

MULTI-FACETED VEDIC HINDUISM

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Introduction

Life in the universe is a wonderful mystery. Human beings have the privilege of seeking, understanding and experiencing the mystery of life. In a triadic approach based on the Vedas, existence of life can be described as God (Ishwara), Universe (Jagat) and individual (Jeeva). Any individual human being could see the universe as an entity that consists of all beings including other individuals and nature. The GOD as Supreme Being is seen as a free and independent entity responsible for Generation, Operation and Dissolution of everything in the universe and all beings. Thus it can be seen that One God as Bramhan with all attributes is the unitary source of all manifestations. Any human being is eligible to make connection with this One Source from which all knowledge manifest. The multi-faceted knowledge emanating from this One Source is referred as Vedas, which is infinite and eternal. This infinite body of knowledge as Vedas and Vedic literature can be represented as an inverted tree shown in figure 1 and also referred in Bhagavadgita (15-1).

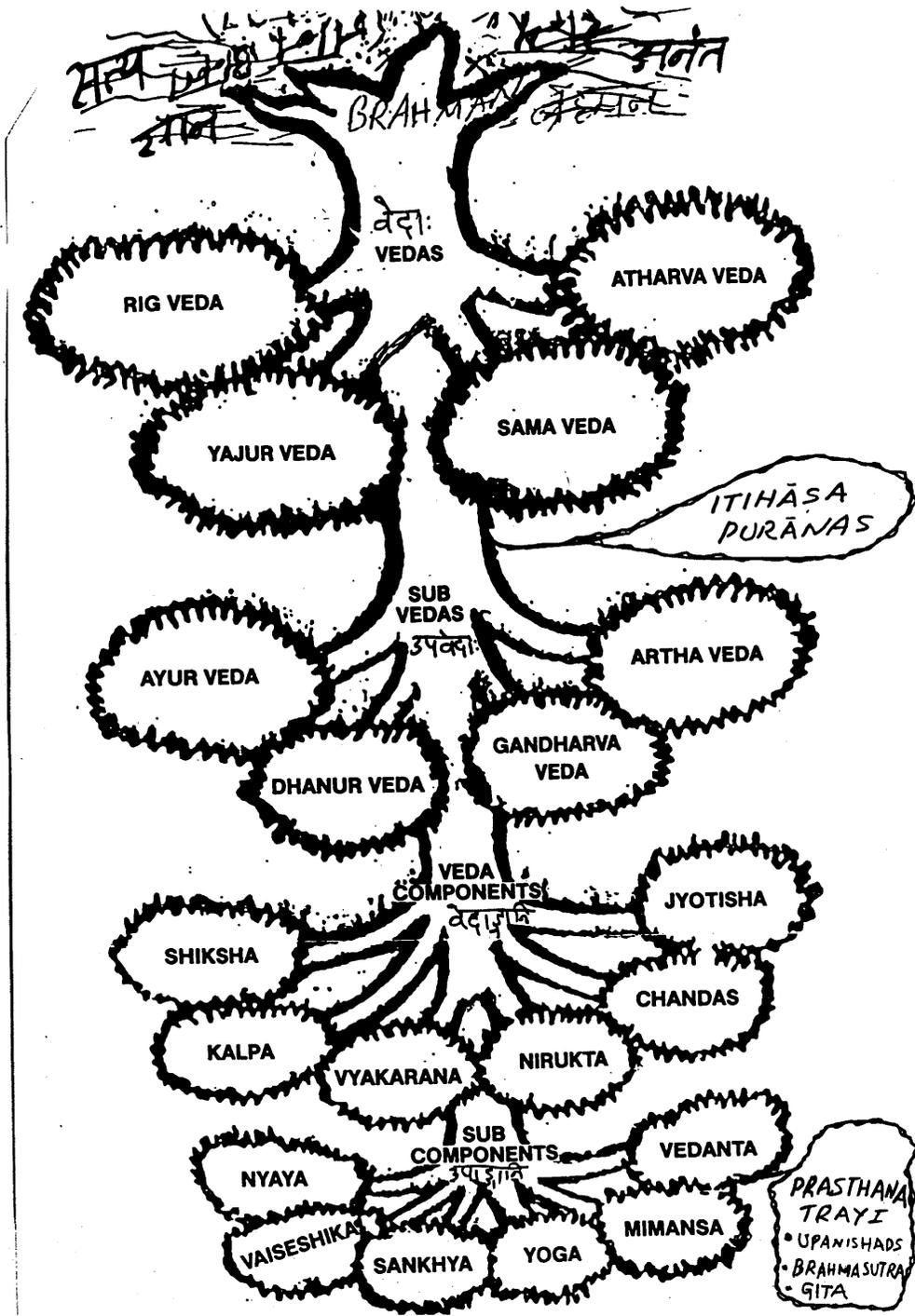


Figure 1: Inverted tree

This inverted tree representation can be used to describe the multi-faceted Vedic Hinduism (Sanatana dharma). In Vishnusahasranama, we have the verse:

Yogo jnanam tathaa sankhyam vidya shilpadi karma cha

Vedaa shastraani vijnanam etatt sarvam Janardhanat

Which means that yoga, all types of knowledge, art, sculptures, rituals, Vedas, Vedic scriptures and science have emanated from Janardhana denoting One Source. Thus, this multi-faceted nature of Vedic Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma offers the seekers with diverse aptitudes several pathways to approach that One Source of Light and Bliss.

