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### Law and religion – a Hindu Tamil perspective

#### ABSTRACT

The scope of this paper is in terms of the guidelines provided by the conference organizers for the first conference on Law and religion held in Stellenbosch from 20-23 September 2011 at the Faculty of Theology. In addition to the brief insight into the many religious scriptures governing the lives of Hindus in general and Tamilians in particular, a background on the arrival of Indians in South Africa, systems of worship, the paper will also give some practical examples of how the Hindu religion and its laws relate to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996. It is said that as Hindus, we will need more than one life-time to read and study all our scriptures.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is indeed an honour for me to deliver this paper on behalf of the South African Tamil Federation.

The **South African Tamil Federation** is a representative body operating in a non-racial, nonsexist and non-sectarian manner and was formed to promote and protect the Tamil language, culture and traditions consistent with the objectives of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Its **objectives** include the promotion of the economic, social, religious, educational, cultural and political upliftment of the Tamil people in South Africa. It also gives leadership and guidance in matters relevant to the moral, spiritual, educational, social welfare and economic upliftment of Tamilians. Its **membership** comprises of representatives from Provincial affiliates. Presently there are four Provincial affiliates viz. Kwa-Zulu Natal, Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape. Provincial bodies in turn draw their membership from religious and cultural bodies functioning in their respective Provinces. There are approximately 150 religious and/or cultural bodies affiliated to the South African Tamil Federation. Our National President Thiru Mickey Chetty currently serves on **The State Presidents National Interfaith Leaders Council**. We can say, from a political perspective, that we have the direct ear of the State President. Thiru Mickey Chetty also meets regularly with the relevant Cabinet Ministers to take up issues. Recently he met with the National Minister of Education to take up the issue of Tamil language been taught in public schools.

#### 2. CURRENT POSITION OF RELIGIOUS BODY

I am the officiating priest of the S S Aulayam (temple) in Port Elizabeth, an affiliate of the East Cape Tamil Federation. Our religious body is duly recognized by the **Nelson Mandela Metro**. I serve on the Executive of the **Mayoral Religious Unit** and is called upon to perform opening prayers at Civic functions. One of the basic teachings of our religion is that we should not live in a place where there is no temple. When our forefathers landed in the then **Algoa Bay**, in the 1890s, their first priority was to build a temple. A piece of land was identified in the Baakens River Valley, Port Elizabeth as being an ideal site. On 27 November 1891, a group of our forefathers known as the **Indian Church**, purchased this piece of land in Upper Valley Road.

Construction of a Siva Subramanier (Father Temple) started approximately in 1896. The Temple was consecrated in 1901. This was the first Temple built in the entire Eastern and Western Cape. This Temple was declared a **National Monument**. In November 2001, we celebrated the Centenary of this Temple with a Maha Kumbha Abishegam (re-consecration). We also have a **Mother** (Marriamman) Temple in our township, Malabar which was built in 1972, after we were displaced from South End, by the Group Areas Act. This Temple was relocated from South End, Port Elizabeth and the cause of dissension in our community as many, including myself were of the opinion that, rather than breaking down and relocating our Mother Temple which was built in 1930, an entirely new Temple should be established in Malabar.

### 3. FINANCING AND AUTONOMY OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Our Temples are funded through donations from our congregation. We do not, for example,, stipulate that Congregation members should pay into our coffers a certain percentage of their income. Our businessmen do however donate generously to the upkeep of our Temples. We are *registered as an NPO (non Profit Organization) which assists us in soliciting funds*. In terms of the NPO Act donors can claim a tax deduction up to a certain amount, for donations made. We don't pay any rates or taxes. Our temple body is totally **autonomous** and we have *our own constitution*. I serve a congregation of approximately 500 families. We **don't** practice any form of discrimination in our Temples. Women and men mix and worship freely. Anyone is allowed to enter and worship in our Temples. There is no particular dress code, accept, having to be dressed appropriately, a vegetarian diet to be observed and shoes to be removed before entering our Temples.

### 4. SYSTEM OF WORSHIP

We have a type of **Parliamentary** concept of worship. The presiding Deity of the temple, which may be, either male or female, is regarded as the **State President**. Lord **Ganesha**, the son of Lord Shiva, whose presence is invoked as **Vickneshvara** (remover of all obstacles) and worshipped prior to the main Deity, is symbolized as the **Prime Minister**. A similar concept exists in Christianity when **Jesus Christ** says "no man shall come unto the Father, but by me".

