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Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



FESTIVE DAYS IN NEPAL



(Cover) Men near the Kamal Vinayaka Temple in Bhaktapur pose during their special sadhanas of the annual Shree Madhav Narayan Mela, near Kathmandu; (above) students at the Hindu College at Cove and John Ashram in Guyana celebrate Mahasivaratri

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2022 • The Hindu Year Śubhakṛta, 5124 • शुभकृत

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Massive Metal Statue Celebrates Saint Ramanujacharya

Explore the remarkable complex honoring the 11th-century Vaishnava philosopher-saint near Hyderabad. ... [Page 34](#)



GLOBAL DHARMA

KHAJURAHO

Iconic Tourism Designation Worries Preservationists

THE ANCIENT, ORNATE HINDU AND Jain temples outside Khajuraho city have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986, and they are on the Archeological Survey of India's list of national treasures. Now, as reported by *Religion News Service*, the government plans to designate the 25 temples an "iconic tourist destination." VD. Sharma, a local member of Parliament, recently proclaimed that Khajuraho is on its way to "better connectivity, more jobs and more tourists"—prospects worrying to cultural activist Chinmay Mishra who feels, "Profiteers with no vision are turning spiritual centers into amusement parks." The government has greenlighted more than US\$6 million for projects in and around Khajuraho. A \$45 million convention center was launched last year.

These monuments, built between ca 850-950ce by the

Chandela dynasty, stand out as the pinnacle of temple architecture in northern India, among the few to survive Muslim invasions. Conservationists say the government restoration is a threat in itself. They worry that shoring up temples with plain stones and the use of abrasive cleaning techniques could hasten their deterioration. A monument attendant said that cleaning is being done by unskilled, mostly unsupervised workers. Further, he noted, there are no scientific or chemical restoration plans for upkeep of temples, posing a threat that they could become piles of plain stones.

.....
Fragile temple environs: *Visvanatha temple outside Khajuraho. More flights at the nearby airport may cause cracks from acoustic vibrations.*



DIET

"Meat Made Us Human"?

The following excerpts are from an article at phys.org.

QUINTESSENTIAL HUMAN traits such as large brains first appear in *Homo erectus* nearly two million years ago. This evolutionary transition towards human-like traits is often linked to a major dietary shift involving greater meat consumption. A new study [Jan. 2022] in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, however, calls into question the primacy of meat eating in early human evolution. While the archeological evidence for meat eating increases dramatically after the appearance of *Homo erectus*, the study's authors argue that this increase can largely be explained by greater research attention on this time period, effectively skewing the evidence in favor of the "meat made us human" hypothesis.

"Generations of paleoanthropologists have gone to

famously well-preserved sites in places like Olduvai Gorge (in Tanzania) looking for—and finding—breathtaking direct evidence of early humans eating meat, furthering this viewpoint that there was an explosion of meat eating," W. Andrew Barr, an assistant professor of anthropology at George Washington University and lead study author, said. "However, when you quantitatively synthesize data from numerous sites across eastern Africa to test this hypothesis, as

we did here, that 'meat made us human' evolutionary narrative starts to unravel." Barr and his colleagues compiled published data from nine major research areas in eastern Africa, including 59 site levels dating between 2.6 and 1.2 million years ago. They found that, when accounting for variation in sampling effort over time, there is no sustained increase in the relative amount of evidence for carnivory after the appearance of *H. erectus*. "I would think this study and its

Two million years: *Homo erectus* in East Africa surrounded by contemporary fauna

findings would be of interest not just to the paleoanthropology community but to all the people currently basing their dieting decisions around some version of this meat-eating narrative," Barr said. "Our study undermines the idea that eating large quantities of meat drove evolutionary changes in our early ancestors."



Welcome to Dubai's skyline: Artist's rendering of completed temple across from downtown

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Dubai Temple Nears Fruition With Topping Out Ceremony

A FEBRUARY 2022 REPORT IN *Trade Arabia* says a prayer was recently held at the construction site of Dubai's new Gurudarbar Sindhi Temple in Jebel Ali locality to mark the "topping out" (final beam placement) ceremony. It is adjacent to the Guru Nanak Darbar and Christian churches, making the area a multi-religious corridor in Dubai.

This modern structure with earthy tones and lattice screens inspired by Arabic themes will house 11 Hindu Deities, catering to communities from across India. Sunlight streams through an octagonal skylight onto the upper floor's prayer area which can seat up to 1,500 worshippers. The room opens up to a terrace

where yagnas, fire ceremonies, will be performed. The ground floor is a community center.

With the trial opening scheduled for July-August, the temple is on track for official completion in October this year during Dussehra festival, reported *Khaleej Times*.

Nine brass *kalashas* (metal or stone spires) will soon soar above. They were imported from India, says Raju Shroff, one of the trustees. "The tallest, about six feet high, weighs about 265 pounds. The remaining eight are each almost four feet high and about 200 pounds." He added, "In this city which is all about hustle and bustle, we have tried to create a feel of serenity and calm when you come to prayer."



Uplifting the masses: This and hundreds of other planned temples across India are strategically situated to serve underprivileged communities

ANDHRA PRADESH

Rituals Mark Opening of Sri Venkateswara Temple

MORNING, NOON AND EVENING CONSECRATION RITUALS WERE performed March 19-23, 2022, as per the tenets of *Vaikhana Agama*, in the auspicious Vrishabha Lagna of the newly constructed Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple at Rushikonda, Visakhapatnam city. *The Hindu* shares that the day began with Suprabhatam, Kumbharadhana, Nivedana, Homam and Maha Purnahuti between 5:30 and 8am. Utsava murtis were paraded between 9am and 11:30am, then Brahmaghosha, Veda Sattumora, Dwajaroohanam and Archaka Bahumanam. Nitya Kainkaryama were performed between noon and 1:30.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Chairman Mr. Subba Reddy said that the construction of the temple started two years ago, to add to the spirituality of Visakhapatnam. He said that hundreds of Sri Venkateswara temples are being constructed, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, as part of the promotion of Sanatana Hindu Dharma. The construction of Srivari temple has been completed in Odisha, and it will be open soon. A temple of Sri Venkateswara at Amaravati is expected to be completed in the near future. Another 1,000 temples are planned in the next two years in areas inhabited by tribals, fishermen and underprivileged sections of society, he added.

LANGUAGE

Can AI Unlock a Script That's Defied a Century of Efforts?

Most of the below is excerpted from an article at restofworld.org.

JIAMING LUO GREW UP IN mainland China thinking about neglected languages. When he was young, he wondered why the different languages his mother and father spoke were often lumped together as Chinese “dialects.” Luo says when he became a computer science doctoral student at MIT in 2015, his interest coincided with his advisor’s long-standing fascination with ancient scripts. After all, what could be more neglected than a long-lost language, left to us as enigmatic symbols on scattered fragments?