The multi-faceted nature of Vedic Hinduism is due to innumerable number of great rishis (seers) and yogis who showed the paths of reaching that One Source. In the words of a seer-yogi, Sriranga Sadguru, “It is the view of the rishis of Bharata that spiritual enlightenment is the ultimate goal of life. That is attainment of ultimate joy (Ananda). That is liberation (Mukti). Spiritual knowledge (Jnana) is that by which one merges into the light of atman as river merges into the ocean. The rishis or jnanis having attained this ultimate goal have brought forth the knowledge in science and arts (vijnana) keeping in line with their roots in spiritual knowledge (jnana) because vijnana is the manifestation of jnana. It is for this reason that an in-depth sincere study of knowledge in science and arts at any stage of manifestation will lead into attainment of the ultimate goal of spiritual knowledge (jnana)”.

Multi-faceted Vedic Hinduism

Vedic Hinduism can be seen through its manifestations such as rituals, sculptures, temples, dance, music, mantras, yoga including meditation, science and philosophical systems. The vedic rituals and religious practices are based on the spiritual core. This transfer of tradition from generation to generation forms an important aspect of Vedic Hinduism. The various rituals (samskaras) are carried out at various stages of life of a Hindu to awaken, strengthen, nourish and refine the mind so that it can advance towards the spiritual knowledge. These rituals include first feeding of food, beginning of learning, wedding, pregnancy etc. In addition to these rituals, the temples and festivals play an important role in transferring sustaining and transferring the Vedic tradition.

A Hindu temple is a representation (figure 2) of a human being with the Deity in the temple representing the God as indweller in humans and all beings. In a temple the feet represents rajagopura, the heart represents mahamandapa and the crown of the head represents the sanctum sanctorum (garbha griha). The temple is used as a reminder that our spiritual journey is inside to see the indweller God.