Mother **Saraswathie**, portrayed as holding the holy Vedas in one hand, playing the veena (musical instrument) and holding the meditation beads, symbolizes the **Minister of Arts, Culture and Education**. This means *meditation*, which teaches you *concentration*, is the secret to *education*. A nine night (Nava-ratri) festival is held annually, in honour of Mother Saraswathie. On the final Nava-ratri night, all students bring their text books to Temple to be blessed by the Priest. The sacred mantra "Aum" is written on the tongues of devotees, by the Priest, with honey, sacred ash and a clove in order to give them the *wisdom of speech*.

Mother **Luxmi** is our Minister of Finance. She is portrayed as the lady, clad in a red sari standing on a lotus flower, with money pouring from her hand. A special prayer service (**Vara-Luxmi Viratam**) is held annually to honour her. At this prayer service, the Priest will chant sacred mantras as the devotees tie nine knots onto a sacred red string which is then tied around the wrist. The *wearing of the red string on a Hindu's wrist* signifies identification with Mother Luxmi for blessings of **wealth** and more importantly **health**, which we consider to be our greatest wealth. It can be noted that certain schools in Port Elizabeth forbade Hindu pupils from wearing the red string. In my opinion this is in conflict with *section 15 of our Bill of Rights* which clearly states that everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.

Lord **Muruga**, the younger son of Lord Shiva, is our *Minister of Youth Affairs*. He is portrayed as the child God, riding on a peacock. We have a ten day **Kavady** festival annually to worship Lord Muruga. This is an austere ten day fasting period for us, culminating in the piercing of our bodies and tongue with needles and carrying of the sacred Kavady. If no blood is shed, when piercing, then it means that you have fasted sincerely for the ten days. Annually we observe a special 12 hour prayer service in honour of Lord **Shiva, the Father** (Shivaratree). This prayer is observed in the evening from 6pm to 6am the following morning. Here we sacrifice our sleep for the Lord. Tamilians also observe a one month **Purathati** fast by abstaining from all **rajistic foods**, alcohol, smoking, sex, etc. To honour **Lord Vishnu**, the preservation aspect of the Trinity. There are other religious festivals that Hindus observe such as the birth of **Lord Krishna** (Krishnajanastami), Ramnavami (birth of **Lord Rama**), Hanumaan Jayanthi (birth of **Lord Hanumaan**) etc.

Respect is one of the cornerstones of our religion. We respect our elders, parents, teachers, leaders and even **Mother-nature**. One of our scriptures teachings, **Martha, Peetha, Guru, Deivam**, means firstly, we must respect our mother, father and teacher, before we can respect God. The teacher, therefore, is never wrong and as Hindus we place a very high emphasis on educating our children.

## 5. GENERAL BACKGROUND

The majority of Tamilians in South Africa are followers of the Hindu religion. Tamilians originated from the southern part of India, mainly from the **State of Tamil Nadu**. There are other Hindus in South Africa viz. **Gujaratis and Hindis** who originated mainly from the North or West of India and speak either Gujarati and/or Hindi. There are also **Telegu** and **Urdu** speaking Hindus. The term Hindu is derived from the name of the **Sindhu River**. The Persians referred to India as the land beyond the Sindhu. Hinduism would therefore appear to be a generic term meaning the religion of the people of India. *It is more like a tree that has grown gradually than like a building that has been erected by an architect at some fixed point in time.* It contains within it, the influences of many cultures, having easily absorbed the customs and ideas of people with whom it has come into contact. It has stood the strains and stresses of more than five millennia of spiritual thought and experience. The differences among the sects of Hindus are more or less superficial. Hindus remain a distinct cultural unit with a common history and civilization. It was generally believed that prior to the **Arayan** conquest, India was a wild country, inhabited by savages and cannibals to whom the conquerors brought the blessing of civilization. A recent discovery at **Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa** disproved this ancient assertion and indicates that Hindus are a civilized race, culturally far more advanced than the Arayan nomads. Excavations at these places unearthed the remains of a modern city with proper sewerage and drainage built some three thousand years ago.