In 2019, Luo made headlines when, working with a team of fellow MIT researchers, he brought his machine-learning expertise to the decipherment of ancient scripts. He and his colleagues developed an algorithm informed by patterns in how languages change over time. They fed their algorithm

words in a lost language and in a known related language; its job was to align words from the lost language with their counterparts in the known language.

The work raised an intriguing proposition. Could machine learning assist researchers in their quests to crack other, as-yet-undeciphered scripts — ones that have so far resisted all attempts at translation? What historical secrets might be unlocked as a result?

It is remarkable how little we know about the original people of the Indus Valley, who at one point constituted nearly 10% of the world’s inhabitants. This is especially galling given how much more we know about their contemporaries, such as the people of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations. Part of the reason for this is the continued elusiveness of the Indus script.

Putting machines to work on the Indus script is tricky. We don’t have a great deal of information about the Indus script:



Algorithms to the rescue: in a illustration by Somnath Bhatt, AI tries to help decipher this stone stamp-seal found at Harappa in the Indus valley—modern day Pakistan’s Punjab and Sindh provinces.

most crucially, we don’t know what other language it may be related to. As a result, a model like Luo’s wouldn’t work for the Indus script. That’s not to say technology can’t help, though. In some ways, computer modeling has already played a crucial role: by showing that the Indus script is, in fact, a language and not just symbols as claimed by a hostile group of Harvard researchers in 2004. In 2010 Ronjojoy Adhikari, professor of statistical physics at the University of Cambridge, and fellow data scientists

joyfully proved it’s a language with their program that drew on the notion of information entropy—essentially a mathematical measure of disorder.

Luo is quick to point out that he doesn’t expect any decipherment of lost languages to be fully automated. “My thinking is: Let the system propose a list of candidates and let the experts say, ‘Okay, maybe this theory is more correct than the other,’” he said. “It definitely reduces the effort and the number of hours that experts have to expend.”

BRIEFLY...

THAIPUSAM PUJAS RESUMED IN Singapore and Malaysia in January 2022, though festivities were muted, with limitations on crowds and barring of certain customs like body piercing and carrying kavadi.

IN JANUARY 2022 THE MALAYSIA Hindu Sangam released a great presentation of Sanatana Dharma’s commonly held beliefs and practices in four languages: English, Tamil, Hindi and Malay. In 2017 they had set out to tackle a common problem of Hindu communities: what exactly do we all believe? Download the 16-page e-books in each language here: malaysiahindusangam.org/mhs-youtube-videos/publications.

A RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BILL HAS been introduced in federal parliament, reports the Hindu Council of Australia, to make discrimination on the basis of religion illegal. However, it creates exemptions. It allows discrimination based on religion by organizations that are inspired by religious ethos, like schools, hospitals, employment agencies, charities, etc. Under this claim, any business could fire people who don’t belong to their religion. This bill adversely affects minority religions. It especially affects Hindus and other newly arrived religions who have not had time and resources to establish their own schools, hospitals, etc. For more information contact info@hinducouncil.com.au

ACCORDING TO A SUNNY TRAVEL and Treks press release in February 2022, Nepal invested in world class hotels, resorts and guesthouses during the shutdown. Roads are now improved. Nepal is now open to tourists. As of press time, you can get the visa on arrival, and there is no need to stay in quarantine.

A 126-PAGE CANADIAN RESOURCE guide on Hinduism for grade 12 World Religions was released in 2019 for Manitoba province schools. It has excellent chapters on: What Is Hinduism, Key Writings and Scriptures, Foundational Beliefs, Concepts and Ideas, Historical Figures, Practices, Rituals, Symbols, and Celebrations, Modern Hinduism Challenges and much more. Download this impressive teacher’s aid at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/

support/world_religions/hinduism/full_doc.pdf.

1,117 HINDU PRISONERS ACROSS Indonesia were granted remissions (time off or release) for the 2022 Hindu Silence Day (Nyepi Day). “The purpose is to motivate inmates to improve themselves and increase their obedience to God,” wrote Rika Aprianti of the Law and Human Rights Ministry.

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and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Awake with Carnatic Music

Learning classical tunes with soulful gurus in person taught me what bhakti really means

BY SURYA AMBATIPUDI

The first time I walked into the warm, carpeted home of my music teacher, I didn’t expect much. I was a restless, impatient first-grader who was told that if I sat for an hour and sang, I would get a white chocolate chip cookie. At the time, I didn’t understand that I was making a lifelong commitment to an ancient art and an integral aspect of my Hindu culture. I didn’t realize that everything I learned in the next few years would stick with me for the rest of my life.

I started under my guru, Smt. Sankari Senthilkumar, who teaches from her home in Los Angeles. Her class environment ensured that no time was wasted, and that something new was learned every week. We were instructed to always keep our backs straight, voices crisp and books out. Soon I began learning *geetas* (shorter, structured pieces) and *varnams* (longer, structured pieces). I had my first rehearsal at age eight, followed by first individual performance at twelve. I then switched from group classes to individual. After moving to San Diego I pursued advanced *kritis* (nuanced compositions), under guru Sri. Subbu Iyer. As the years passed, Carnatic music ceased to be just a side hobby. It started becoming a part of my daily life, and my identity as a whole.

Understanding intricate pieces and being able to perform them was a small portion of what I learned. Learning compositions by masterful composers such as Sri Thyagaraja and Sri Dikshitar has given me an insight into what bhakti or, in simple terms, devotion really means. I recall one time I was sitting down for a class. By now, I had become used to the routine. Keep my back straight, open up the Google Drive folder with the lyrics to the song of the day, and get ready to sing. The class went on as usual, with my guru teaching and myself repeating whatever notes came out of his mouth.

He stopped after a while and told me there needed to be “more emotion” in my



voice. I shrugged it off and tried some nuances in my notes, only to sing the same dry melodies as I had before. I then realized that emotion can’t be forced, especially in Carnatic music. I had to be completely in tune with the lyrics and engrossed in the image of God, for the song to sound genuine.

Carnatic music fosters bhakti as an art and practice. The intricacies of each piece are wrapped in a tapestry of soulful meanings. Sri Thyagaraja, for example, often asks to see Lord Rama’s presence, through a dramatic array of devotional words. I started paying attention to the meanings of certain *kritis*. I noticed beautiful combinations of phrases that described Deities in all Their splendor, followed by magnificent poetry signifying a sense of longing to be blessed by Them. This allowed me to imagine each song being a prayer to God. And so, the music has given me increased devotion and appreciation for my faith. It has made me proud of the talent that composers had in portraying their devotion, and I feel a sense of newfound reverence for their work.