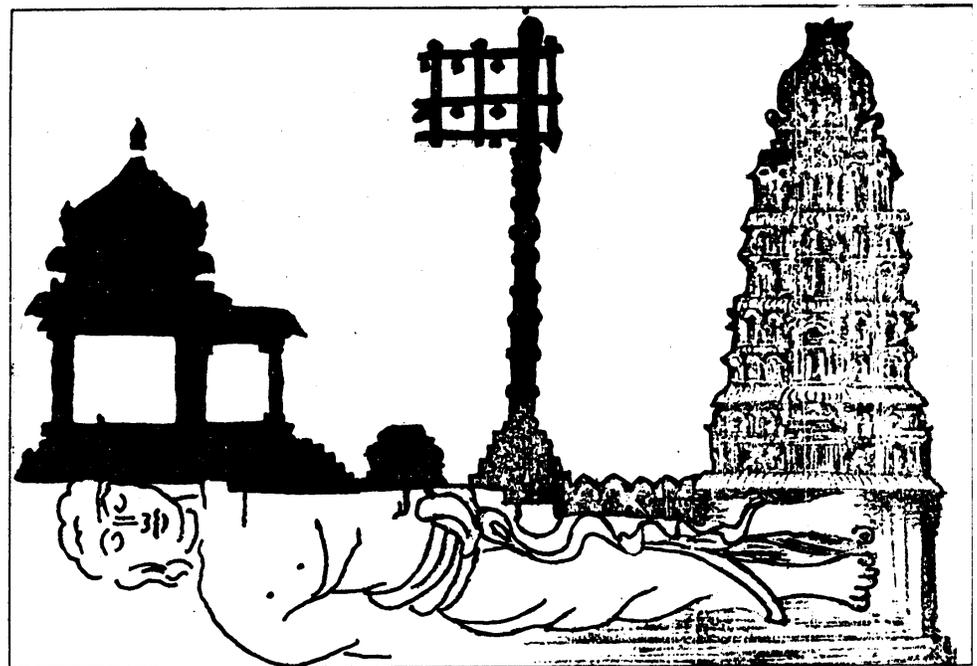
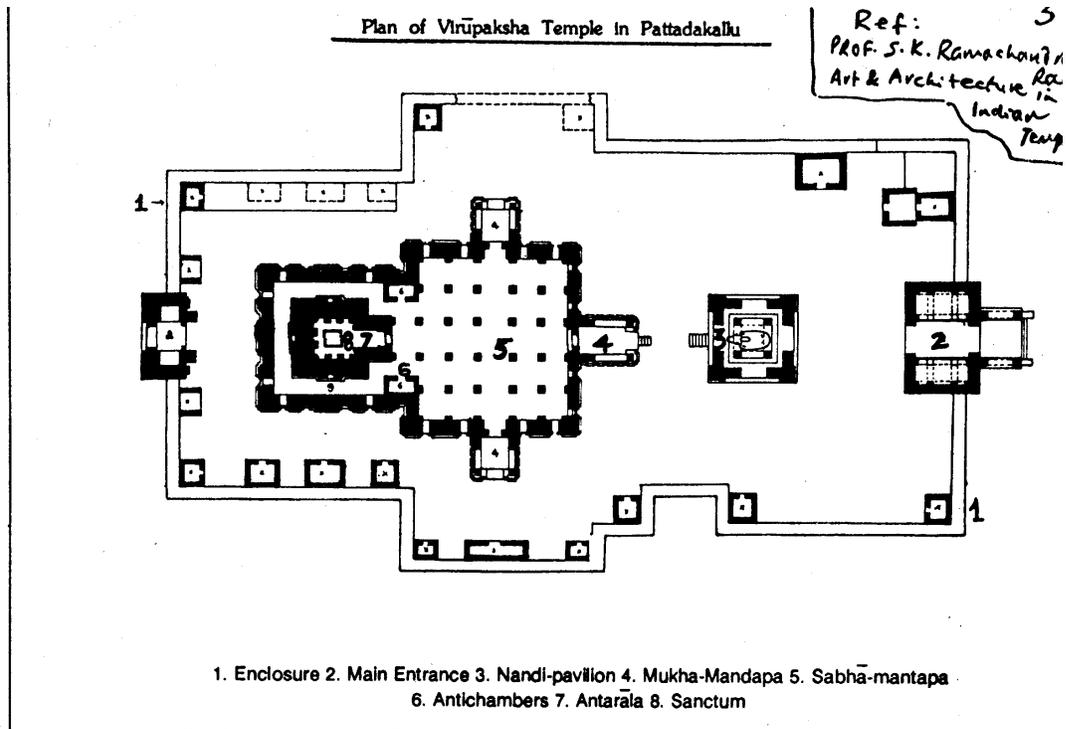


Figure 2: Representatin of a Hindu temple

The rituals in a pooja such as invoking god into deity, giving sacred bath with chanting, decoration, offering food and waving lamp helps the seekers to internalize the spiritual

energy. Also, the seekers can make connections through five senses to focus their mind on God. A Vedic Hindu festival has many aspects of significance namely, spiritual, philosophical, religious and socio-cultural. Celebrations of various festivals have sustained the dynamic nature of Vedic Hinduism.