## 6. ARRIVAL OF INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Historically our forefathers were brought to South Africa to supply the vital labour force that was needed to cultivate sugar cane. The first lot of indentured labourers arrived on board a ship called the **S S Truro** which docked in Durban on 16 November 1860. There were 340 passengers on board, 197 men, 89 women and 54 children. *The religious denominations of the passengers were as follows: 263 Hindus, 61 Christians and 16 Muslims.* A total of 152,184 labourer immigrants were brought into the Natal Colony with the last ship Umlazi arriving on 21 July 1911. In the 1870s the so called "free passenger Indians" arrived in Durban. These

were the merchants or traders who originated mainly from the North or West of India. In 1874, a certain **Mr. Amod Aboobaker** opened the first Indian store, in West Street, Durban. The Indian government had consented to Indian emigration *subject to certain conditions* among which were that after the period of indenture, Indians would be entitled to the vote, be free to own property, enjoy freedom of movement and unrestricted in the choice of schools for their children. This obviously did not materialize and Indians, like the other non-white racial groups were subjected to severe forms of discrimination but in addition, became the most restricted race group in South Africa, since they were the only ones subjected to the *Provincial Border restriction laws*. Indians were not even allowed to leave the station at Bloemfontein, when travelling by train through the former Orange-Free State.

## 7. INFLUENCE IN POLITICS

The arrival of an Indian lawyer, **M K Gandhi**, in 1893, mobilized the Indian people, in South Africa, into political action, under his leadership. **Mahatma Gandhi**, who was thrown off a train for sitting in a "Whites – only" compartment, began the fight in South Africa against racial discrimination. He brought the world's attention to focus on the *abhorrent system of apartheid* and under his leadership; India relentlessly championed the course of the anti-apartheid movement. At the United Nations, in 1946, India was the first nation to raise its voice against the racist policies of the South African Government. The **South African Indian Congress** produced many dynamic Indian leaders who took up the cudgels in the fight against Apartheid and many of them were imprisoned for their political beliefs. In February 1981, the Mayor of Cape Town, **Alderman Louis Kreiner**, wrote the following in his message to mark the occasion of the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa. **"The Indian community has made its own special contribution to the South African scene. They are a colourful people, are hard working, intelligent, quick-witted, and artistic and have a philosophy which goes back to the heart of time."**

## 8. ECONOMIC STATUS

Viewing the Indian people in terms of their **economic status**, we find many geographical variations. Contrary to popular believe there are **extremes**, ranging from those that may be classified as *extremely wealthy to those that are poverty stricken* and economically depressed impacting on their life style and social change. I believe it is an open secret that Indians are born businessmen. We are not afraid of hard work and prepared to put in long hours in order to succeed. When I was running my businesses, 18 hours a day was the norm and I certainly reaped the benefits of my effort. *Racial discrimination denied us the right of playing a more meaningful role in the economy of South Africa* which I am sure would have been much more vibrant if we were given the opportunity. Indians have a culture of "plowing back" into the underprivileged communities. Inspired by the words of our revered sage **Swami Sivananda** **"Service to mankind is worship to God"**, the Indian community, through donations to the Divine Life Society of South Africa which was founded by Swami Sivananda, helped build schools, hospitals and crèches for the underprivileged, mainly in KZN. The **Sai and Hari Krishna** groups also contribute tremendously to the upliftment of the less fortunate, through their unselfish efforts of service to the poor.

## 9. SOCIAL STATUS

From, a **sociological** point of view, it may be said that in recent times the Indian people

have moved more rapidly towards the acceptance and adoption of Western concepts and modes of living. Mixed schools and the freedom to move into former "white" residential areas, influenced and permeated all areas of their thoughts and practices. However it would be safe to say that they are *not fully absorbed into the main-stream of the dominant Western culture* although important cultural changes are becoming more evident. The institution of religion, the dominating force in personal and community life continue to play an important role in the preservation of our rich culture.

## 10. HINDU RELIGION

In order for us to understand law, from a Hindu religious perspective, we need to comprehend a little about the religion. Hinduism is *one of the world's oldest religions*. It is based on *five fundamental principles*.