My gurus inspired this devotion in me. They told me the meanings, details and stories behind each composition. They shaped me as a student and person. It’s given me an understanding of guru-shishya *parampara*, or the cultural tradition of knowledge passed down from teacher to student. Unlike many self-learn school subjects, sports and hobbies, Carnatic music, in my opinion, must be taught by a guru.

Such a valuable music tradition has kept me grounded. It is a humbling experience, because you can never be perfect. Each retake of a *kriti* opens up a new array of improvements to be made. The complexities of this art ensure that one stays humble, and never begins to think that they have learned “enough” or are at the level of their guru.

SURYA AMBATIPUDI, 16, is a high schooler living in California who is inspired to write about his experiences as a Hindu in America.

Life's Challenges Are Not to Be Avoided

We can recoil from difficulties or brave them. Here are three insights that offer hope and strength when times turn tough.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A COMMON PERSPECTIVE REGARDING major challenges is that we would prefer life without them. Why would anyone want to face all these difficult times, to regularly wake up in the morning and be seriously challenged by life? My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, held a different perspective. He stated, "This is why we are born on this planet, to evolve through challenges. We are here for no other reason." What Gurudeva was telling us is that it is actually by living through karmas and thereby gaining better control over our instinctive and intellectual natures that we progress spiritually. We can compare this idea to Gurudeva's comment on being peaceful. He stated that it is fine to learn to be peaceful in a quiet place, but eventually you have to learn to be peaceful in the midst of intense activity. Likewise, we need to acquire the ability to have consistent self-control in simple, daily interactions and eventually be able to remain composed even when facing intense difficulties. If your peace cannot be disturbed in any situation, it is a permanent treasure.



have children who are not calm."

There's a chapter on self-control in the ethical scripture *Tirukural* in the section on family dharma. One verse reads, "More imposing than a mountain is the greatness of a man who, steadfast in domestic life, has mastered self-control." The meaning is evident. It is easy to have self-control if you are single and live by yourself, for no one is by your side to disturb you. But when you're married, have young children and must meet professional responsibilities, self-control is much harder to achieve. The goal is to face the disturbances and still maintain calm. If you are a family person, take heart. It has been done!

Challenges Are Your Friend

Another context for dealing with challenges relates to astrological cycles of life. (Vedic astrology is a technical subject, and the example that follows is simplified.) We tend to think that astrological periods with lots of challenges are bad, and times in which conditions are smooth and conducive to success are good. That is true in the sense that it's easier to accomplish important tasks in the world when your astrology is free of obstacles. However, astrological periods that indicate difficulties can also be viewed as good in that they present opportunities for making inner, spiritual progress through successfully facing challenges and thereby strengthening our self-control. I remember Gurudeva once said that his current astrology was so good that he had no challenges, kidding that he was "not making any spiritual progress at all." One astrological system provides this insight: "This period is the start of a more inward journey during which you absorb and take in new information. It is also a time of real determination and giving up much superficiality in favor of in-depth learning and self-discipline.... However, it can be a tedious and difficult period for worldly matters, and you are likely to be given extra responsibilities of one sort or another at this time." When it comes to challenges, we don't want to be overwhelmed; but, as seekers on the spiritual path, we don't want our lives to be free of challenges either.

Worldly Experience Leads to Divine Experience

In working with a group of Hindu university students at a weekend seminar, I asked the question, "What is needed to achieve moksha, liberation from rebirth?" The answer from several students was, "You need to realize the Self." This is certainly a correct answer, but to a thoughtful person it leads to a second question, "What, then, is needed to realize the Self?" The answer to that is not as well known:

Staying Calm Amidst Chaos

I regularly meet with families visiting the monastery. Generally it is in the morning after they have attended the Siva puja, which is about ninety minutes long. If a family has young children, the kids have already had to sit still for a long time. So, when they come to meet with me, their ability to sit quietly has been used up. One family had two young boys around age four and six who couldn't stop running around the room. This embarrassed the father, who eventually confided, "You know, I used to be a lot calmer before we had children." I told him, "Well, that's the challenge—to be calm when you



"Experience in the world, lots of it."

In his *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali addresses the need for experience in the first sutra of chapter 2: "What is encountered has the character of brightness, activity and inertia. It is embodied in the elements and the sense organs. Its purpose is to provide both experience and liberation." In other words, we are not on Earth just to go straight for liberation. We first need to learn and grow in the world's vast ocean of events before we even begin to think about, let alone achieve, moksha. It is by encounters in the world and in learning to face those experiences in the right way—such as strengthening our self-control—that we ultimately end up seeking liberation. Experience, it turns out, is the path.

Gurudeva explores this idea in *Dancing with Siva*: "How Is Our Soul Different from Siva? Our soul body was created in the image and likeness of the Primal Soul, God Siva, but it differs from the Primal Soul in that it is immature. While Siva is unevolutionary perfection, we are in the process of evolving, Aum."

His commentary on the verse delves deeper: "To understand the mysteries of the soul, we distinguish between the soul body and its essence. As a soul body, we are individual and unique, different from all others, a self-effulgent being of light which evolves and matures through an evolutionary process. This soul body is of the nature of God Siva, but is different from Siva in that it is less resplendent

Making the best of ordeals: A man surveys the path ahead, seeing all of the difficulties, but knowing that his goal of moksha awaits at the end of his soul's journey

than the Primal Soul and still evolving, while God is unevolutionary perfection. We may liken the soul body to an acorn, which contains the mighty oak tree but is a small seed yet to develop. The soul body matures through experience, evolving through many lives into the splendor of God Siva, ultimately realizing Siva totally in nirvikalpa samadhi. Even after Self Realization is attained, the soul body continues to evolve in this and other worlds until it merges with the Primal Soul, as a drop of water merges with its source, the ocean. Yea, this is the destiny of all souls without exception."

The point of this upadesha is that the soul body, anandamaya kosha, is maturing through experience in the world. How does this happen? It happens through gaining greater and greater control over the instinctive-intellectual nature. Doing so causes the soul body to mature sufficiently to attain realization of the Self.

Therefore, the next time you are faced with a challenge, be it major or minor, accept it as an opportunity to increase your understanding, strengthen your self-control, mature your soul body and move that much closer to realizing the transcendent Self within you.



CLAIRE BURKERT

LETTERS

Addressing Common Questions

I found the content of the Jan/Feb/Mar 2022 issue meaningfully informative, as always. The Educational Insight "14 Questions People Ask about Hinduism" is particularly useful for its practical application in day-to-day life for many, like me, who wish to effectively address queries on the religion thrown at them by various people (including those with malefic intent), but find themselves ill-equipped to do so. This is a highly useful reference compendium, fulfilling a long-pending need! I am going to preserve this for future reference, and for equipping others to field these queries. I have added my own reflections to each. Thanks and regards.