The icons or deities of Gods and Goddesses also help the seekers to focus on the concepts. These icons are not imaginations but they are manifestations of the Supreme Being in the inner yogic visions of the seers. Thus the icons depict the inner concepts in a visible form. The Goddess Saraswati shown in figure 3 is the Goddess of speech, music and knowledge. She is seated on a lotus denoting the heart. In Her right hand, the rosary (akshamala) represents the alphabets of a language (Sanskrit). The musical instrument (Veena) represents the spinal cord important in physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of life. The book in Her left hand denotes the knowledge. The swan as Her vehicle represents the devotee. She is clad in white cloths to indicate the purity in pursuit of knowledge. Thus we can see that deity worship is an important means to internalize and develop the spiritual insight.



Figure 3: Goddess Saraswati

The Vedic Hinduism asserts that all changing manifestations are referred to the Supreme Unchanging God as Source and Substratum. These continuous changes are described as a

dance. The Lord Shiva as King of Dancers (Lord Nataraja) shown in figure 4 illustrates this principle.



FROM 'AMARAVANI' by SRIRANGA MAHARAJA
ಅಮರವಾಣಿ
ASTANGA YOGA VIDYANA MANDIRAM
57, Sushruti, Iyer Road,
Laxmiduram, MYSORE 570004 INDIA

Figure 4; Lord Nataraja as a Divine dancer

The divine dance posture of Lord Nataraja depicts spiritual bliss obtained by the state of balance achieved through the process of yoga. The drum and the fire in His right and left

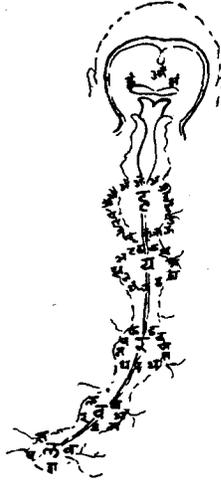
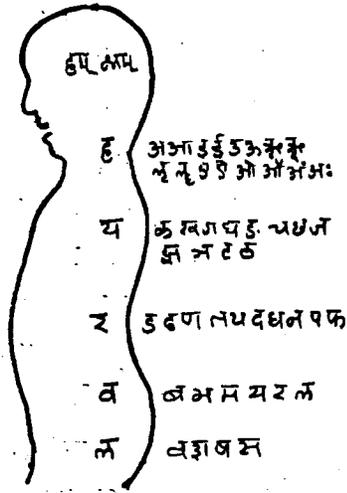
hands signify the vital forces namely, prana and apana respectively. The union of prana and apana is the goal of yoga. The snake signifies the yogic energy as Kundalini. The fearlessness as His blessing is indicated by His two hands in the middle. The dwarf-demon called as Apasmara denotes forgetfulness. The Vedic literature says that ignorance in the form of forgetfulness (of one's divinity) makes humans unconscious of the indwelling divinity. This ignorance is the cause of suffering. The darkness created by Apasmara has to be dispelled by the divine dance of Lord Nataraja, which brings spiritual enlightenment. In a verse, Swami Sriranga Priya says :

Om namo Natarajaya shuddha jnana svaroopine

Bhaktanam hridaye nityam divyam nrityam prakurvate

Which means, "Salutations to the Lord Nataraja, Whose form is pure spiritual knowledge. He dances everyday in heart-altar of all devotees".

