

॥ ल०री ॥

॥ श्रीः ॥

॥ श्रीः ॥



Achyuta Bhakti
DEETS

श्री नारायणाय नमः ।

8 December 2024

Vaishnava Philosophy and its Antiquity

By Praajna Pattada Hari Kumaara (prajna@nilapatri.com)



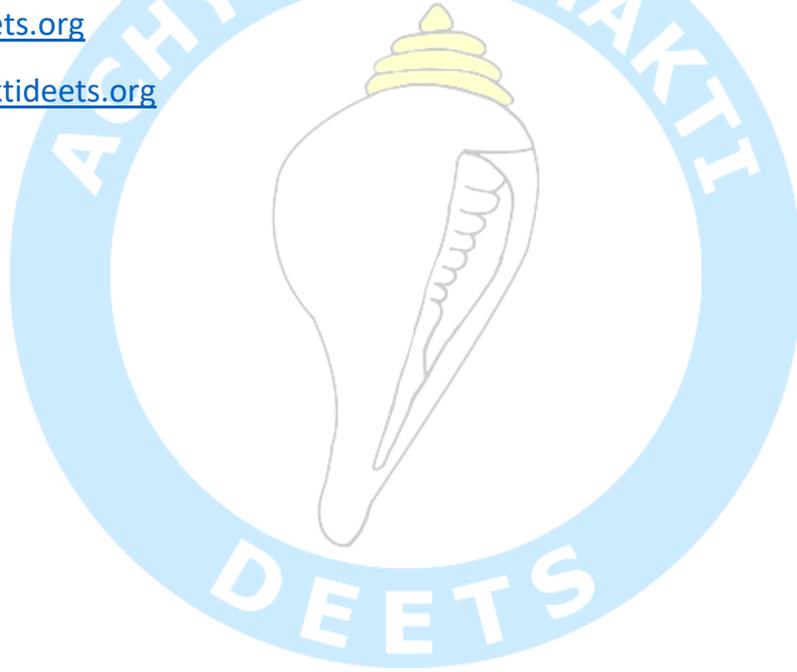
Contents

Introduction and Overview of Vaishnava Dharma	3
The Philosophy of Pancharaatra	6
The Aagamic Texts	12
Mentions of Pancharaatra in the Shaastras	17
Archaeological Evidences for the Practice of Vaishnava Dharma in Ancient Times	21

The contents of this article are copyrighted by Achyuta Bhakti Deets. Misuse of it is strictly forbidden. Contents used in this media not owned by Achyuta Bhakti Deets, belong to their respective owners.

<https://bhaktideets.org>

Email: info@bhaktideets.org



Introduction and Overview of Vaishnava Dharma

Vaishnava Dharma, or Vaishnavism, is the darshana (philosophy) within Hinduism which considers Shri Vishnu as the Supreme Being or Param Brahma. There are multiple Vaishnava darshanas today, with their own disciplic successions and philosophical tenets, known as 'sampradaayas'.

There is even a myth that the Vaishnava philosophy is developed during recent centuries and did not exist before the time of Shri Ramanujacharya. However, this is quite baseless. All present day Vaishnava sampradaayas follow either the Pancharaatra or Vaikhaanasa philosophies. These are two ancient systems of Vaishnavism, with their philosophical texts called 'Aagamas', which describe their philosophical tenets and rituals, including temple worship. These philosophies have been in practice since thousands of years and are even mentioned several times in the other Shaastras, including the Vedas, Mahaabhaarata and Puraanas.

Vaikhaanasa was founded by Maharshi Vikhaanasa, an amsha of Shri Brahmaa. Pancharaatra was founded by Shri Naaraayana Rshi, an avataara of Shri Vishnu Himself. He provided the knowledge of Pancharaatra to many Rshis, who transferred its knowledge through the Pancharaatra Aagamas. Most of the popular present day Vaishnava sampradaayas, such as Shri Vaishnavas, Maadhva Vaishnavas and Gaudiya Vaishnavas, are followers of the Pancharaatra darshana and are descendants of these Rshis through their disciplic succession. In the 358th Adhyaaya of the Shaanti Parva of the Mahaabhaarata, it is explained how during different ages and cycles of destruction and recreation of the various realms of the universe, this philosophy was transmitted and propagated differently by Shri Vishnu, starting with the Devatas like Brahmaa Deva and the Rshis.

The Vaikhaanasa Aagamas are mentioned directly in the Vedas. For instance, the Taandya Maha-Braahmana of the Saama Veda says:

वैखानसं भवति ।

वैखानसा वा ऋषय इन्द्रस्य प्रिया आसँ ॥

—Taandya Maha-Braahmana, Praapathaka 14, Khanda 4, Mantras 6-7

The Vaikhaanasa Aagamas mainly consists of Veda mantras and practices directly linked to them. They are linked to the Vaikhaanasa Shaakha (branch) of the Krshna-Yajurveda. Currently, only the Paramaatmika Upanishad and the Vaikhaanasa Samhita are extant texts of this Shaakha. The Upanishad has been commented upon by the Vaikhaanasa philosopher, Shri Shreenivaasa Deekshita. All Vaikhaanasas are Dvijas and their followers are hereditary. Only those born to practising Vaikhaanasa parents are eligible to receive deeksha (initiation) and become its followers. The ritual of deeksha is also done before birth, when the child is still in the mother's womb.

The Pancharaatra philosophy is derived from the Vaidheya Shaakha, or Ekaayana Shaakha of the Shukla-Yajurveda (a currently lost branch of the Yajurveda). Therefore, it is also known by the name 'Ekaayana'. Unlike Vaikhaanasa, Pancharaatra is open to all and any bhakta of Shri Vishnu, with good conduct and nature, is eligible to become a Pancharaatrika Vaishnava through the ritual of Pancharaatrika deeksha, known as 'Pancha samskaara' (five rituals). Upon deeksha, one can learn the Aagama Shaastras and worship Shri Vishnu with their protocols. The Aagamas mention that all Sat-bhaktas, regardless of background, are eligible for Panchasamskaara, to become disciples of a Vaishnava Guru and learn the Pancharaatra philosophy. The Vishnu Samhita even mentions that those who aren't bhaktas of Vishnu are also eligible to obtain knowledge of the Vaishnava Aagamas.