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Belittling Attacks

Reading "The Day Robertson Vilified Hinduism" by Dr. Julie Rajan (Jan/Feb/Mar 2022), I reflected—fast forward from 1995 to today, and Christians continue to vilify Hinduism. Just last month, while in India, I emailed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India about videos on YouTube calling yoga a demonic practice. Such videos are too numerous to count. They uniformly refer to Hindu Gods as demons, and many of them feature converts to Christianity stating that they had finally discarded the demonic practice of

Grateful Artists!

Regarding my article "Meet the Maithil Women Artists of Nepal" in the Jul/Aug/Sep 2021 issue, the artists were so grateful for the magazines that you sent for them. [See photo of the Maithil artists above, holding the magazine gatefold showcasing their artwork.] I told them about your donation for a pizza dinner! They were grateful for that, too, but suggested they

use the money to purchase raw materials for their products, since after being closed down during Covid the center is low on funds. It is a great help to have these funds to reboot the center. With all my best wishes and for peace in the world.

CLAIRE BURKERT, FOUNDER OF JANAKPUR
WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT CENTER AND
AUTHOR OF HIMALAYAN STYLE

Hinduism. These videos are extremely offensive and are clearly hate speech. There are instances of yoga studios in America being attacked, perhaps instigated by such videos. I emailed the Ministry to research this issue and order YouTube to remove such offensive videos, at least in India. I have not received a reply. Other readers may want to contact them as well (www.mib.gov.in). Let us take a firm stand and resolve to stop this abuse.

RAJA G. BHAT, MD
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Control of India's Hindu Temples

Regarding the excellent book review by Vidyasagar Tontalapur of *Temple Management in the Agamas* by Dr. Deepa Duraiswami (Jan/Feb/Mar 2022): during a recent four-month stay in India, I found it heartening to learn that clear steps are being taken to remove our precious devasthanams from the control of state and central governments. Your recent article about how the great

temple institution at Chidambaram was finally being released from government control was encouraging. It was in 1925 that the British established the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board. It is deeply distressing that the independent government of India continued it as a law, as a source of revenue. The constitution of India protected minority religions but left Hinduism and its precious temples wide open. It is only with a clear amendment to the Indian constitution that this huge injustice can be resolved.

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Lingayats in America

Anyone who wants to learn about Lingayats in America can begin with this article: "Veerashaivism Threatened, But Surviving in North America" (Hinduism Today, Oct. 1986). It traces the history of the Lingayats' crisis and the solutions found by adherents in the US. Still, an elaborate and scholarly article

on the migratory patterns, history and contemporary life of Lingayats of the US is badly required.

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Daily Rites of Worship

I was very happy and proud to read the article on performing sandhya vandanam by Sri Gunap Ganesh in your Apr/May/Jun 2022 issue. The young author has done a good service to the Hindu society by writing about this sacred practice and its benefits. Two ideas in the article struck me as powerful truisms: 1) The performance of the worship has declined considerably due to the apathy of adult Hindus; and 2) Parents can ignite enthusiasm in their children by doing the daily ritual themselves. Thanks for a most worthy article!

CHITTUR RADHAKRISHNAN,
PRESIDENT OF DEVI TEMPLE OF FLORIDA
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Ganesha Chaturthi

The article "Join Us for Ganesha Chaturthi" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2022) was a lovely way of describing the Ganesh festival, its preparations, the values it brings to Hindu communities, typical puja rituals and festive foods. It also shows readers how visiting other Hindu

homes to receive Lord Ganeshji's blessings is one of the means of binding everyone together.

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Surviving College as a Hindu

I have received many congratulations on my article about surviving college as an American Hindu (Apr/May/Jun 2022). A few have emailed me personally and asked if they could reproduce my article. Apparently, it has already been reproduced in Samvad and one individual from South Africa has asked to publish it on the website hindasa.org. Regards,

MARUT YELAGALAWADI
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Nice article! Here's my experience with similar challenges. I am a born Hindu Indian living in the US for 30 years, with ties to family in India. When I criticize practices in the US such as corruption or racism, I am often asked what I think of India's corruption or caste system. My answer is two parts: First, "I am an American citizen paying taxes and can criticize US without having to simultaneously explain my opinion of any other country's policies." I may add, "Is it because I am brown that this additional burden is placed on me?" Second, "If you are curious about

my opinion of India's situation, I need thirty minutes to explain the context and thirty minutes for my nuanced/non-trivial opinion. Let me know if you have time. Additionally, I can provide the same for South Africa or the UK. Let me know." Often people get the point and back off or start talking about weather. Thanks for your courage.

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Journey to Murugan

This is a beautiful article full of inner experiential devotion expressed by the author. Anyone interested in Lord Murugan's temples and their significance should read this for sure ("Journey to Murugan," Oct/Nov/Dec 2007).

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Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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Despite Appearances, Humanity Is Slowly Advancing

How you can help dharma continue to nurture and guide this progress

IN OUR LAST ISSUE PUBLISHER SATGURU Bodhinatha Veylanswami submitted that HINDUISM TODAY deserves to be appreciated for its journalistic integrity, a cardinal virtue rarely seen today. He has since explained that there is another major reason to appreciate and support the magazine, especially at this time of violence and heightened worldwide insecurity.

"HINDUISM TODAY has consistently brought forward Hinduism's golden ethical principles," he explained, "as well as the perspectives and practices passed on through the millennia that have helped souls live positively and at peace within themselves—even through trying times."

Readers regularly say such expositions in the magazine have meant a great deal to them. Longtime subscriber and advertiser Sri Mukund Hanumante, co-founder of the Akkalkot Swami Samarth in New Orleans, recently shared, "Each one of us should do our best to support our magazine so that we are reminded of the wisdom, the magnificence that is our heritage, to put it all into practice daily, and uplift our lives." Accord-



ing to Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley), the magazine's effect is also societal. He has said, for example, "An aspect of your success is in showing how to use an English idiom that avoids the distortions we find elsewhere. Most importantly, the magazine has upgraded Hinduism's image at a media level, which plays an important role in the India context as well."

Humanity has made some undeniable improvements since HINDUISM TODAY's founding in 1979, and much of what was

then inconceivable has become ordinary today. Yoga is all over the world, in every country, for example, and there is an annual International Yoga Day. Another example is India's pioneering emphasis on soft power in dealing with other nations. These are new and encouraging signs for the future, if we all keep at it.

HINDUISM TODAY is not alone, of course. There are many hands on that same stout rope, pulling the great chariot and keeping it rolling. Our point is that HINDUISM TODAY is one of those strong and enduring hands. It has spoken, proclaimed and shouted those same great truths for 43 years, and it is just getting started.