The divine dance of Lord Nataraja also signifies the yogic process. The importance of various chakras in spiritual path is well-known. In figure 5, the production of various seed-sounds in relation to various chakras starting from Mooladhara at the base are shown. The Vedic representation of the human spinal cord as the musical instrument (Veena) is shown in figure 6. The 24 frets of the instrument and is analogous to the 24 cartilages in the spinal cord. The number 24 also relates to the 24 syllables in the Vedic Gayatri mantra. Thus the inter-relation (figures 3,5 and 6) between Goddess Saraswati holding Veena, The production of seed-sounds at the various chakras in the spinal cord and representation of Veena as spinal cord shows the multi-faceted manifestations of Vedic concepts.



नामान्ते वात्स मध्ये
इफळकमहितं कस्य देवो स्वराणां
हं श्रीं तत्त्वार्थयुलं
मकालदळगतं ब्रह्ममार्गं वदन्ति

The origin of the speech-sounds from the Bijaksharas in the six Padmas which are scattered along the spinal column from the Muladhara triangle to the Ajna Chakra (see pages 136-7).

FROM 'THE DIVINE DANCER'
BY DR. S.V. CHAMU

ASTANGA YOGA VIJNANA MANDIRAM
957 SESHADRI IYER ROAD
LAXMI PURAM, MYSORE 570004, INDIA

ALL THESE FIGURES ARE FROM
PUBLICATIONS OF 'ASTANGA YOGA
VIJNANA MANDIRAM' FOUNDED
BY SRIRANGA MAHA GURU

FURTHER DETAILS CAN BE OBTAINED
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Figure 5: Lord Nataraja and speech-sounds

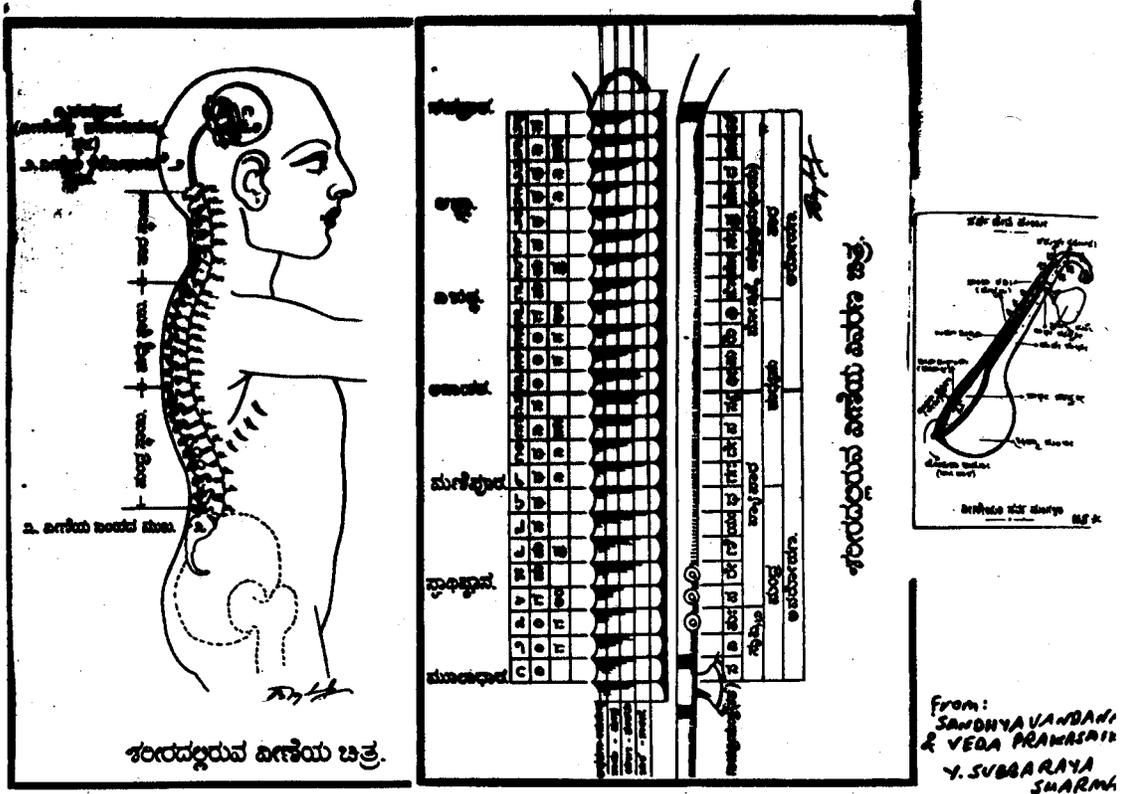


Figure 6: Veena and spinal cord representation (ref 1)

The rishis and yogis experienced the various manifestations of the Supreme Being not only within themselves but also in the nature and cosmos.