**The first principle** is called (**Parameshwara**) which is the belief in **one Supreme God**. Hinduism is therefore, a **monotheistic** religion, subscribing to the theory that **as knowledge grows, theology must develop**. Hindus recognized the dire need for harmony in society and therefore created a *blending between the progress of mankind and the progress of religion*. **Swami Chinmayananda** tells us that, *philosophy and religion must come to serve mankind and not mankind forced to serve philosophy* and religion. If there be a religion of Truth, and a philosophy explaining that truth, then that philosophy **must** be a living philosophy, ever growing with the development of the community. *The growth of the community cannot be stopped*. The new extension of the community will absorb the very laws and overgrow these laws. A vital, dynamic **philosophy must be elastic**, but not so elastic that any foolish idea in the community can find its way into the scriptures but sufficiently elastic to embrace the new urges in society. Hinduism, therefore, in my opinion, can be perceived as being a **dynamic** religion, subscribing to the belief that God is the **Creator, Preserver and Dissolver** of the Universe. A Supreme Being, who is **Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent**. A God, who has *many attributes* to which **He** is given *many names, yet is nameless* and who incarnates on earth from time to time, in *many forms, yet is formless*. The important functions of God are namely, **Brahma** as Creator, **Vishnu** the Preserver and **Shiva** as Dissolver. These are not three different Gods, but **one God performing three different functions**. Everything belongs to God and God exists in everything. *God is the totality of all that exists, both animate and inanimate*. The existence of everything is by the light of God. This is the reason why the sun, moon, planets, earth, water, etc. are regarded as sacred to a Hindu.

**The second fundamental principle** of Hinduism is **Prathana and Seva** (prayer and service). We believe that the most important form of worship is sincere prayer. Through daily prayer we praise God and thereby receive his blessings. When a Tamil lady gets married it is compulsory for her mother to give her a God-lamp (**Luxmi-villaku**) which she is expected to light daily in her home. Most Hindu homes will also have a prayer-room, where the entire family will gather at least once a week to pray and sing hymns. This reinforces the old adage that *the family who prays together, stays together*, and may also be the reason why **unmarried** Hindu children live with their parents, irrespective of age. *Service to others* is also important in order to lessen your karma.

**The third fundamental principle** is **Punarjanma** (reincarnation). We believe that the soul is immortal. A soul undergoes an evolutionary process, which will eventually lead to oneness with God. However a soul cannot gain perfection in one life alone. The soul's journey does not

come to an end with this life. Spiritual progress continues through reincarnation. It will take many births and deaths to attain **Moksha** (liberation).

**The fourth fundamental principle** is **Purusharta** (law of action). We believe that man is largely the maker of his own destination or the conditions of his reincarnation. *What you sow, you shall reap.* If you try to improve yourself in all ways, the soul will become more perfected and thus be re-incarnated into a higher form when your body dies. We may say that Hindus believe in the **theory of evolution** but it is **not** the evolution of the physical body but *the evolution of the Atma* (soul).

**The final fundamental principle** is **Prani Daya** (the doctrine of non-violence). We are expected to respect and be compassionate to all living creatures. We see God in all living beings and therefore practice non-killing (**Ahimsa**). We believe all living creatures are born to pay their karma from a previous birth. If you take a life before it was due time for death i.e. the creature has not as yet, paid its full karma, then the *balance* of that karma of the living creature will accumulate to you.

## 11. HINDU SCRIPTURES

**Hinduism which is called Sanatana-darma** meaning the eternal religion is not confined to a single religious book such as a Bible or Koran. It draws its teachings from many religious books such as the four great Vedas known as the Rik, Yajur, Sama and Atharva.

**Rig Veda** is called the Veda of praise because it comprises 10,522 verses in praise of the Supreme Lord.

**Yajur Veda** consists of formulas for sacrifice

**Sama Veda** contains 1549 verses of incantations or mantras which are used in various ceremonies

**Atharva Veda** is called the Veda of knowledge and gives rules for worshipping the planets, oblations, prayers for averting evil spirits and mantras to remove evil forces.

The **Vedas** are our most important scriptures and was not created by man. In the very beginning God revealed unto the saintly **Rishis**, the knowledge of the Vedas which is said to be Divine knowledge. The Vedas broadly deals with rituals, ceremonies and the way of life for Hindus to follow the path of right action in order to prepare themselves for higher attainment of *merging with the Supreme Soul*. We regard this as true religion. The **literal meaning** of religion "to bind again" derived from Latin, re "again" and ligere "to bind" clearly tells us that the **purpose** of religion is to bind your soul back to God. Hindus believe that the soul is subjected to numerous births, deaths and re-births. **The soul is immortal**. It takes one form after another on account of its own actions. Beginning from basic cell life, insect, sea, animal life, we finally will evolve in human form which is *the highest form of life*. This continuous transmigration of the soul is called **Samsara**. Human beings are the only living creatures which have a **sixth sense**. This sixth sense which we may call our conscience, informs us when we are doing right or wrong i.e. *transgressing the laws of God*. We believe that by performing good deeds, leading a righteous life and most important of all, detaching yourself from mundanely things i.e. moving away from **I** (ego) and **mine**(attachment) we can free ourselves from the cycle of births and deaths and merge our soul or consciousness with the Super-Conscious from whom we all evolve. The

four Vedas are known as the **Vedanta** which means the end or final goal of wisdom and are also referred to as **Shrutis** (what is heard).