अधिकारं स्वकीयं च तत्त्वं चास्मै निवेदयेत् ।

दद्याच्च वैष्णवं ज्ञानं संसारच्छेदकारणम् ॥ ४६ ॥

श्रावयेत् समयांश्चैतांस्तन्त्रोक्तान् देशिकोत्तमः ।

अनुग्राह्यास्त्वया शिष्या वैष्णवाः शुभचारिणः ॥ ४७ ॥

ब्राह्मणाः क्षत्रिया वैश्याः शूद्रा योषित एव वा ।

अन्यदेवरता ये तु चातुर्वर्ण्याच्च ये बहिः ॥ ४८ ॥

“One's own people have the authority to obtain knowledge of Shri Vishnu and the Tattvas, which make one free from samsaara. An ultimate scholar well versed in the Tantras, out of compassion, should accept disciples, who should be Vaishnavas with good conduct – Braahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, women or a devotee of other Devatas, or even those who are out of the four varnas.”

—Vishnu Samhita, Patala 11, Shlokas 46-48

The five samskaaras of the procedure of Panchasamskaara are:

- (1) **Tapta**: branding one's left and right shoulders with the heated seal of the Shankha and Chakra respectively
- (2) **Pundra**: Applying marks of Urdhvapundra tilaka with Gopi chandana on the various parts of the body
- (3) **Naama**: Receiving a new name given by the Guru, which is one of Shri Vishnu's names
- (4) **Mantra**: Receiving upadesha, or instruction, of different mantras to chant regularly, which are used to propitiate Shri Vishnu and other Devatas
- (5) **Yaaga**: performing different kinds of worship of Shri Vishnu, as per the protocols of the Aagamas

The darshana is named 'Pancharaatra' due to the following reasons:

- Shri Vishnu, during the beginning of creation of the material universe, first taught the knowledge of the Pancharaatra philosophy to Shri Brahmaa and other Devatas, in

five nights. This gives it the name 'Paancharaatra' than the popular one 'Pancharaatra'. (Refer to the Eeshvara Samhita, Adhyaaya 21, Shlokas 532-533; Vihagendra Samhita, Adhyaaya 1, Shlokas 31-34)

- The Pancharaatra Aagamas provide five-fold types of knowledge, known as 'rastras'. (Refer to the Naarada Pancharaatra Samhita, Adhyaaya 1, Shloka 44)
- It provides knowledge on the five manifestations of Shri Vishnu – Para, Vyuha, Vibhaava, Antaryaami and Archa. (Refer to the Ahirbudhnya Samhita, Adhyaaya 11)

So, there are many such explanations. The Shatapatha Braahmana also mentions Brahmaa Deva performing a Yajna of five nights to obtain this knowledge, with the remembrance of Naaraayana as his Antaryaami (indweller), also giving it the name 'Pancharaatra'.

पुरुषो ह नारायणोऽकामयत अतितिष्ठेयं सर्वाणि भूतान्यहमेवेदं सर्वं स्यामिति स एतम् पुरुषमेधम्
पञ्चरात्रम् यज्ञक्रतुमपश्यत्तमाहरत्तेनायजत तेनेष्ट्वात्यतिष्ठत्सर्वाणि भूतानीदं सर्वमभवदतितिष्ठति सर्वाणि
भूतानीदं सर्वम् भवति य एवम् विद्वान्पुरुषमेधेन यजते यो वैतदेवम् वेद ।

—Shatapatha Braahmana, Kaanda 13, Adhyaaya 6, Braahmana 1, Mantra 1



The Philosophy of Pancharaatra

The Vaishnava philosophy considers Bhagavaan Naaraayana alone to be Param Brahman. He is solely eternal and is the creator, sustainer and annihilator of all the realms and the universe. All other entities are jeevas, living entities, who are eternally subordinate to Him and dependent on Him for their existence. The highest abode or destination for all living entities is Parama Padam, Vaikuntha. Vaishnavism considers Brahman to possess a divine and inconceivable form. The Pancharaatra Aagamas describe five levels of manifestations of Shri Vishnu:

1. **Para:** Literally meaning “the Highest” or “Supreme”, this refers to Para Vaasudeva, the highest form of Shri Vishnu. He resides at ‘Paramapadam’ (literally meaning “the Highest/Supreme abode”). He is the Mula-Rupa or root form of Vishnu.
2. **Vyuha:** They are four forms acquired by Shri Vishnu, which are His manifestations in our material universe, known as ‘Vyuhas’. He acquired these forms when He creates the universe.
 - **Vaasudeva:** The first Vyuha form, who resides at the Ksheera-Saagara and is visible to the devatas.
 - **Sankarshana:** The Vyuha form who is the presiding devata of tamas. He is also the originator of Shri Aadi Shesha and Shri Shiva.
 - **Pradyumna:** He is the third Vyuha form, who performs preservation.
 - **Aniruddha:** He is the form of Shri Vishnu among the Trimurtis (Brahmaa, Vishnu and Shiva). Shri Brahmaa originates from a lotus on His navel.
3. **Vibhaava:** The various avataaras of Shri Vishnu, who appear from the Aniruddha Vyuha form. He descends in our material realms, the Lokas, in various forms. All the saakshaat avataaras of Vishnu are the same Personality as Himself and are completely equivalent to Him in all aspects.
4. **Antaryaami:** The form of Shri Vishnu, being present within the soul of all beings, as Paramaatma, the Indweller within all beings.
5. **Archa:** The energized deity in a temple, which is used as a means of worshiping Shri Vishnu.

The Pancharaatra Aagamas enable the worship of Bhagavaan Naaraayana through several mediums, such as water, fire, in a temple deity or even as one’s own Antaryaami (Indweller within the soul). The objective of the Pancharaatra philosophy is to provide moksha to all Vaishnavas, regardless of background, varna, sex, race, and all factors. So, the Mahaabhaarata says:

पञ्चरात्रविदो मुख्या यथाक्रमपरा नृप ।
एकान्तभावोपगता वासुदेवं विशन्ति ते ॥

“Those eminent ones who comprehend the Pancharaatra philosophy and through understanding the relative position of the Devas, thereby attain single-minded devotion, enter into Vaasudeva (i.e., obtain moksha).”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva, Adhyaaya 359, Shloka 72 (var. Adhyaaya 337, Shloka 67; Quoted by Shri Madhvacharya, in the Mahaabhaarata Taatparya Nirnaya, Adhyaaya 2, Shloka 110)



The Shaastras provide the following description of Para Vaasudeva, as quoted by Shri Madhvacharya, in the Mahaabhaarata Taatparyya Nirnaya, Adhyaaya 21.