We believe along with Sri Hanumante that HINDUISM TODAY does deserve your support. You can donate through your estate plan, for long-term stability. Or, even more pertinently at this time of soaring expenses, you can donate now, at the end of the year, or occasionally to help meet ongoing expenses.

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QUOTES & QUIPS

“Silence is the language of God, all else is a poor translation.”

Rumi (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

The stars are not afraid to appear like fireflies. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *Bengali poet and philosopher*

Things do not grow better; they remain as they are. It is we who grow better, by the changes we make in ourselves. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

We are like butterflies who flutter for a day and think it is forever. **Carl Sagan** (1934–1996), *famed astrophysicist*

Don't explain your philosophy. Embody it. **Epictetus** (55–135 ce), *stoic philosopher*

The season of failure is the best time for sowing the seeds of success. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952)

Be fearless, let fearlessness radiate from you and dispel fear in the hearts of others. **Govinda Bagavatpada**, *guru of Adi Shankara*

A wise man fills his head before emptying his mouth. *Kenyan Proverb*

Death is not the end. Death can never be the end. Death is the road. Life is the traveler. The Soul is the Guide.... Our mind thinks of death. Our heart thinks of life. Our soul thinks of Immortality. **Sri Chinmoy** (1931–2007), *renowned spiritual leader*

Relieving the ravaging hunger of the poor is a right use for wealth men have obtained. *Tirukural* 226

Only those who attempt the absurd can achieve the impossible. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

There are two means of refuge from the misery of life—music and cats. **Albert Schweitzer** (1875–1965), *German theologian and musician*

Peace is your natural state. It is your mind that destroys it. **Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950), *South Indian mystic*

Don't worry, be happy! **Meher Baba** (1894–1969), *Indian Guru*

DID YOU KNOW?

The Friendship of Swami Vivekananda and Nikola Tesla

YOU PROBABLY NEVER THOUGHT OF THE two together, but Swami Vivekananda, Hindu monk and founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, and Nikola Tesla, Serbian-American inventor who was pivotal in the creation of the alternating current (AC) power system, were actually well acquainted. When Tesla wasn't pursuing world-changing inventions, he was contemplating philosophy and metaphysics, something Indian sages have been excelling at for millennia. Vivekananda hoped Tesla would be able to prove, in a way satisfying to the Western mind, the truths expounded in the *Vedas*. This included concepts such as universal oneness, which Tesla approached through his intuitive sense that matter and energy are different aspects of the same thing. Naturally, their mutual interest sparked a friendship.

Swami Vivekananda wrote the following after their first meeting in 1896: “Mr. Tesla was charmed to hear about the Vedantic

Prana and Akasha and the Kalpas, which according to him are the only theories modern science can entertain.... Mr. Tesla thinks he can demonstrate mathematically that force and matter are reducible to potential energy. I am to go see him next week to get this mathematical demonstration.”

It would have been incredible to see where their friendship would have led if it had not been cut short when Swami Vivekananda died after his third heart attack on July 4, 1902. Years later, Tesla would go on to write an article for the *New York Journal* titled “Man's Greatest Achievement,” attempting to describe the nature of human existence using the same mystical Sanskrit language Swami Vivekananda had introduced to Tesla during their first meeting.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The two together: A photo taken during the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Swami Vivekananda is on the left with Nikola Tesla seated on the right.

Q- Why is Ganesha equated with the primordial sound pranava (OM)?
M- Because Ganesha represents the knowledge prana, the vital breath. Out of the pranava, the product of prana, the vocal language develops, after passing through four stages—*para*, *pashyanti*, *madhyama* and *vaikhari*. Para is the source and the subtlest stage, while vaikhari is the grossest, representing the bursting out of vocal language. The state prior to para is “Love to be,” the sense of love, which gives rise to all activities. That state is Ganesha.

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981)
A guru of the Inchagiri Sampradaya

I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain. **Frank Herbert** (1920–1986), *author of Dune*

The life ahead can only be glorious if you learn to live in total harmony with the Lord. **Sai Baba of Shirdi** (1838–1918) *Indian spiritual master*

Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. **Steve Jobs** (1955–2011) *founder of Apple*

Last night in the cave it finally happened, Swamiji, full unity with the cosmic divine....



Can you send me the link?

They are learned in Vedic lore. Knowing God is within them, they thought themselves to be God and plunged into distracting pleasures, forgetting all thought of God. *Tirumantiram* 529

Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but rather when there is nothing more to take away. **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry** (1900–1944) *French writer and aviator*

The Self indeed is below. The Self is above. The Self is behind. The Self is in front. The Self is to the south. The Self is to the north. The Self, indeed, is all this. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.5

When we look at the world as providing our happiness, life is a constant series of emotional ups and down. When we derive our contentment from within, life is joyous, and we can share that joy with others. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

People act in evil ways who have lost touch with their soul nature and live totally in the outer, instinctive mind. What the ignorant see as evil, the enlightened see as the actions of low-minded and immature individuals. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

BASICS

To Cause No Harm

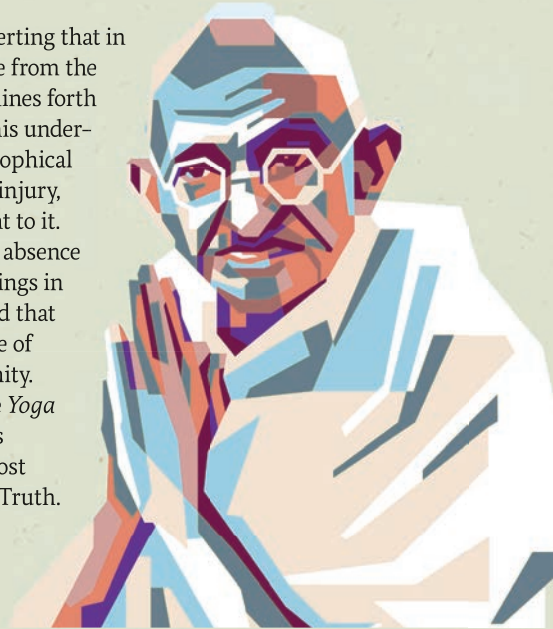
THE RISHIS WHO REVEALED THE PRINCIPLES OF dharma in Hindu scripture knew full well the potential of human life for entangling itself in suffering and the path which could avert it. They explained that one spiritual force flows in and through all things in this universe, conferring existence by its power. According to their ancient wisdom, life is a coherent process leading all souls without exception to enlightenment, and no violence can be carried to the higher reaches of that ascent. Sages taught a philosophy of

Advocating ahimsa: Gandhi, one of the most famous proponents of non-harmfulness, with hands in anjali mudra

non-difference of self and other, asserting that in the final analysis we are not separate from the world nor from the Divine which shines forth in all things and all peoples. From this understanding of oneness arose the philosophical basis for the practice of ahimsa, noninjury, and Hinduism's ancient commitment to it.