Another illustration is the discovery of a natural instrument namely, conch-shell used for rituals and spiritual practices. Figure 7 shows the interior of a conch-shell and its spectral characteristics of the sound.

Lisa Taylor, MG Prasad, R.B. Bhat

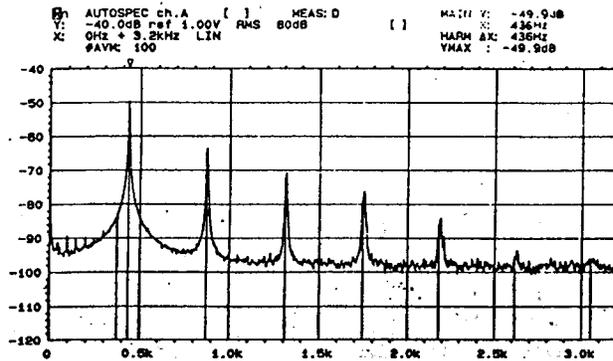


Figure 2. Sound spectrum of conch shell trumpet

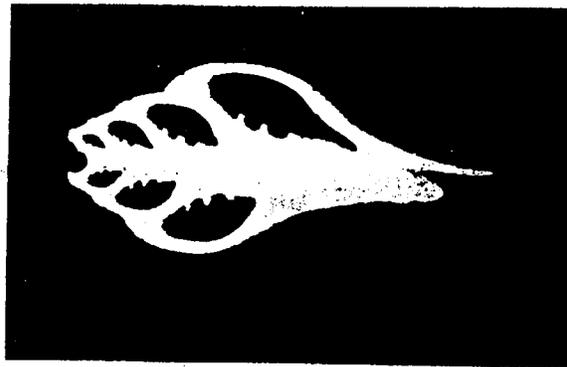


Figure 3. X-ray tomography picture of conch longitudinal section.

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Figure 7; Spectral characteristics of Sankha (conch-shell)

The interesting feature is the sharpness of the tone, which is even difficult to obtain in a human-made instrument. The superior sound quality of the tone from a proper conch-shell represents the spiritual vibrations of the universal sound of OM. The Garbhpanishat says that an infant in the womb, in its eighth month hears the sound of OM and has the spiritual vision of Light of God. It is for this reason, the Vedic literature

says that God is in every being and it is the rediscovery of that vision and knowledge that is needed for spiritual enlightenment.

It is well known that Indian classical music has Vedic origin. The acoustical characteristics such as melodious sound, phonetic quality of letters, proper breaking of words, correct intonation, majesty and proper speed of Vedic chants are precisely transmitted through oral tradition from teacher to disciple. Svaras are common to Vedic chants, music and language. The seven svaras of music are acoustically related to svaras in Vedic chants. It is interesting to note that Vedic chants are effectively played on musical instrument Veena. The Shabda Bramhan encompasses the full range of vibrations such as infra, audio, ultra and electro-magnetic waves. The Amrita Bindu Upanishat refers to two Bramhans namely ParamBramhan and ShabdaBramhan. Great saints such as Purandaradasa, Tyagaraja etc. have demonstrated that the divine music is a means of spiritual realization. The classical Music in the Vedic Hinduism belongs to the path of yoga namely, Nada Yoga. The treatise of classical music Sangita Ratnakara describes Nada as the union of prana and anala which represents the drum and fire respectively in the hands of Lord Nataraja (figure 4). The acoustical knowledge of ancient Hindus manifested in several musical instruments. One distinguishing feature of Mridangam and Tabla is interesting. The sounds of a percussion instrument provides the rhythm and not melody. However, the Mridangam and Tabla due to their design produce several harmonic tones, which brings melody to their sounds (figure 8). This brings a pleasing quality to rhythmic sounds. It is for this reason the classical music and dance emanating from Vedic origin not only is a spiritual path but also provides joy to mind and senses.