ददर्श तद्भोगसुखासनं विभुं महानुभावं पुरुषोत्तमोत्तमम् ।
सान्द्राम्बुदाभं सुपिशङ्गवाससं प्रसन्नवक्त्रं रुचिरायतेक्षणम् ॥ ५४ ॥

महामणित्रातकिरीटकुण्डलप्रभापरिक्षिप्तसहस्रकुन्तलम् ।
प्रलम्बचार्वाष्टभुजं सकौस्तुभं श्रीवत्सलक्ष्मं वनमालया वृतम् ॥ ५५ ॥

सुनन्दनन्दप्रमुखैः स्वपाषाणैश्चक्रादिभिर्मूर्तिधरैर्निजायुधैः ।
पुष्ट्या श्रिया कीर्त्यजयाखिलार्थिभिर्निषेव्यमानं परमेष्ठिनां पतिम् ॥ ५६ ॥

“He (Arjuna) saw seated happily on that mighty serpent (Aadi Shesha), the Almighty Purushottama. Resembling a dark cloud, He had a beautiful yellow garment, a pleased face, with attractive and broad eyes. He had a crown and ear rings with several great bright gems and several scattered locks of hair, with eight long beautiful arms, the Kaustubha mani, the Shreevatsa mark and embraced by a garland of forest flowers. He was served by Sundanda and Nanda prominently, by His associates such as the Sudarshana chakra and the others, with His weapons having adorned their true form. The Master of all rulers was being served distinctly by Pushti, Shri, Keerti and Ajaa.”

—Bhaagavata Puraana, Skandha 10, Adhyaaya 86, Shlokas 54-56

The Vishnu Puraana too provides a similar description of the form of Shri Vishnu, to be meditated upon, during dhyaana (focused meditation/worship).

प्रसन्नवदनं चारुपद्मपत्रोपमेक्षणम् ।
सुकपोलं सुविस्तीर्णललाटफकोज्ज्वलम् ॥ ८० ॥

समकर्णान्तविन्यस्य चारुकुण्डलभूषणम् ।
कंबुग्रीवं सुवीस्तीर्णश्रीवत्साङ्कितवक्षसम् ॥ ८१ ॥

वलित्रिभङ्गिना मग्ननाभिना ह्युदरेण च ।
प्रलम्बाष्टभुजं विष्णुमथवापि चतुर्भुजम् ॥ ८२ ॥

समस्थितोरुजङ्घञ्च सुस्थिताङ्घ्रिवराम्बुजम् ।
चिन्तयेद्ब्रह्मभूतं तं पीतनिर्मलवाससम् ॥ ८३ ॥

किरीटहारकेयूरकटकादिविभूषितम् ।
शार्ङ्गशङ्खगदाखड्गचक्राक्षबलयान्वितम् ।
वरदाभयहस्तं च मुद्रि कारत्नभूषितम् ॥ ८४ ॥

“Vishnu with a pleased face, beautiful eyes like the leaves of a lotus, smooth cheeks, a broad and brilliant forehead, equally sized ears whose lobes have splendid earrings, a thin neck, a broad chest with the Shreevatsa symbol, a belly with three folds and a deep navel, eight or four long arms, properly positioned thighs and well-formed lotus-like feet – one must meditate upon this form of Brahman, dressed in a pure yellow garment, adorned with a splendid crown, necklaces, bracelets, armlets and other ornaments, holding the bow,

conchshell, mace, sword, discus, rosary beads, lotus and arrow. His hand shows the mudra of varada (bestowing benedictions), decorated with gems.”

—Vishnu Puraana, Amsa 6, Adhyaaya 7, Shlokas 80-84





The Pancharaatra Aagamas are the root of Vaishnavism. They provide a hierarchy of the Devatas and explain how worship of Shri Vishnu and Lakshmi Devi is the method to achieve moksha, liberation from the cycle of continuous birth and death in this material world. They explain the different manifestations and forms of Shri Vishnu and Lakshmi Devi. They state that all other Devatas such as Brahmaa, Shiva, Indra, Surya, Yama, etc., are jeevas (living entities), who are subordinate to Vishnu. They have an amsha of Vishnu within their hearts as their Antaryaami, who is like an additional Aatma and is ultimately worshiped when those Devatas are. It is He who enables all beings to even exist and He Himself is causeless.

The Pancharaatra Aagamas prescribe daily rituals and duties to be done by everyone, at all places from one's home to temples, for members of all varnas and aashramas (stages of life)

© Copyrights 2022-24 Achyuta Bhakti Deets

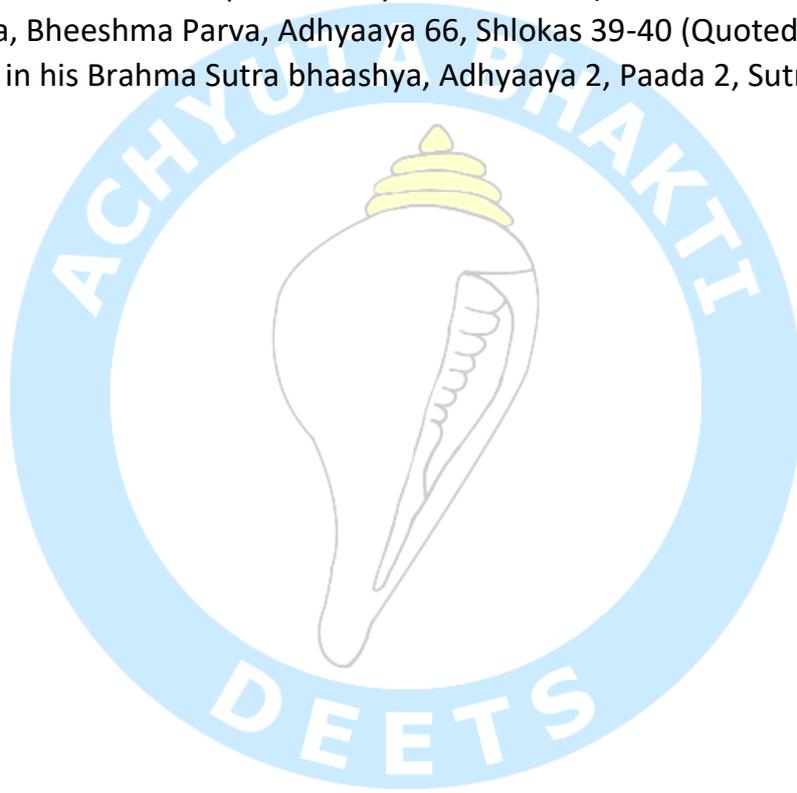
– Brahmacharya, Grhastha, Vaanaprastha and Sanyaasa. They elaborately explain both the Vaishnava philosophy and prescribe the ideal aachaara (conduct) for a Vaishnava. So, the Mahaabhaarata says:

ब्राह्मणैः क्षत्रिकयैर्वैश्यैः शूद्रैश्च कृतलक्षणैः ।
सेव्यतेऽभ्यर्च्यते चैव नित्ययुक्तैः स्वकर्मभिःक ॥ ३९ ॥

द्वापरस्य युगस्यान्ते आदौ कलियुगस्य च ।
सात्वतं विधिमास्थाय गीतः संकर्षणेन वै ॥ ४० ॥

"Braahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, worship Him (Vaasudeva) in their daily rituals and activities. They are to worship Him in the Dvaapara and in the beginning of Kali Yuga, using the Saattvata rules expounded by Sankarshana (in the Pancharaatra texts)."

—Mahaabhaarata, Bheeshma Parva, Adhyaaya 66, Shlokas 39-40 (Quoted by Shri Ramanujacharya, in his Brahma Sutra bhaashya, Adhyaaya 2, Paada 2, Sutra 43)

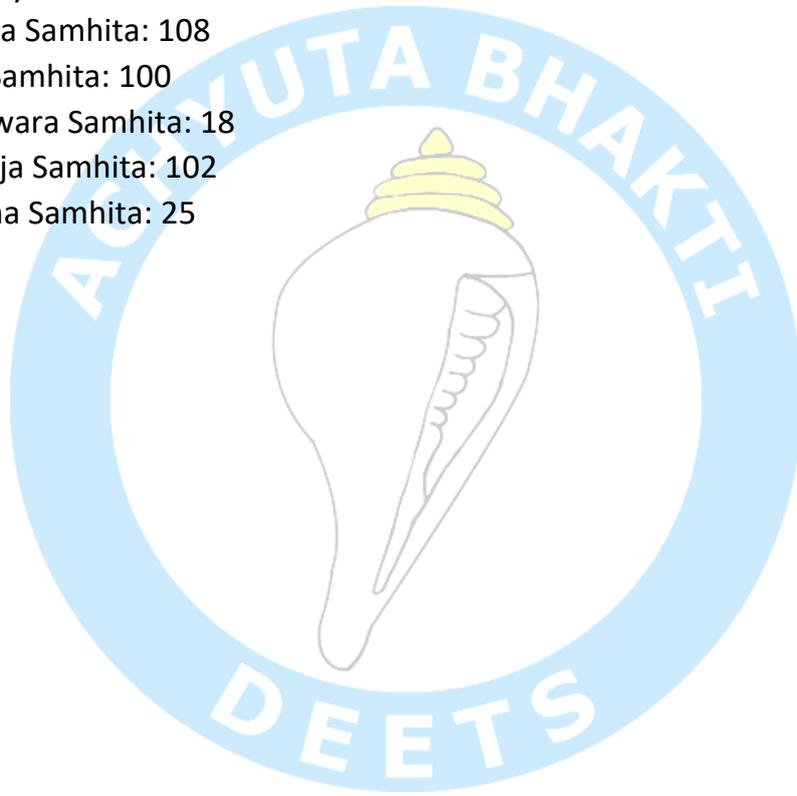


The Aagamic Texts

Originally, there have been about one and a half crore Pancharaatra Aagamas, as stated in the Maarkandeya Samhita! Among these, barely about 40 survive currently. 108 chief Aagamas are listed in the Padma Samhita and Vishvamisra Samhita, though it is likely that the number of these would have been about 1,008. Shri Madhvacharya himself quoted 292 different sources in his works, half of which are Pancharaatra texts.

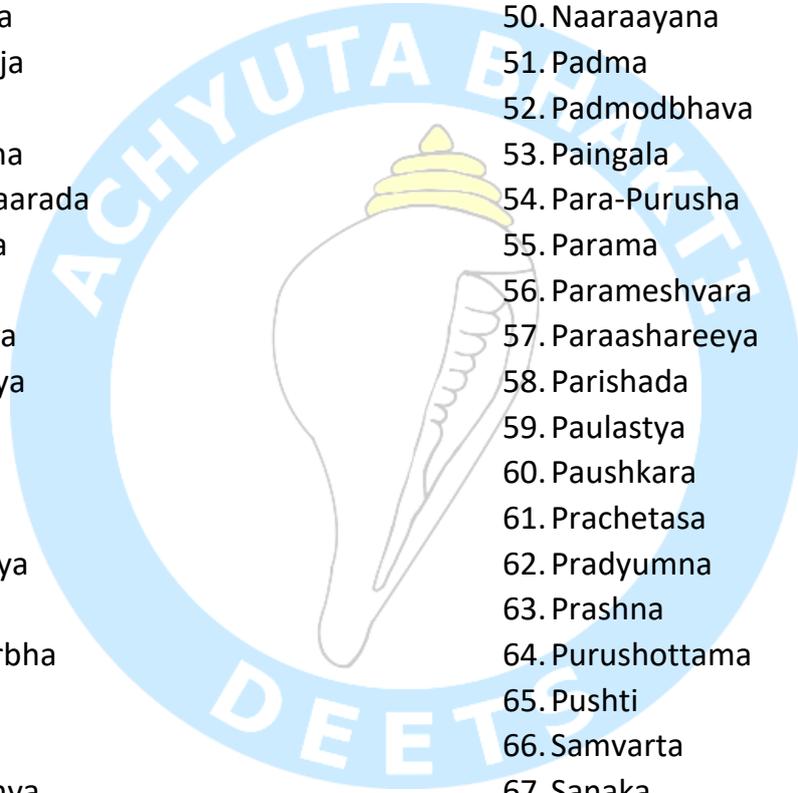
The following Aagamas list different numbers of other credible Pancharaatra Aagamas:

1. Padma-Samhita: 108
2. Purushottama Samhita: 105
3. Maarkandeya Samhita: 91
4. Vishvamisra Samhita: 108
5. Kapinjala Samhita: 100
6. Parameshwara Samhita: 18
7. Bharadvaja Samhita: 102
8. Hayashirsha Samhita: 25



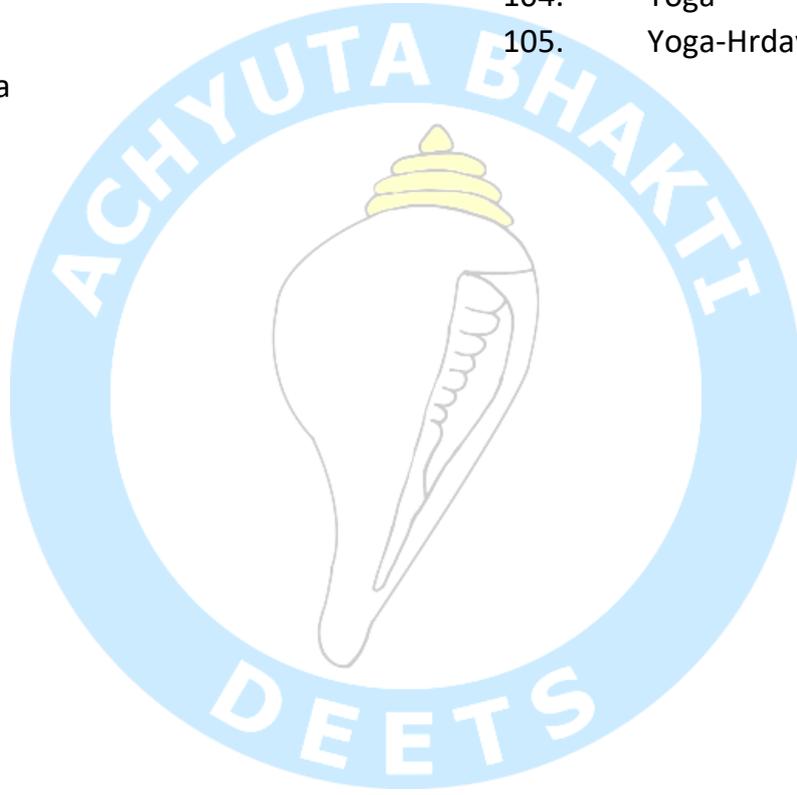
The Padma Samhita provides the following list of 108 Pancharaatra Aagamas:

1. Agastya
2. Agneya
3. Ahirbudhnya
4. Ambara
5. Ananta
6. Aangirasa
7. Atreya
8. Aupagaayana
9. Aupendra
10. Aushaanasa
11. Bhaagavata
12. Bharadvaaja
13. Bhaargava
14. Bodhaayana
15. Brahma-Naarada
16. Brhaspatya
17. Daksha
18. Dattaatreya
19. Dhanadeeya
20. Dravina
21. Eeshvara
22. Gargya
23. Gautameeya
24. Haarita
25. Hiranyagarbha
26. Jaabala
27. Jaimina
28. Jaamadagnya
29. Jaya
30. Jayottara
31. Janaarnava
32. Kalki-Raaghava
33. Kaanva
34. Kapila
35. Kashyapa
36. Kaatyayaaneya
37. Kaumaara
38. Krshna
39. Maha-Sanatkumaara
40. Mahendra
41. Mandara
42. Maniprashna
43. Maaricha
44. Maarkandeya
45. Maaya-Vaibhava
46. Mula
47. Nala-Kubara
48. Naaradeeya
49. Narasimha
50. Naaraayana
51. Padma
52. Padmodbhava
53. Paingala
54. Para-Purusha
55. Parama
56. Parameshvara
57. Paraashareeya
58. Parishada
59. Paulastya
60. Paushkara
61. Prachetasa
62. Pradyumna
63. Prashna
64. Purushottama
65. Pushti
66. Samvarta
67. Sanaka
68. Sanatkumaara
69. Sankarshana
70. Sarva
71. Saattvata
72. Satya
73. Saumya
74. Saunakeeya
75. Saura
76. Shaakala
77. Shatatapa
78. Shreekara



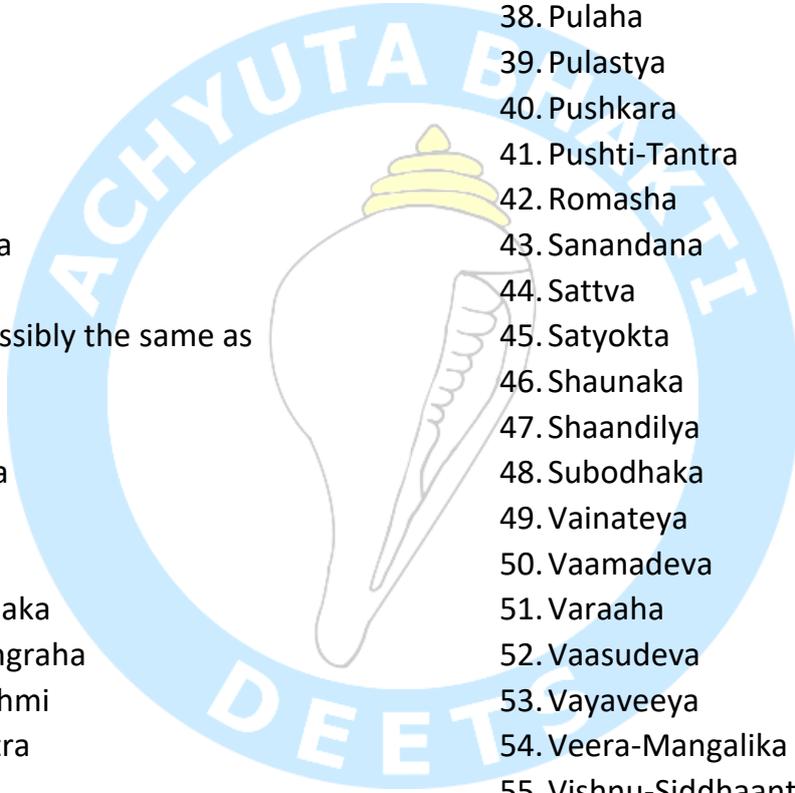
79. Tattva-Saagara
80. Trailokya-Mohana
81. Trailokya-Vijaya
82. Uma-Maheshvara
83. Uttara-Purvaka
84. Vaageesha
85. Vaikhaanasa
86. Vaalmiki
87. Vaamana
88. Vaamaneeya
89. Varaaha-Mihira
90. Varuna
91. Vasishtha
92. Vihagendra