## 11.1 Dharmashastras or manusmriti

The Dharmashastras are the **Laws of Manu** and provides guidelines for proper, productive living and conduct for domestic, social and religious life. It plays a major role in the structure of Hindu society, administration of a country, sources of revenue, methods of conducting trade and *laws for the punishment of criminal offenders*, This “revealed scriptures” comprises 2684 verses divided into 12 chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social and religious life in India. The *first chapter* deals with the creation of the world, the divine origin of the book itself and the objective of studying it. *Chapters 2 to 6* recounts the proper conduct of the members of the upper castes, their initiation into the Brahmin religion by the sacred thread or sin removing ceremony, the period of disciplined studentship devoted to the study of the Vedas, sacrifices to the Gods, feasts to the departed relatives along with numerous instructions. *Chapter 7* talks of the duties and responsibilities of Kings. *Chapter 8* deals with the modus operandi in civil and criminal proceedings and the proper punishment to be meted out to the different castes. *The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>* chapters relate to customs and laws regarding inheritance and property rights, divorce and the lawful occupation of each caste. *Chapter 11* expresses the various kinds of penance for misdeeds. The *final chapter* expounds the doctrine of karma, rebirth and salvation. Because of its **sophisticated jurisprudence**, Dharmashastra was taken by early British colonial administrators *to be the law of the land for Hindus in India*. Dharmashastra is divided into three main topics. **Acharya** which gives us rules pertaining to daily rituals, life-cycle rites and other duties of the different castes. **Vyavahara** provides rules pertaining to the procedures for resolving doubts about dharma and rules of **substantive law**. It is an important concept of **Hindu law** denoting legal procedure. **Kane** defines it as follows “*when the ramifications of right conduct that are all together called dharma and that can be established with efforts (of various kinds such as truthful speech etc )have been violated, the dispute (in a court between parties) which springs from what is sought to be proved (such as debt) is said to be Vyavahara.*” A debtor has a duty to execute a certain performance towards a creditor (**Law of obligation**). This liability does not imply that a debtor owed monetary compensation to the creditor. It is merely an acknowledgement of debt to avoid punishment. Similarly *we need to acknowledge our eternal debt to the Lord* since we owe our creation to Him and if we *transgress His Code of Ethics or Morality*, we are prone to punishment (**Law of Karma**) what is this law of karma? It is the **accumulated sum of one's good and bad deeds**. Newton's law “every action must have a reaction” It applies to our actions, words and thoughts. Pious actions create good karma resulting in health, wealth, beauty, knowledge, happiness, birth in a higher form, etc. Bad karma is created by acting impiously, violating scriptural injunctions and acting according to your own whims. This result in poverty, disease ugliness, re-birth in a lower form of life. The Dharmashastras , sometimes called the **Manusmriti** , also spells out the 4 **Varnas** or *Social Orders* of life and the 4 *Spiritual orders* as follows:

### 11.1.1 Social orders

These Social Orders were *monarchical*, and formed the basis for the *caste-system*.

The **Brahmans** were the *intellectual class* and considered the head of society. They studied the Vedic scriptures and became experts in one or more fields of knowledge. They were subject to self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness. *They*

were teachers, doctors, priests, astrologers, political advisors and so on. The Brahmins would not accept remuneration, more than necessary, to lead a simple, austere life, and if they receive more, they would give it away to charity.

The **Ksatriyas** were the arms of society. They *provided all levels of administrative services* to the kings. They were the soldiers, police and leaders of the army. Their qualifications are listed in chapter 18 verse 43 of the Bhagavad-Gita: "Heroism, power, determination, resourcefulness, and courage in battle, generosity and leadership." A **ksatriya** king was responsible for the well being of his citizens. He would *never* think of exploiting them and knew he would be subjected to karmic reaction for any sinful activities. The goal of their leadership was to enable all people to make progress on the path of spiritual enlightenment. *Activities such as meat-eating, illicit sex, intoxication and gambling were restricted.* According to **Swami Prabhupada**, meat-eating destroys **mercy**, gambling destroys **honesty**, intoxication destroys **austerity** and sexual promiscuity destroys **physical and mental cleanliness**. Vedic society *encouraged individual ownership of land* so that people could be self-sufficient.