Figure 9 shows an interesting scientific experiment referred as Tyndall effect wherein an acoustical tone, when directed on a flame break the flame into seven-tongue. In Vishnusahasranama, the seven-tongued fire is referred as a name. This phenomenon of effect of sound or vibrations on flame plays an important role in Vedic yajnas. The sacred fire represents the deity worshipped in a yajna. The observation is that Vedic literature encompasses universal phenomena in nature and cosmos. It is this multi-faceted nature of Vedic Hinduism that has made it relevant and useful for all seekers in the past, present and future.

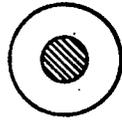
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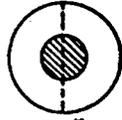
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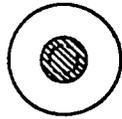
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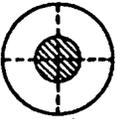
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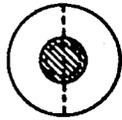
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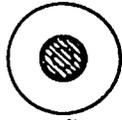
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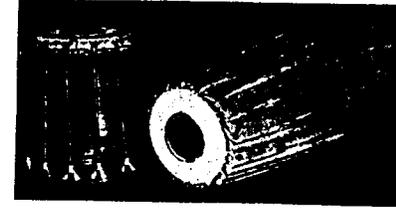
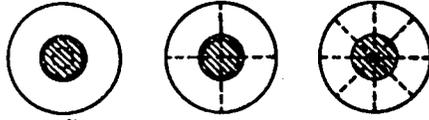


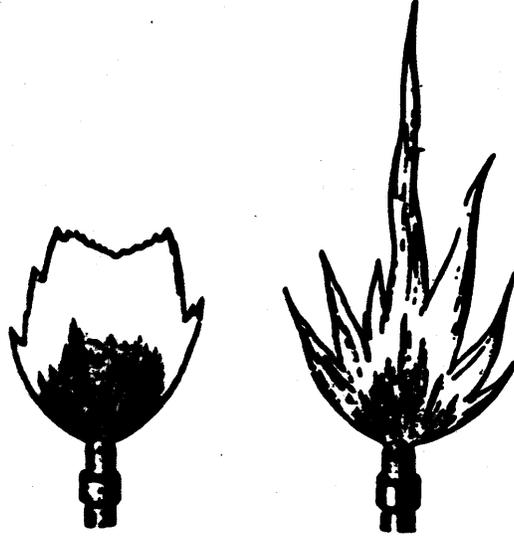
FIG. 1. Photograph of the Indian drums *Thabala* and *Mridanga* (left to right) which possess an approximately harmonic set of overtones.



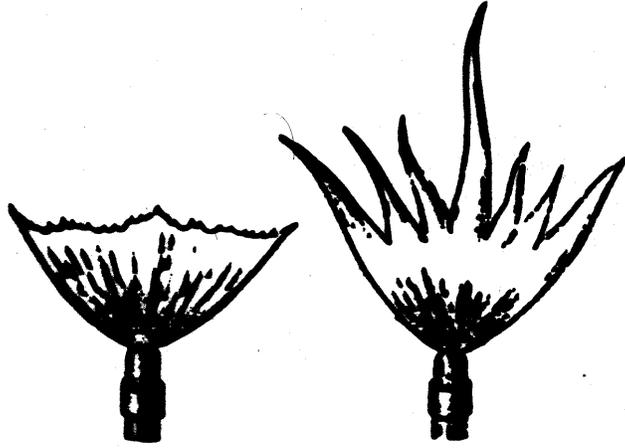
$$\Psi_{41} : \frac{\kappa_{41}}{\kappa_{01}} = 4.96$$

FIG. 3. Nodal lines (shown dotted) of the ideal composite membrane corresponding to the first nine modes of vibration. Cross-hatched portion shows the loaded central region. The modes and their frequency ratios with respect to the fundamental are indicated below each. The various modes are arranged in different rows according to the harmonic to which they closely correspond.