93. Vishnu (Samhita)
94. Vishnu-Purvaka
95. Vishnu-Sadbhaava
96. Vishnu Tantra
97. Vishnu Tilaka
98. Vishnu Vaibhaavika
99. Vishva
100. Vishvaksena
101. Vyaasa
102. Yaajnavalkya
103. Yamy
104. Yoga
105. Yoga-Hridaya



The Purushottama Samhita mentions the following additional Samhitas, excluding the ones common to the Padma Samhita:

1. Aindra
2. Aishvarya
3. Aananda
4. Bhrgu
5. Brahmaanda
6. Brahmokta
7. Dashottara
8. Durvaasa
9. Gajendra
10. Gana
11. Gandharva
12. Garuda
13. Hairanya
14. Hariti
15. Hayagreeva
16. Indra
17. Jaimini (possibly the same as Jaimina)
18. Kapinjala
19. Kaatyayana
20. Khadeshi
21. Kushaala
22. Lakshmi Tilaka
23. Madhu Sangraha
24. Maha Lakshmi
25. Maha-Tantra
26. Manu
27. Matsya
28. Maudgala
29. Meru-Ganga
30. Naarada-Uttara Vijaana
31. Paisada
32. Panchaprashna
33. Para
34. Parama-Purusha
35. Paavaka
36. Pavana
37. Prahlaada
38. Pulaha
39. Pulastya
40. Pushkara
41. Pushti-Tantra
42. Romasha
43. Sanandana
44. Sattva
45. Satyokta
46. Shaunaka
47. Shaandilya
48. Subodhaka
49. Vainateya
50. Vaamadeva
51. Varaaha
52. Vaasudeva
53. Vayaveeya
54. Veera-Mangalika
55. Vishnu-Siddhaanta
56. Vishvamitra



The Vishvamitra Samhita lists the following, excluding the ones common to the Padma and Purushottama Samhitas:

1. Amrta
2. Brahma (repeated twice)
3. Brahma-Siddhaanta
4. Brhaspatya
5. Chandramaasa
6. Gautama
7. Kalki
8. Kaarshnya
9. Mahendra
10. Mahi-Prashna
11. Maaya-Vaibhaavika
12. Nandaakhya
13. Naarada
14. Nrkesari
15. Paarsha
16. Raaghava
17. Rudhaakhya
18. Rudra
19. Sambara
20. Shaakalya
21. Shukla
22. Skanda
23. Taijodravina
24. Tantra-Saagara
25. Ushaanasa
26. Vaalmeeki
27. Vaamana-Tantra
28. Varaaha-Mihira
29. Vishnu-Rahasya
30. Vishvamitriya
31. Yogi-Hrdaya



Mentions of Pancharaatra in the Shaastras

The Shaastras have repeatedly describing and extolled the Pancharaatra darshana numerous times, even supporting its tenets and practices. In the Chhaandogya Upanishad, Devarshi Naarada mentions it as one of the Shaastras he knows.

ऋग्वेदं भगवोऽध्येमि यजुर्वेदं सामवेदमथर्वणं चतुर्थमितिहासपुराणं पञ्चमं वेदानां वेदं पित्र्यं राशिं दैवं
निधिं वाकोवाक्यमेकायनं देवविद्यां ब्रह्मविद्यां भूतविद्यां क्षत्रविद्यां नक्षत्रविद्यां
सर्पदेवजनविद्यामेतद्भगवोऽध्येमि ॥ २ ॥

—Chhaandogya Upanishad, Prapaathaka 7, Khanda 1, Mantra 2

This mantra refers to Pancharaatra by the name 'Ekaayana'. The context of Devarshi Naarada learning about the Vaishnava philosophy can be found In the Varaaha Puraana, where he performs Tapas to propitiate Bhagavaan Vishnu, after which Varaaha appears and says that the Pancharaatra Aagamas have been revealed by Him, and are the highest means to reach Him.

दिदं पञ्चरात्रं मे शास्त्रं परमदुर्लभम् ।
तद्भवान् वेत्स्यते सर्वं मत्प्रसादान्न संशयः ॥

वेदैश्च पञ्चरात्रैश्च भक्त्या यज्ञैस्तथैव च ।
दृश्योऽहं नान्यथा दृश्यो वर्षकोटिशतैरपि ॥

(Shri Varaaha said): “You will know that this Pancharaatra Shaastra belongs to Me, in its entirety, which is the highest means and easy to follow, through My grace. There is no doubt about this. I am to be seen through the Vedas, the Pancharaatra Aagamas, bhakti and yajnas, not by any other means, even in crores of years.”