The **Vyisyas** represented the belly of society, the *productive class*. They were the business people and farmers. *Present day wealth consists of paper that can lose its value at any time such as what was recently experienced in America.* In Vedic times, however, land, cows, grain and gold were considered wealth.

The Sudras or labourer class was inclined towards manual labour and service to others. They represented the "legs" of society and their services were seen as a valuable contribution to the smooth functioning of the Vedic society. Any society requires a workforce to take care of construction, maintenance, cleaning or general services. In modern day India these social orders have largely been dispensed with.

### 11.1.2 Spiritual orders

These spiritual orders were intended to bring the people closer to God.

The **Brahmacari** is *celibate student life* equivalent to the first quarter of man's life. Education in Vedic society did not entail mere accumulation of data, facts, figures, equations, formulas and so on. **Vedic education was intrinsically spiritual.** It taught the student practical knowledge about using the material body in conjunction with the laws of God in order to live happily in this material world. This does not mean that people in the Vedic ages had inferior material knowledge. *In our Vedic scriptures we find description of things modern man prides himself on having invented only recently: airplanes, space travel, nuclear technology etc.*

The **Grhastha** is *married life*, the second quarter of life. In family life there is a natural tendency to accumulate money and material objects. Man is allowed to get married, procreate and earn a living to provide for his children. It is only during this spiritual order that man is allowed to make money. We find in modern society that everyone wants to acquire as much as possible and reluctant to share their wealth with others. **The Vedic system establishes charity as a religious duty.** The Grhasthas understood that charity to a saintly person is not a liability but an asset in one's spiritual account.

The **Vanaprastha** is *the stage of retirement*. It is the third quarter of life. Modern society postulates the *goals of life as wealth, fame, beauty, sense gratification through material accumulation etc.* Consequently people often continue trying to attain these things until they die. Politicians

cling to power even when they become senile, dying businessmen pray to their doctors to prolong their lives just a little so they can finish one more transaction. Aging film stars pay huge amounts of money to get face lifts or other reconstructive surgery in an attempt to outwit nature. The use of Viagra to prolong the sex lives of men has become common practice. Vedic society was based on the understanding that the *spirit soul is covered by a temporary body subject to birth, old age, disease and death*. The soul is the real **life force**, eternal, distinct from matter and full of knowledge and happiness. The body, with all its material attributes such as fame, wealth, beauty etc. will perish sooner or later.

The Sannyasa stage is the renounced order and final stage of life reserved for spiritual upliftment. The Sannyasi gives up all worldly attachments and becomes like a beggar, going house to house, spreading the message of God. They lived by the charity of householders who were happy to receive them since their presence afforded an opportunity to hear realized transcendental knowledge. Their very presence reminds the householders that they too would one day have to renounce their possessions, either voluntary or at death and that they had to be prepared for the ultimate test.

## 11.2 Upanishads

We have Upanishads which deals wholly with the essentials of philosophic discrimination and ultimate spiritual vision through a spiritual master. The Upanishads deal with Vedic philosophy and forms conclusions of the Vedas. It elaborates on how the soul can be re-united with the ultimate truth, Brahman. *The Upanishads is thus regarded as direct revelations of God (the spoken word)*

## 11.3 Puranas

There are 18 Puranas that are divided according to **three** modes namely *ignorance, passion and goodness*. Each Purana contains five basic subjects which include the creation of the world, its destruction and re-creation, the history of Solar and Lunar dynasties and also include descriptions of the activities of Gods incarnations.

**Other** religious texts are the **Ramayana** which is a moving love story with moral and spiritual themes. We also have the **Mahabharata** which is a group of books of which the sixth book is called the **Bhagavad-Gita**. The Bhagavad- Gita has assumed a *position of universal interest* and its teachings have gained appreciation worldwide. It has been translated into many languages and **Lord Krishna's** profound wisdom comes to the fore in his discourse with Arjuna. Lord Krishna who was born some 5112 years ago, *initiated the beginning of our Tamil calendar* and also the start of **Kali- yugam** (432000 years) the fourth ( final) cycle of our universal time. The Bhagavad-Gita and **Srimad-Bhagavatam**, gave rise to a universal movement called *Krishna-consciousness* which is doing yeoman work in terms of creating **spiritual awareness** and **seva** (service to humanity) such as feeding programs for the destitute and the propagation of a healthy lifestyle. The **Upavedas** are smaller compositions attached to the four main Vedas. There are also six **Angas** or subsidiary portions of the Vedas which details rules for reciting prayers, rituals to be performed, and the use of proper grammar, glossarial comment, astrology, logic and theology. The **Vedanta-sutras** are short, condensed bits of information used as reminders by the Spiritual Master in his interaction with his students. **Vedanta** means "the end of knowledge" or final conclusion of Vedic philosophy. We also have the **64 Saivite saints** who composed many religious songs contained in the Thevaram, Thiruvagasam, Thiruarrutpa etc. **Thiru Valluvar** is one of our Tamil saints who composed the 1330 couplet called the

