedanga defines public rituals in the Shrauta and Shulba Sutras, domestic rites in the Grihya Sutras and religious law in the Dharma Shastras. Four other Vedangas ensure the purity of mantra recitation, through knowledge of phonetics, grammar, poetry and the way of words. The Upavedas expound profound sciences: Arthaveda unfolds statecraft; ayurveda sets forth medicine and health; Dhanurveda discusses military science; Gandharvaveda illumines music and the arts; and Sthapatyaveda explains architecture. In addition, the Kama Sutras detail erotic pleasures. The Agamas, too, have ancillary texts, such as the Upagamas and Paddhatis, which elaborate the ancient wisdom. The Jnaneshvari says, "The Vedas in their perfection are as the beautiful image of the God, of which the flawless words are the resplendent body. The smritis are the limbs thereof."

## Does Hinduism Have Epics and Myths?

The Mahabharata and Ramayana are Hinduism's most renowned epic histories, called Itihasa. The Puranas are popular folk narratives, teaching faith, belief and ethics in mythology, allegory, legend and symbolism. Aum.

Hinduism's poetic stories of rishis, Gods, heroes and demons are sung by gifted panditas and traveling bards, narrated to children and portrayed in dramas and festivals. The Mahabharata, the world's longest epic poem, is the legend of two ancient dynasties whose great battle of Kurukshetra is the scene of the Bhagavad Gita, the eloquent spiritual dialog between Arjuna and Krishna. The Ramayana relates the life of Rama, a heroic king revered as the ideal man. The Puranas, like the Mahabharata, are encyclopedic in scope, containing teachings on sadhana, philosophy, dharma, ritual, language and the arts, architecture, agriculture, magic charms and more. Of eighteen principal Puranas, six honor God as Siva, six as Vishnu and six as Brahma. The witty Panchatantra, eminent among the "story" literature, or katha, portrays wisdom through animal fables and parables. The Bhagavad Gita proclaims, "He who reads this sacred dialog of ours, by him I consider Myself worshiped through the sacrifice of knowledge. And the man who listens to it with faith and without scoffing, liberated, he shall attain to the happy realm of the righteous."

Are There Other Types of Sacred Texts?

India's lofty philosophical texts expound diverse views in exacting dialectics. Yoga treatises unveil the mysterious path to ultimate samadhis. Intimate devotional hymns disclose the raptures of consummate Divine love. Aum.

In addition to the epics, legends and supplements to the Vedas and agamas, there is a wealth of Hindu metaphysical, yogic and devotional writings. Considered foundational are the early texts defining the six philosophical darshanas: the sutras by Kapila, Patanjali, Jaimini, Badarayana, Kanada and Gautama. Hailed as leading occult works on yoga, asanas, nadis, chakras, kundalini and samadhi are the Yoga Sutras, Tirumantiram, Yoga Vasishtha, Siva Sutras, Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati, Jnaneshvari, Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita. Widely extolled among the bhakti literature are the Bhagavad Gita, Narada Sutras, Tiruvasagam, the Vachanas of the Sivasharanas and the hymns of mystic poets like Surdas, Tukaram, Ramprasad, Mirabai, Andal, Vallabha, Tulasidasa, Tayumanavar, Lalla, Tagore, Auvaiyar and the saintly Nayanars and Alvars. The Bhagavad Gita explains, "As a blazing fire reduces the wood to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all activity to ashes. There is nothing on earth which possesses such power to cleanse as wisdom. The perfect yogin finds this knowledge in himself by himself in due time."

## What Is the Source of This Catechism?

The philosophical basis of this catechism is the monistic Saiva Siddhanta of the Kailasa Parampara as expressed in the Vedas, Saiva Agamas, Tirukural, Tirumurai, Tirumantiram and contemporary scripture. Aum.

This catechism, prashnottaram, is the creation of the living lineage of seers known as the Kailasa Parampara, of the South Indian Saivite school called Shuddha Saiva Siddhanta, Advaita Siddhanta or monistic Saiva Siddhanta. It reflects the teachings of the Vedas and Saiva agamas, the profound Tamil scriptures Tirumurai and Tirukural and the revelations of contemporary Kailasa gurus. The Tirumurai is a twelve-book collection of hymns of numerous Saivite saints. Most important among these is the Tirumantiram, a siddha yoga treatise by Rishi Tirumular, recording the Saiva tenets in 3,047 verses. It is prized as the confluence of Siddhanta and Vedanta. The Tirukural, containing 1,330 couplets by the weaver saint Tiruvalluvar, is among the world's greatest ethical scriptures, sworn on in South Indian courts of law. Natchintanai are the sacred hymns of Sri Lanka's Sage Yogaswami. Tayumanavar says, "I meditate on the great light of the Siddhanta, the thought of all thoughts, the life of all life, which, existing in all objects without distinction, causes a spring of inestimably pure and happy nectar to flow for the good of its followers."