

Smriti - Introduction

Smriti: (Sanskrit) "That which is remembered; the tradition."

What is remembered; unwritten teachings handed down by word of mouth, distinguished from srutis or teachings handed down in traditional writings.

Hinduism's non-revealed, secondary but deeply revered scriptures, derived from man's insight and experience. Smriti speaks of secular matters - science, law, history, agriculture, etc. - as well as spiritual lore, ranging from day-to-day rules and regulations to super conscious outpourings.

The smritis were a system of oral teaching, passing from one generation of recipients to the succeeding generation, as was the case with the Brahmanical books before they were embodied in manuscript. The Smartava-Brahmanas are, for this reason, considered by many to be esoterically superior to the Sruta-Brahmanas. In its widest application, the smritis include the Vedangas, the Sutras, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, the Dharma-sastras, especially the works of Manu, Yajnavalkya, and other inspired lawgivers, and the ethical writing or Niti-sastras; whereas the typical example of the sruti are the Vedas themselves considered as revelations.

1. *Smriti* is a Sanskrit word, from the root Smara (स्मर), which means "remembrance, reminiscence, thinking of or upon, calling to mind", or simply "memory" The word is found in ancient Vedic literature, such as in section 7.13 of the Chandogya Upanishad. In later and modern scholarly usage, the term refers to tradition, memory, as well as a vast post-Vedic canon of "tradition that is remembered".
2. *Smriti* is also symbolic synonym for number 18, from the 18 scholars who are credited in Indian tradition for writing dharma-related smriti texts (most have been lost). In linguistic traditions, *Smriti* is the name of a type of verse meter. In Hindu mythology, *Smriti* is the name of the daughter of *Dharma* and *Medha*.
3. David Brick states that the original meaning of smriti was simply tradition, and not texts.
4. The term smriti refers to a specific collection of ancient Sanskrit texts as follows: the six or more Vedangas, the four Upavedas, the two Itihasas, and the 18 main Puranas. Among the vedanga, the Kalpa Vedanga defines codes of ritual in the Shruta and Shulba Shastras, and domestic-civil laws in the Grihya and Dharma Shastras. Also included as classical smriti are the founding sutras of six ancient philosophies called shad darsanas (Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa and Vedanta).
5. In a general sense, smriti may refer to any text other than shruti (revealed scripture) that is revered as scripture within a particular sect. From the vast body of sacred literature, shastra, each sect and school claims its own preferred texts as secondary scripture, e.g., the Ramayana of Vaishnavism and Smartism, or the Tirumurai of Saiva Siddhanta. Thus, the selection of smriti varies widely from one sect and lineage to another.