**Thirukkural.** It consists of three parts. The first 38 chapters are based on **Aram** (virtue) the second 70 chapters are based on **Porul**, how a Government should govern or a King should rule. The final 25 chapters are based on **Kamam** (love). Each chapter has ten couplets.

## 12. SHAKTI WORSHIP (ENERGY ASPECT OF GOD)

The Supreme Lord is all-pervading and yet **He** is simultaneously localized at any and every place. Here we use the word "He" with circumspect since our scriptures teach us that **God may assume the form of either male or female**. We have Father Temples and Mother Temples. The *energy aspect* of God is female or **Sakti**. It is this same Sakti or consciousness that gives our bodies life. It can then be concluded that all living beings are *both male and female*. Male being the physical body and female being the energy which gives the body life. This energy may also be called a soul. We can thus see that **Hindus have preached gender equality since the beginning of their religion**.

The **potencies** of the Almighty lord are **infinite** and do not decrease when the Lord assumes any other form. These potencies of the Lord are *divided into three energy categories*. These are **lccha-sakti** which means *His potency* is such that whatever he wishes is done. **Kriya-sakti** which refers to *activity* and **Jnaya-sakti** which refers to *knowledge*. You may have seen a field of brightly coloured flowers and lingered awhile to savour their fragrance and unsurpassed beauty perhaps concluding it to be a miracle of Mother-nature. To Hindus it is *Kriya-sakti*, the activity potency of God. His Jnana-sakti reveals perfect knowledge in that there is no defect in every aspect of nature. Everything is perfect. The Lords lccha-sakti reveals that anything can be executed simply by His desire and will. Hindus believe that the *Lord is the source* of all opulence's, all prowess, all fame, all knowledge and all renunciation. His every incarnation can be equally surcharged with such potencies but his different manifestations require varying degrees of power. They are endowed with as much power as necessary to fulfil their particular functions. *The electric bulbs we use in our homes in no way indicates the magnitude of the power grid we draw electrical energy from*. The actual power house supplies energy billions of times greater than that which is used in our home. Similarly we can understand that the incarnations of the Lord display limited power because **just that** much power is needed for a particular incarnation.

## 13. DEATH AND REINCARNATION

Hindus believe that death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a new life. We are dying from the day that we are born and the day we die, our soul, which resides in our hearts is released through an orifice in our body, and thus born again. Just as it takes 16 days for the moon to grow from new moon to full moon, we believe it also takes 16 days for the soul to grow from babyhood to adulthood before it leaves Earth. On the 15<sup>th</sup> night after death family and friends will once again gather, *to give the soul a proper send off*. A photograph of the deceased which represents the soul, is placed on an alter, garlanded, and family and friends will symbolically, bless the soul with petals and sesame seeds, wishing it a safe journey. The following morning, all the prayer items will be committed to the sea or river where the soul will cling to a grain of sesame seed and be taken up into the sky, in a droplet of water, through the process of evaporation.

### 13.1 Souls journey after death

the soul, if it is not going to merge with the Super conscious, will spend some time in Pitri-logam (abode of our ancestors) and will eventually descend to earth again, to take re-birth in another body. We call this reincarnation. Just as the soul ascended in a droplet of water, it will likewise come back to earth in a rain drop. This rain drop will fall on a grain of food such as rice; the soul will enter the grain of rice and enter the body of man after he has eaten this grain of rice. From man's body it will enter the female ovum at the time of conception and thus begins a new life.

## 14. ABORTION

The fact that life begins with conception, brings into contention the **Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act**, which was enacted on December 11 1996 and took effect on 1 February 1997. This Act gives women of any age or marital status **access** to abortion services, upon request. This request could be *during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy* or, in certain cases extend access to the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. According to the Hindu scriptures this would be *tantamount to murder*. To deny the soul its right to life in another body, could be construed as criminal in the extreme. However, there are exceptions, if for example, a mother's life was endangered and abortion the only way out, then an exception could be made.