—Varaaha Puraana, Adhyaaya 66, Shlokas 17 and 18 (Shloka 18 quoted by Shri Madhvacharya, in his Mundaka Upanishad bhaashya, Mundaka 1, Khanda 1, Mantra 5)

धर्मं च मत्तो गृह्णीष्व सात्वतं नाम नामतः ।
तेन सृष्टं कृतयुगं स्थापयस्व यथाविधि ॥

ततो ब्रह्मा नमश्चक्रे देवाय हरिमेधसे ।
धर्मं चाग्र्यं स जग्राह सरहस्यं ससंग्रहम् ॥

आरण्यकेन सहितं नारायणमुखोद्गतम् ।
उपदिश्य ततो धर्मं ब्रह्मणेऽमिततेजसे ॥

तं कार्तियुगधर्माणं निराशीः कर्मसंज्ञितम् ।
जगाम तमसः पारं यत्राव्यक्तं व्यवस्थितम् ॥

ततोऽथ वरदो देवो ब्रह्मा लोकपितामहः ।
असृजत्स ततो लोकान्कृत्स्नान्स्थावरजङ्गमान् ॥

ततः प्रावर्तत तदा आदौ कृतयुगं शुभम् ।
ततो हि सात्वतो धर्मो व्याप्य लोकानवस्थितः ॥

तेनैवाद्येन धर्मेण ब्रह्मा लोकविसर्गकृत् ।
पूजयामास देवेशं हरिं नारायणं प्रभुम् ॥

(Shri Vishnu said): “Also receive this excellent Mata (philosophy) from Me, known as Saattvata. Aided by it, create the Krta Yuga (Satya Yuga) and ordain it duly.” Thus addressed, Brahmaa bowed his head unto the illustrious Hari and received from Him that foremost of all philosophies, with all its mysteries and its abstract of details, together with the Aaranyakas, which appeared from the mouth of Naaraayana. Naaraayana then instructed Brahmaa of immeasurable energy in that Dharma and addressing him, said, “You are the creator of the the respective Yuga Dharmas.” Having said this unto Brahmaa, Naaraayana disappeared and proceeded to that spot which is beyond the reach of tamas, where the Unmanifest resides, and which is known by the men of acts without desire of fruits. After this, the boon-giving Brahmaa, the father of the Lokas, created the different realms, with their mobile and immobile creatures. The Yuga that first commenced was highly auspicious and came to be called by the name of Krta. In that Yuga, the philosophy of Saattvata Dharma existed, pervading the entire universe. With that primeval philosophy of righteousness, Brahmaa, the creator of all the worlds, worshipped Devesha, Hari, Naaraayana.”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva (Mokshadharmas Parva), Adhyaaya 358, Shlokas 29-35

This also shows that the Pancharaatra Siddhaanta is eternal, just like the other Shaastras and has been in practice even since Satya Yuga. In fact, the same chapter of the Mahaabhaarata explicitly refers to it as an eternal philosophy:

नारदेन सुसंप्राप्तः सरहस्यः ससंग्रहः ।
एष धर्मो जगन्नाथात्साक्षान्नारायणानृप ॥

एवमेव महान्धर्मे आद्यो राजन्सनातनः ।
दुर्विज्ञेयो दुष्करश्च सात्वतैर्धार्यते सदा ॥

“This Dharma was obtained by Rishi Naarada from Him, the Master of the universe, Naaraayana Himself, with all its details. So, this great Dharma is ancient, O Raajan, and is eternal. Incapable of being comprehended with ease and exceedingly difficult of being practised, it is always upheld by the Saattvatas.”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva (Mokshadharmas Parva), Adhyaaya 358, Shlokas 54-55

पञ्चरात्रस्य कृत्स्नस्य वक्ता नारायणः स्वयम् ।
ज्ञानेष्वेतेषु राजेन्द्र सर्वेष्वेतद्विशिष्यते ॥

(Rshi Vaishampaayana said): “The narrator of the Pancharaatra philosophy, in its entirety, is Shri Naaraayana Himself. Among the sources of knowledge, this is superior and the best, O

© Copyrights 2022-24 Achyuta Bhakti Deets

Raajendra.”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva, Adhyaaya 359, Shloka 68 (var. Adhyaaya 337, Shloka 63)

This shloka has been quoted by:

- Shri Madhvacharya, in the Mahaabhaarata Taatparyya Nirnaya, Adhyaaya 2, Shloka 108
- Shri Jaya Teertha, in his Bhagavat Geeta bhaashya, Adhyaaya 2, Shloka 39
- Shri Ramanujacharya, in his Brahma Sutra bhaashya, Adhyaaya 2, Paada 2, Sutra 43

ज्ञानेष्वेतेषु राजेन्द्र साङ्ख्यपाशुपतादिषु ।
यथायोगं यथान्यायं निष्ठा नारायणः परः ॥

“O King! The other philosophies like Saankhya, Paashupata and the rest are acceptable only to the extent, where they accordance (with Pancharaatra) and are interpreted with reference to the Supremacy of Shri Naaraayana.”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva, Adhyaaya 359, Shloka 69 (Quoted by Shri Madhvacharya, in the Mahaabhaarata Taatparyya Nirnaya, Adhyaaya 2, Shloka 109)

इदं महोपनिषदं चतुर्वेदसमन्वितम् ।
सांख्ययोगकृतं तेन पञ्चरात्रानुशब्दितम् ॥

नारायणमुखोदीतं नारदोऽश्रावयत्युनः ।

“This great Upanishad takes one close to Brahman, explains the purport of the four Vedas harmoniously. It is based on Saankhya (Jnaana) and Yoga (bhakti). It is known as Pancharaatra. It appeared from the face of Shri Naaraayana and was explained by Devarshi Naarada once again.”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva, Adhyaaya 348, Shlokas 62–63 (var. Adhyaaya 339, Shloka 112)

तैरेकमतिभिर्भूत्वा यत्प्रोक्तं शास्त्रमुत्तमम् ।
वेदैश्चतुर्भिः समितं कृतं मेरौ महागिरौ ॥

“This lofty Shaastra (the Pancharaatra) has been expounded unanimously (by Shri Vishnu), has been declared equal to the four Vedas on the great mountain Meru.”

—Mahaabhaarata, Shaanti Parva, Adhyaaya 343, Shlokas 28–29

रिभिः स्वधर्मप्रमुखैर्युक्ता भक्तिरियं मुने ।
धर्म एकान्तिक इति प्रोक्तो भागवतद्र सः ॥

साक्षाद्भगवतः संगत्तद्भक्तानां च वेदशाम् ।
धर्मो ह्येकान्तिकः पुम्भिः प्राप्यते नान्यथा क्वचित् ॥

“This path of bhakti is inclusive of three aspects. This is also known as ‘Ekaantika Dharma’ as well as ‘Bhaagavata Dharma’. One will be able to tread this path only by the association of the Bhagavaan Himself or by the association of His exclusive bhaktas. There is no other way to follow this path of Ekaantika Dharma.”