Sage Vyasa defines ahimsa as “the absence of injuriousness toward all living beings in all respects and for all times.” He said that a person engaged in the true practice of ahimsa would be freed from all enmity. Rishi Patanjali, revered author of the *Yoga Sutras*, regarded ahimsa as the yogi's mahavrata, the great vow and foremost spiritual discipline of those seeking Truth.

Drawn from the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami



SHUTTERSTOCK

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

The Light That Lighteth Everywhere

"There is One Supreme Light which ever burns steadily and surely, and that Light Eternal is God who lighteth every soul and all that is"

BY H.D. PARAMAHAMSA OMKARANANDA SARASWATI

CHERISHING UNIVERSAL LOVE, DEDICATING YOURSELVES TO selfless service of mankind, guarding your minds against all evils and sins and abiding in holy thoughts, you shall now behold the Grand Majesty of the Lord of Light and be blessed to live a life of holiness, blessedness, happiness and prosperity in this world of sin, wretchedness, misery and paucity.

Entirely neglect the past; forget it once for all; be not anxious for the future and anticipate nothing temporal in the time to come. But purify your mind now by holy and pure thoughts of an unperturbed, calm and sacred life; for, your path will be lighted up and you shall live a peaceful, successful, harmonious life of perfection among the imperfections and disorders of today. Character is everything: so, by adhering to the universal moral principles and by shaping your lives in accordance with the laws of the spiritual verities, possess a stainless character in order to lead an exalted and ideal life of purity and goodness, truth and light.

Let not callousness and want of feelings reign in your heart: sympathise with all; for, sympathy is a holy virtue which will reveal to you the One Light and Life existing in all men and creation. Compassion and universal love will land you in the kingdom of radiance and illumination. A life of sagacious humility and sincere prayer will crown you with Divine Grace, which in its turn will enlighten you to behold the luminous Splendour of God everywhere: thus, you shall overcome the riddles of confusing circumstances, triumph over undesirable happenings and solve all the enigmas of perplexing situations, in life.

May you all move towards the Home of eternal Light, Wisdom and Bliss and in this way fulfil the purpose of your living on earth. May God bless you all to walk in the Way of His Light. May His Grace descend upon you all most abundantly. OM

Swami Omkarananda Saraswati, (1929–2000), sage, mystic, philosopher, was founder-president of several charitable trust societies, academic and cultural schools and a research institute for science-synthesis.

website: www.omkarananda-ashram.org



Omkarananda Saraswati

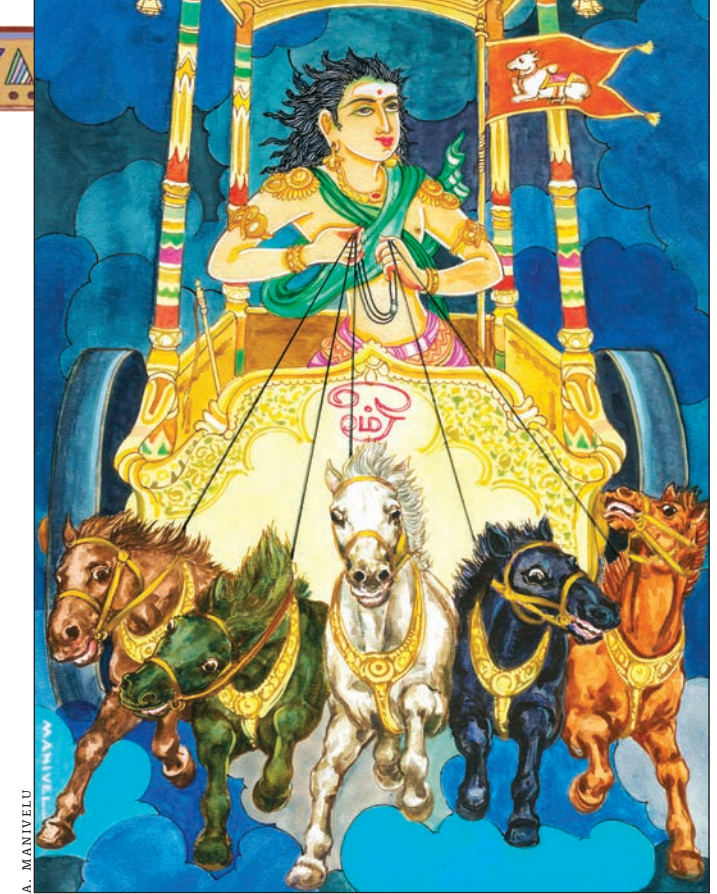
FROM THE UPANISHADS

Know the Self: Lord Of the Chariot

Lord Yama compels us to identify as the That which restrains the mind

The following is from the translation of Katha Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan. This Upanishad belongs to the Krishna Yajurveda. The verses follow Lord Yama as he fulfills young Nachiketa's third wish—to understand the mystery of death. In the first chapter of Section 1, for his second wish, Yama had taught (and named after him) the immortality-granting "Nachiketa fire sacrifice." The following verses, 1 to 17, are drawn from Chapter 3 and have been lightly edited for clarity.

1. Lord Yama: "There are two selves that drink the fruit of karma in the world of good deeds. Both are lodged in the secret place of the heart, the seat of the Supreme. The knowers of Brahman speak of them as shadow and light, as also do the householders who perform the triple Nachiteka fire sacrifice.
2. "May we master that Nachiteka fire which is the bridge to Brahman for those who perform sacrifices, a passageway for those who wish to cross over to that farther, fearless shore.
3. "Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as the chariot itself. Know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins.
4. "The senses, they say, are the horses, and the objects of sensation are the paths over which they run. When the sense of self is associated with the body, the senses and the mind—this wise men call 'the enjoyer.'
5. "He who has no understanding, whose mind is always unrestrained, his senses are out of control, as wicked horses are for a charioteer.
6. "He, however, who has understanding, whose mind is always restrained, his senses are under control, as good horses are for a charioteer.
7. "He who has no understanding, who has no control over his mind and is ever impure, reaches not that goal but comes back into mundane life.
8. "He, however, who has understanding, who has control over his mind and is ever pure, reaches that goal from which he is not born again.
9. "He who has the understanding for the driver of the chariot and controls the reins of his mind, he reaches the end of the journey, that supreme abode of the All-Pervading.
10. "Beyond the senses are the objects of the senses; beyond



the objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the understanding; beyond the understanding is the Atman.