Figure 8: Harmonic tones of Tabla



सद्गुरुर्भिः 'सप्तनिघ्नः' सप्रबंधः स्फुटाहनः 'विष्णु महामनाम'
 (कर्म, कर्म, परोपकार, मूर्खवृत्ति, गुणप्रकर्ष, सुखीभित्त, विभवदर्थ)



EFFECT OF SOUND ON FLAMES (TYNDALL)

Figure 9: Effect of sound on flame (Tyndall effect)

In figure 10 a simple Vedic triadic approach is shown to describe any effort to seek knowledge and particularly spiritual knowledge. The three lines represent the three essential components required for any seeking are Sadguru, Shastra and Anubhava. The Sadguru refers to the guiding energy in the form of mother, father, acharya, mentor, etc., which helps and directs the individual to gain knowledge and discriminate between right

and wrong. It is a life-force of subjective importance. The Shastra refers to the body of knowledge (Vedic literature), which has sustained the test of time and space. The shastras include infinite large collection of sources as shown in figure 1. Shastras represents the perennial objective source that includes rituals to vedanta. The shastras include resources for all levels of enquiry. The following of rituals provide required refinement for the mind. The historical masterpieces such as Ramayana and Mahabharata illustrate the Vedic principles applicable to human beings. The vedantic literature such as Advaita, Vishiishataadvaita and Dvaita etc provide the Vedic truths at the fundamental levels. Then there are shastras for arts, music, science, medicine etc. The third important component Anubhava means the experience of the seeker. In the course of time, the three lines should advance towards concurrence, which is indicated by the reduction of the triangle size. The concurrence assures that the seeker's experience is concurring with those of Sadguru and Shastra. The non-concurrence indicates disparity between the three components and need to be worked at. It is a dynamic process to be carried out by the seeker.

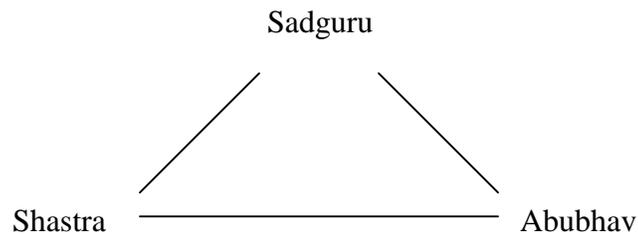


Figure 10: the triadic approach for spiritual knowledge in Vedic Hinduism

Concluding remarks:

Vedic Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma) with its source in the eternal Vedas has sustained and guided its followers in the long history of time. Innumerable number of rishis and yogis have provided guidance and direction through their scientific, saintly and introspective abilities. The popularity of yoga and meditation in the world demonstrates the universal nature of Vedic Hinduism. Yoga and meditation have both their roots in Vedas and they are integral part of Vedic Hinduism. The Katha upanishat, Bhagavadgita and Patanjali's yoga sutras are some major references in the literature for the yoga and meditation. It can be seen that he Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali deals with all aspects of human development such as physical, psychological and spiritual aspects. In the words of seer-yogi, Sriranga Sadguru, "The customs and habits, the dress and ornaments, the manners and etiquette, the conceptions of right and wrong and of good and evil, the learning, literature and the various arts like music, the political thoughts, views regarding all action and the consecratory ceremonies, etc., of the Indians are all permeated like the warp and woof by Ashtanga Yoga".

It is our common experience that our present times have provided many comforts due to growth of technology, global communications, consumerism etc. In spite of all these global developments, the critical issues of life and particularly human life such as hunger, poverty, hatred, threat of nuclear war etc. still pose major challenges. These basic human problems need to be addressed at the development of an individual in a global sense. It is in this important area that multi-faceted Vedic Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma offers possible solutions.

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4. All about Hindu temples by Swami Harshananda

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