—Skanda Puraana, Vaasudeva Mahatamya, Adhyaaya 25, Shlokas 64–66



Archaeological Evidences for the Practice of Vaishnava Dharma in Ancient Times

There are numerous archaeological evidences too, which show the prevalence of the worship of Shri Vishnu, during ancient times. There is an Indus Valley terracotta figure of Shri Vishnu, estimated to about 4,700 years old, by archaeologists!



Along with these, there are more explicit evidences mentioning the practice of the Vaishnava philosophy of Pancharaatra, with artifacts showing symbols such as Vishnu's Vyuhas. The following sculpture is from the 2nd century AD, depicting Vaasudeva and Sankarshana.



There is an ancient inscription from the 3rd century BC, mentioning the Bhaagavatas, in other words, Pancharaatikas. The short & incomplete inscription reads:

थे न भा ग व त न न ट के न का रि



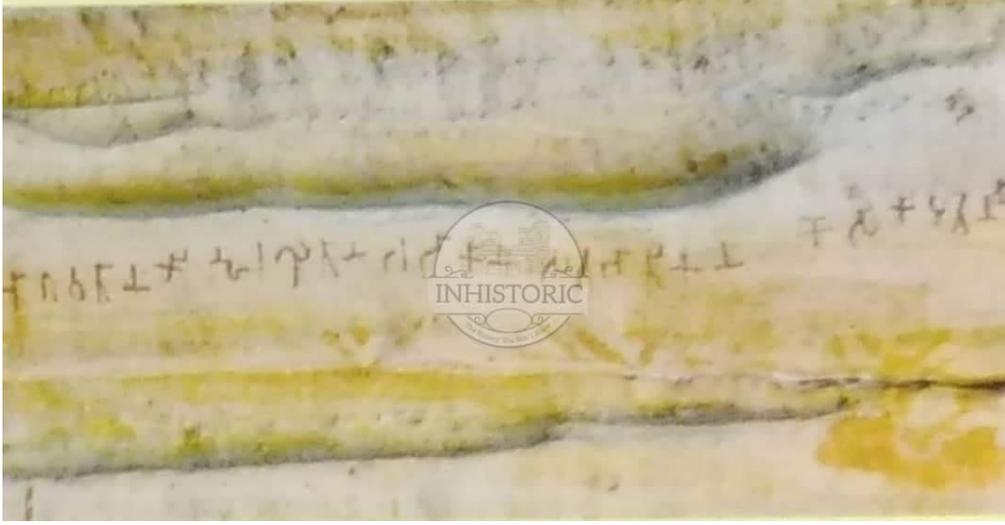
Figure 16: Inscribed brick from Madan Mohan temple



Figure 17: Inscribed brick from study Area

The inscription was found in the old mound of the Madan Mohan temple in Mathura. Hindu tradition asserts that this temple was rebuilt many times, with the original temple being built by King Vajra, the grandson of Shri Krshna. This inscription found in a medieval temple, affirms the Hindu tradition.

Another inscription was found in a cave locally known as 'Chudail Chhajja', situated in Mod. Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh. It dates to around **200 BC**. The Inscription is related to the Bhaagavata tradition and records the donation of several paintings by devotees named Krshnarakshita (literally meaning "protected by Krshna") and Bhadaka Shatabhatika, the former being the son of Kaushiki and Svira. It again provides evidence for the nationwide mass-popularity of the Vaishnava traditions.



24. ROCK INSCRIPTION FROM SHIVPURI

Jai Prakash

The Ochre coloured painted inscription is edited here with the kind permission of Shri.M.N.Katti, Director (Epigraphy). It is found in a cave locally known as 'Chudaila Chhaja' (i.e. ghost shelter). The cave is located at a distance of 18 kms. from Shivpuri, the headquarters of the Shivpurri District in Madhya Pradesh. The inscription is in one line. The writing is in a good state of preservation. The characters are Brāhmi, regular for the second century B.C.

The inscription was commented upon by J.P.Jain¹. Since the readings given by him are faulty the inscription is being re-edited. It records the making of paintings by *bhagavata kinharakhita*, *bhadaka Satabhatika* who was probably the son of *Kōsika* and *Svira*.

The inscription is interesting in as

much as it shows the prevalence of Vaishṇava tradition in the Shivpuri District as early as second century B.C. It provides the earliest epigraphical reference to the Bhāgavata cult, for which the most ancient epigraphical reference was hitherto provided by the Besenagar Garuḍa Pillar Inscription² of the time of Bhagabhadra assignable to 2nd century B.C.

TEXT³

Bhagavata (te) na Kinharakhita (te) na
Bhadaka (ke) na Satabhatika (ke) na
Kosikaputena Svira sutena Ka(kri) ta

Translation:

(The paintings were) done by *bhagavata* Kinharakhita, Bhadaka, Satabhatika, probably the son of Kosiki and Svira⁴.

Notes and References

1. K.K.Chakravarti, *Rock Art of India*, p. 241.
2. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, vol.I, p.88.
3. From Photograph
4. I am thankful to Dr. M.D.Sampath and Dr.S.S.Iyer for their valuable suggestions in the preparation of this paper.

As of now, the currently oldest reference of the word 'Vaishnava' (वैष्णव) is found on the following coin of Traikutaka King Dharasena who ruled parts of Gujrat & Maharashtra. The coin is dated to about **250 AD**, i.e., around 1,800 years old. The King and his family are referred to as 'Parama Vaishnava' (परम वैष्णव).



There are more such evidences, too. Therefore, there should no doubt that Vaishnava Dharma is extremely ancient and has been prominent since thousands of years. Thus, ends this sketch on the Vaishnava philosophy.

Thank you for reading.

© Copyrights 2022-24 Achyuta Bhakti Deets

श्री हरये नमः ।

श्रीकृष्णार्पणमस्तु ॥

© Copyrights 2022-24 Achyuta Bhakti Deets