## 15. CONVERSION

Hindus believe that there are two types of people on earth, Hindus and Atheists, that is to say, believers and non-believers. This essentially means that Christians, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is etc are regarded by us as Hindus. Anyone who believes in a **God** is a Hindu. This is the reason why you will *not* find Hindus going out to convert other religious groups into becoming Hindus.

## 16. FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

We have total freedom of worship, may call God by any name and have the freedom to worship in any religious institution, be it, temple, church, mosque or even a synagogue. This is also one of the reasons, why we do not impose conditions, such as when a *non*- Hindu marries a Hindu, that you must firstly convert or follow our Hindu faith.

## 17. FREEDOM TO MARRY

There are no modern day religious impediments which preclude a Hindu from marrying outside of the religion, although most parents would prefer their children to marry within the religion. Most Hindus marry according to Hindu custom. These marriages are very elaborate and costly. Traditionally the parents of the groom, among Tamil speaking Hindus, bear the cost of the entire wedding and must also buy gold jewellery and saris as dowry for the bride. The parents of North Indian brides bear the cost of their daughter's wedding. In modern times costs are shared between the respective parties. It has always been the custom for Hindu women to wear the marriage ring on the toe and not the finger. The symbol of marriage for a Tamil woman is the sacred "tali" which is worn around the neck. When this tali is tied by her husband, a solemn vow is taken that it will only come off when "death do them part". A red "kungan" (red ash) dot is affixed on to the wife's forehead after the tali is tied by the husband. When you see an Indian lady wearing a red dot it means "hands off" she is married. Surprisingly this Eastern custom of the toe-ring and dot has now become the fashion of the West.

## 17.1 Recognition

Prior to 1994 Hindu marriages were not recognized as having any legal standing. A subsequent amendment to the Marriage Act gives some legal status to customary marriages. Hindu Priests are not easily accorded **Marriage – Officer Status**, since their individual community temples are not recognized as bona fide bodies to make recommendation for such status. My temple body, although in existence for more than one hundred years **was not** allowed to recommend my application to become a Marriage Officer although I was initiated into priesthood in 1978. Thanks to the South African Tamil Federation I finally became a Marriage Officer four years ago.

## 18. CONCLUSION

Whenever **Dharma** i.e. eternal order, righteousness, religion, law, obligation and duty are threatened, **Lord Vishnu** (the Preserver) reincarnates to save mankind. When the Lord incarnates we refer to the Lord as an **Avatara**. *According to the Hindu religion we can regard Jesus Christ as an Avatara*. The Oxford dictionary defines an incarnation as an embodiment in flesh, in human form. *The Sanskrit equivalent of incarnation is Avatara*. It is derived from the Sanskrit word “**Avatarana**” meaning descending. The word Avatara is a composite term describing those that have a spiritual body as well as those with material bodies. It is said that the Lord **descends** on earth from time to time in order for humans to **ascend** spiritually. There has been much speculation from many sources of the impending **end of the world**.

According to the Hindu scriptures, **Lord Vishnu**, has already incarnated 9 times. There is to be *one final incarnation* of the Lord towards the end of Kali-yugam which lasts for another 400,000 plus years, before the earth destructs, and then life begins again from the first cycle, **Satya-yugam** which is characterized by virtue, wisdom and religion. There is a total absence of ignorance and vice in this period which lasts for 1,728,000 years. This is followed by **Treta-yugam** lasting 1,296,000 years. Vice is introduced during this period. The third cycle is 864,000 years called **Dwarpa-yugam**. There is a decline in virtue and religion and vice escalates. In the present **Kali-yugam** age, true virtue is practically non-existent. There is abundance of strife, ignorance, irreligion and vice.

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## Afterword:

Hinduism is generally misunderstood to be a religion worshipping many Gods, it is in fact a

monotheistic religion which allows for complete freedom of worship, for the one and only God to be called by any name, assume any form and worshipped any where. Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. A basic tenet that any one who believes in God is a Hindu. Christians, Muslims etc are therefore regarded as Hindus which makes us all brothers and sisters. Unity in diversity. A practical religion which espouses the concept of service to mankind. The hands that serve is holier than the lips that pray. We believe in the Law of Action ( Purusharta ) every action has a re-action therefore man is responsible for his own destination. We become the architects of our own destruction by the way we live our lives therefore moderation is important to a Hindu.

**KEY WORDS**

Serve

Love

Realise

Meditate

Compromise