11. "Beyond the great Atman is the Unmanifest; beyond the Unmanifest is the Cosmic Soul. Beyond the Cosmic Soul there is nothing. That is the end of the journey; that is the final goal.
12. "The Self, though hidden in all beings, does not shine forth but can be seen by those subtle seers, through their sharp and subtle intelligence.
13. "The wise man should restrain speech in mind; the latter he should restrain in the understanding self. The understanding he should restrain in the great self. That he should restrain in the tranquil self.
14. "Arise, awake, having attained thy boons, understand them. Sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread is that path, sages declare.
15. "The Self is without sound, without touch and without form, undecaying; is likewise without taste, eternal, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great, abiding. By discerning That, one is freed from the face of death.
16. "This ancient story of Nachiketas, told by Death, telling and hearing it, a wise man grows great in the world of Brahman.
17. "Whoso shall cause to be recited this supreme secret before an assembly of brahmins or devoutly at the time of the ceremonies for the dead, this will prepare for him everlasting life, this will prepare everlasting life."

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first vice president (1952–1962) and second president (1962–1967).



SPECIAL FEATURE

Nepal's Grand Mela to Lord Vishnu

Join us for a month-long celebration of sadhana in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley

BY NIKKI THAPA & RAJEEV GURUNG, NEPAL

EVERY YEAR DURING THE NEPALESE MONTH OF MAGH (JANUARY/FEBRUARY), crowds of devotees make their way to the Hanuman Ghat in Bhaktapur, a city in the eastern corner of Kathmandu Valley. They come here to observe a month-long festival to Madhav Narayan, a name for Lord Vishnu. The festival starts on the full moon of the previous month and ends during the full moon of Magh.

The event emphasizes personal devotion and discipline in the forms of daily fasting, special pujas, pilgrimages to various shrines by foot and by rolling and walking prostrations which are done by the few that have dedicated themselves to this more intense form of sadhana. The earliest written mention of this festival is dated at 1604CE, when the event was said to have simply been a month of personal worship and fasting. In later years, with the patronage of the royal family, it slowly took on the popularity and grandeur that is seen today.

For the duration of the festival, a small murti of Narayan is brought to the festival's epicenter, the Hanuman Ghat, located in Bhaktapur, which lies about eight miles east of Kathmandu. In the following days, Narayan is paraded to many of the area's most ancient and renowned temples, accompanied by a group of men and women who have taken vows, or *vratas*, to observe special disciplines for the month. These devotees are thus known as *vratalus*.

Hanuman Ghat itself, *Khorey* in the Newari language, is a religious pilgrimage site for the Newars, the natives of Bhaktapur. It is located at Triveni, the holy confluence of the Veera, Bhadra and Tamasa rivers, which merge to form the mighty waters of the Hanumate. Veera is commonly known as the Brahmayeni River, while the Bhadra is the Tabyakhusi. The Tamasa is a river of legend which originates beneath the ghat itself.

Legend says that when Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman were en-route to Ram's kingdom, Ayodhya, after the epic battle in Sri Lanka, they stopped here to bathe at the confluence. They then enjoyed a mix of rice and yogurt, shared on a banana leaf. Hanuman, being the humble servant

A month of sadhana: (left) The festival's central participants on pilgrimage to sacred places; (below) male and female *vratalus* begin each day at the river's edge



He is, didn't want his touch to defile his God's food, so He pierced the earth underneath him to create a natural spring in which He could wash his hand before every bite from the shared plate. When Ram noticed this humble act, He hugged Hanuman tightly and named the area the Hanuman Ghat. The spring of water Hanuman created is believed to be the Tamasa.

Also according to Newar folklore, in the Treta Yuga, after the poet Valmiki composed the *Ramayana*, he visited many holy sites, including Hanuman Ghat and installed a Sivalingam there for his morning puja. Today it is known as Valmikeshwar Mahadev.

While the ghat has many shrines, it has no Narayan murti of its own. For the past 300 years, the tradition has been to borrow the Shrestha-Vaidya family's 12-inch tall silver murti. On the first day of the festival, the assistant pujari brings the Madhav Narayan murti to Hanuman Ghat from Ishwari Prasad Shrestha's home. A temporary shrine for Narayan is kept at the site for the full month. For each of the festival's 30 days, the murti is brought to the river for blessings, after which it travels with the vratalus for their day's disciplines. At day's end, the Madhav Narayan murti is carried back to the enclosed area near Hanuman Ghat and placed at its makeshift altar. Each evening the male vratalus return to homes in the area, while the women perform a special *dhala puja* (an offering of water with a conch) at an altar at Hanuman Ghat Ashram. There they stay the night and live here for the entire month, only eating one saltless meal each evening.

After the festival, during the full moon, Magh Shukla Purnima, the murti is carried back to its original home.

Nepalese Hindus worship different forms of Sri Narayan and Lakshmi for each month of the year. Madhav Narayan, the Narayan for



ALL PHOTOS: NIKKI THAPA

the month of Magh (January/February), has held a special significance for the people of Bhaktapur district for as long as anyone remembers. Bhaktapur locals observe a fast and venerate Narayan, and others travel from far away to pay homage to the God any day during the festival.

Day 1, Arriving at the Ghat

Throughout the festival, I must start at dawn to drive the 25 miles with Rajeev Gurung

(my co-author) and reach the site before 7am. Many people are baffled when I tell them that such a short trip takes a full two and a half hours; but Kathmandu's narrow, winding roads are always under construction, and like many other developing countries, we lack the concept of sticking to our side of the road. Drivers and riders adopt a serpentine wiggle as they weave their way along the roads and around the slower vehicles ahead of them.

Rajeev is the best friend of one of my younger brothers. We have known each other for over 25 years, so he is like a sibling to me. He speaks perfect Nepali, Hindi, English, French and Newari, the local language of Bhaktapur. We both love learning about people, culture and traditions, so this mela offered us a perfect opportunity to combine our skill sets.

Binod Prajapati, one of the vratalus, tells us Kathmandu Valley was under a partial Covid-19 lockdown when the Madhav Narayan Festival started, therefore the number of vratalus, audience and visitors were reduced to one-fourth. Kathmandu's

.....
An early start: (above) A woman offers worship at one of the ghat's Vishnu shrines; (clockwise from right) Vratals perform rolling prostrations through the streets; women light fires along the route to keep the vratalus' feet warm; the Valmikeshwar Mahadev Lingam, installed by Valmiki; Binod Prajapati offers river water to Narayan; the small silver murti of Narayan

District Administration Authority had imposed an odd/even rule for traffic movement based on vehicle registration numbers, so we could only attend the festival on alternate days.

