Digital Dharma
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Education

Digital Hindu Resources for Kids

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Ask any overworked parent--computers and smartphones are doubling up these days as virtual baby-sitters. Kids can get lost for long stretches of time playing with apps on their parents' phones, online games or interactive web-sites. The iPhone is so appealing for young children that the New York Times called it "Toddlers' Favorite Toy" for 2010.

With so much of children's time and focus now on these gadgets, it would be a wonderful opportunity to use them to educate children about Hindu teachings and culture. Apps and games could help them learn Hindu concepts, read stories and discover different aspects of their religion and culture in a fun and entertaining way.

Sridevi Sundar, a working mother of two young children in San Ramon, CA, would especially appreciate an iPhone app for her five-year-old daughter. "Something bright and visual would be nice, perhaps an app where she could learn the names of the different Hindu Deities, and maybe dress up the Goddesses in new saris like she sees the priests do at the temple."

To our surprise, a survey of digital Hindu resources reveals a scarcity of apps, games and websites devoted especially to kids. Here is a list for parents who want to guide their young ones on these devices.

The Sanatan Society's website includes a dedicated "Hindu Kids Corner" featuring coloring pages to print out. http://bit.ly/sanatana-org-children HinduKids.org is a website that includes Flash-based animations of stories, shlokas and history lessons.

In the mobile device apps department, by far one of the best is the iRemedi series of Amar Chitra Katha comics for iOS and Android. These comic books introduced a whole new generation to ancient stories and Indian history through its simple and entertaining format. Now they are available on the iPhone and the iPad at $1.99 per title. The comic panels are fun and easy to flip through, and can keep kids engrossed in tales of devotion and valor.

There is also a "Kids Hindu Puzzles" app by Appventors LLC (http://bit.ly/hindu-puzzles) and a "BalVihar" app that helps kids memorize basic Sanskrit shlokas.

Video is always captivating. The channel RajShriKids, www.youtube.com/user/RajshriKids, has several animated videos that illustrate the Ramayana and Mahabharata, along with other epics and folktales.

If your child likes to read or if you read to your children, Scribd has "Hinduism for Kids," www.scribd.com/doc/36383204/Hinduism-for-Kids Amar Chitra Katha stories are also available as animated features on DVDs and VCDs. See www.amarchitrakatha.com/products/DVDs-and-VCDs

The scarcity of digital Hindu resources can be taken as an opportunity for new development. Even if we just consider the Indian American population in the US, the market is obviously ripe for innovations. According to a survey (rww.to/hk2GRj) done in February 2011, 63 percent of Indian immigrants in the US plan on purchasing an iPad, while 80 percent of tablet owners already own an iPad.

We would like to challenge developers and designers to explore this niche area and create fun and engaging digital resources to teach kids about Hinduism. Here are few suggestions to help you get started:

games based on identifying and learning about Deities,

digital flash cards to teach Indian languages and Hindu shlokas;

eBooks and Comic Books along the lines of the Amar Chitra Katha apps;

YouTube channels dedicated to video diaries of young Hindu kids detailing their experiences practising Hinduism in the US and around the world.

If we have missed out on any resources in this article, please visit www.hinduismtoday.com/letters and let us know. If any developers do take up the challenge to create digital resources for kids, tell us about them so that we can feature them in a future Digital Dharma column.