

Skandha, Shloka, Stanza, Sutra

Mainly from *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*

Skandha¹

(Sk.) Chapter. The *Bhagavata Purana*, for example, the most popular of the eighteen principal Puranas, consists of some 18,000 shlokas in twelve skandhas.

Shloka

(Sk.) A verse generally formed in four half-lines of eight, or in two lines of sixteen syllables each, — the Sanskrit epic² meter of 32 syllables.

Stanza

(Sk. *lit.*, stay, abode, room.) A division of a poem consisting of two or more lines arranged together as a unit. More specifically, a stanza usually is a group of lines arranged together in a recurring pattern of metrical lengths and a sequence of rhymes. The structure of a stanza (also called a strophe or stave) is determined by the number of lines, the dominant metre, and the rhyme scheme. Thus, a stanza of four lines of iambic³ pentameter, rhyming *abab*, could be described as a quatrain. Some of the

¹ Not to be confused with the Buddhist term *skandha*, the semi-material life-atoms or bundles of attributes of the astral man. They are the aggregate of the animal soul of the worldly, mortal man. See “Transmigration, Reincarnation, Gilgulim Transmigration differ” in the same series.

Skandhas are the manifested qualities and attributes forming the human being on all six planes of Being, beneath the spiritual monad or atma-buddhi, making up the totality of the subjective and objective person. They have to do with everything that is finite in the human being, and are therefore inapplicable to the relatively eternal and absolute. Every vibration of whatever kind, mental, emotional, or physical, that an individual has undergone or made, is derivative of and from one of the skandhas composing his constitution. Skandhas are the elements of limited existence. The five skandhas of every human being are: rupa (form), the material properties or attributes; vedana (sensations, perceptions); sanjna (consciousness, abstract ideas); sanskara (action), tendencies both physical and mental; vijnana (knowledge), mental and moral predispositions. The last two skandhas “are connected with, and productive of Sakkayaditthi, the ‘heresy or delusion of individuality’ and of Attavada ‘the doctrine of Self,’ both of which (in the case of the fifth principle the soul) lead to the maya of heresy and belief in the efficacy of vain rites and ceremonies; in prayers and intercession”; “The ‘old being’ is the sole parent — father and mother at once — of the ‘new being.’ It is the former who is the creator and fashioner, of the latter, in reality; and far more so in plain truth, than any father in flesh. And once that you have well mastered the meaning of Skandhas you will see what I mean.” (ML 111) The human skandhas are the causal activities which by their action and interaction attract the reincarnating ego back to earth-life. The exoteric skandhas have to do with objective man; the esoteric with inner and subjective man.

At death the seeds of causes sown which have not yet been realised remain latent in our inner principles as “psychological impulse-seeds” awaiting expression in future lives. The skandhas “unite at the birth of man and constitute his personality. After the death of the body the Skandhas are separated and so remain until the Reincarnating Ego on its downward path into physical incarnation gathers them together again around itself, and thus reforms the human constitution considered as a unity.” (OG 158)

² A long narrative poem that relates to heroic events at an elevated style. (From *Gr. epos*, word)

³ A foot of two syllables, a short followed by a long, or an unstressed by a stressed. (From *Gr. Iambos*, from *iap-tein* to assail, this metre being first used by satirists.)



most common stanzaic forms are designated by the number of lines in each unit — *e.g.*, tercet or terza rima (three lines) and ottava rima (eight lines). Other forms are named for their inventors or best-known practitioners or for the work in which they first were heavily used — *e.g.*, the *Spenserian stanza*, named for Edmund Spenser, or the *In Memoriam stanza*, popularized by Alfred, Lord Tennyson in the poem by that title. The term strophe is often used interchangeably with stanza, although strophe is sometimes used specifically to refer to a unit of a poem that does not have a regular metre and rhyme pattern or to a unit of a Pindaric ode.

Rubaiyat (of Omar Khayyam) *stanzas* are iambic pentameter quatrains with a rhyme scheme *aaba*.

Spenserian (Edmund Spenser's) *stanzas* consists of eight verses of iambic pentameter and an alexandrine with a rhyme scheme *ababbcbcc*.

Ballard stanza consisted of four lines with the first and third lines unrhymed iambic tetrameters and the second and fourth lines rhymed iambic *trimeters*.

Heroic stanza is a rhymed quatrain in heroic verse with a rhyme scheme of *abab* — called also heroic quatrain.

The Stanzas of Dzyan are archaic verses of philosophical and cosmogonical content drawn from the Book of Dzyan, which form the basis of *The Secret Doctrine*. They present the esoteric teachings in regard to cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, and are the ancient heritage of humanity as preserved by the brotherhood of mahatmas. Every race and nation has drawn from this source through the medium of its initiated or inspired teachers and saviours. Only portions of the original verses are given in *The Secret Doctrine*, and Blavatsky's presentation there represents the first time that they have been set down in a modern European language; her endeavour always was to represent the meaning rather than to give a merely literal rendering of the words: "it must be left to the intuition and the higher faculties of the reader to grasp, as far as he can, the meaning of the allegorical phrases used. Indeed it must be remembered that all these Stanzas appeal to the inner faculties rather than to the ordinary comprehension of the physical brain."⁴

Sutra

(*Sk.*, siv to sew.) A string, thread; the sutras are strings of rules or aphorisms written in serve form, composed in terse and symbolic language with the obvious intention of their being committed to memory. This was a favourite form among the Hindus, as among all ancient peoples, of embodying and transmitting rules of ancient religious and philosophic thought. There are sutras written upon almost every subject but the sutras commonly signify those connected with the Vedas, of which there are three kinds: the Kalpa-sutras (rules of ritual); the grihya-sutras (domestic rules) treating of ordinary family rites such as marriage, birth, name-giving, etc.; and the Samayacharika-sutras which treat of customs and temporal duties. The Kalpa-sutras belong to the class of writings called Srutis (heard or revealed); while the other two types of su-

⁴ Cf. *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 21



tras belong to the Smritis (remembered), carried traditionally from generation to generation by word of mouth.

In Buddhist writings, the Sutras are the second division of sacred works, generally known under the equivalent Pali term Suttas.



Serenade for an Orange Cat by James C Christensen