Arriving in Bhaktapur for our first full day, we hear the Madhav Narayan bhajan resounding from Hanuman Ghat as we approach: "*Madhav Narayan! Madhav Narayan! Guli daya dumha re. Bhakta yaata kripa tayaa darshan byumha re...*"

We reach the ghat at 6:30am. This ancient, stair-stepped complex leading to the river's gentle edge is replete with historic shrines. Among the many Gods and holy figures enshrined here are Ganesh, Valmiki, Kirateshwar, Badrinath, Sitala Mai, Ram Sita, Hanuman, Madhav Narayan, Seshnarayan, Buddha, Uma Maheshwar, Dasavatar, Draupadi and Bhimsen, Ashta Matrika (the eight Mother Goddesses), Nagas, and many Sivalingams. Each image is embellished with bright yellow sandalwood and glowing red vermillion from countless daily worshippers.

At this early hour, we find a group of elderly women wearing *Haku Patasi*—their traditional hand-loomed black saris with red borders and scarfs—singing and dancing around a bonfire of hay at the northern side of the complex. Other locals are worshipping at the many shrines. Around 7:00, during the brisk sunrise, the rest of the crowd begin gathering at the river's western edge. The local assisting priest initiates the morning devotions by dipping the base of the one-foot-tall silver Madhav Narayan murti into the river. This marks the beginning of the day's ritual fasting for all those participating. The male vratalus in their white dhotis line up along the steps, each offering a conch of river water to the rising Sun and to the murti of Narayan.

After offering water, they line up on the front row with the priest, the women on the steps



around them. Led by the pujari, everyone chants the Madhav Narayan Shloka. The assistant pujari then offers water from a copper pot to the Sun God, while the vratalus hold water in conch shells or cupped hands and chant mantras for the ritual's *sankalpa* (statement of intent) to begin the day's events.

Bowing to Madhav Narayan, they depart for the Til Madhav Narayan Temple, where they will begin their prostration journey. For this spiritual practice the male vratalus do rolling and walking prostrations as they circumambulate the sacred temples and shrines throughout Bhaktapur's Durbar Square.

The Til Madhav Narayan Temple at Tau-madhi Square in Bhaktapur, built around 1118ce, is one of the oldest standing temples in Nepal. This two-story pagoda-style temple houses a stone statue of Narayan bedecked in a silver crown and flanked by Saraswati and Lakshmi on either side. Both the Goddesses are also covered in magnificently carved silver jewelry. Photos here are strictly prohibited.

Directly in front of the temple is an image of Garuda perched on top of a tall column. Flanking him on either side are two other columns which support a conch and discus or chakram. The temple complex also has shrines for a Sivalingam, Hanuman and a Tulasi plant. Its walls have niches where one will find many miniature-sized Deities like Ganesha, Radha, Krishna, Matsya Narayan, Sita Ram and others. Houses for Ganesha and the Sivalingam are found at every temple here, because our worship always begins with Ganesha worship and often ends with worship of Siva, the patron Deity of Nepal.

Beginning the Journey

Arriving at the the Til Madhav Narayan Temple, the vratalus queue up by age, from 73 to 13, to be blessed individually by the temple pujari. After sacred water from a temple conch is poured over his head, each vratalu bows down in reverence of the Deity and prostrates fully upon a white cloth that has been positioned upon the ground by other devotees. From here they begin their day's austere journey in the name of the Divine. The vratalus roll their bodies on the white fabric for over half a mile, chanting "Madhav Narayana" as they make their way from shrine to shrine over the course of an hour. The cloth guides them along the old city streets, on a path carefully mapped out by those helping in the event. Every day in the month of Magh, the vratalus perform the same morning routine, commencing with these prostrations—and each day the cloth maps out a different route through the area. The rolling prostration is called *silamantuleu* in Newari. Everyone starts rolling except for the last vratalu, who instead makes walking full-body prostrations—*mha-du daneu*.



ALL PHOTOS: NIKKI THAPA



When doing *silamantuleu*, devotees must clasp their hands together, fingers interlaced, and slowly roll their bodies along the ground. They can lift only the head, neck and knees while performing the journey.

For *mha-du daneu*, devotees begin by standing with feet together and hands folded in namaste. Then, they bow down, with the

Daily duty: (clockwise from upper-right) passing over the steps of the Nyatapola Temple; the Til Madhav Narayan Temple; the last vratalu performs *mha-du daneu* prostrations; partial submersion in the river after prostrations

head lowering first. They kneel and flop the belly down to the ground. Their hands are stretched out in front, palms still joined in namaste as their forehead touches the ground. The soles of their feet face upwards and their heels are touching. Performing these steps in reverse order, they rise to stand where their fingers had been outstretched, thus progressing along their journey one body length at a time.

Culture expert Binod Raj Sharma tells us, "I define *silamantuleu* as touching of the stone street with the head and heart, as an act of devotion to Narayana. The full prostration is also an act of dedication to God. *Jalashayan*, lying in the cold river, is another form of penance to display one's fidelity to Narayan. Their love, devotion and affection for Narayan are the sources of their energy and vigor, to perform such arduous acts of devotion during winter."

Traveling like this, the vratalus make their hour-long pilgrimage through the grounds of the five-story Nyatapola temple to Siddhi Lakshmi and the Bhairav temple complexes, then along the narrow brick pathways to finally reach the Hanuman Ghat. Sometimes they must roll up or down steep inclines and even stairs, but the vratalus devotedly carry



on with their discipline.

Vishnu Prasad Swongamikha, 65, says, "Brahma created the universe and Siva is the God of destruction. But Narayan is the one who protects all. He is the preserver. According to a local legend, upon seeing how magnificently Narayan was preserving the world, Brahma and Siva themselves honored Narayan by performing *mha-du daneu* and *silamantuleu*, respectively. This festival's devotions are a reenactment of that story."

About a dozen women, 50 to 80 years of age, accompany the vratalus, devotedly helping along the way. Wearing red or black-and-red saris, these women sweep away pebbles, dust and rubbish from the path. They also run back and forth to pick up and then lay the pieces of meter-wide cloth for the vratalus. Binod Prajapati tells us, "Up until 2016 we did the prostrations directly on the streets, but then Narayanidevi, an elderly woman who lives in Ina Chowk, Bhaktapur, gifted five ten-meter-long cloths. After her initiative, many others made similar donations. We are all very thankful to them."

The women make small fires along the



way to keep vratalus warm as they roll along the stone streets in our cold Nepalese climate. I worry at first about the vratalus' bare bodies turning purple in the cold, but to my astonishment they all look vital and motivated,

building in dedication and perseverance with each prostration.

The women also have the task of keeping photographers (like me!) at bay. If an overzealous cameraman wearing shoes accidentally touches one of the vratalus, they must restart their prostration journey from the beginning, following another blessing. I am shooed away many times despite trying to be mindful while photographing, and am even yelled at in Newari. I apologetically respond, "Jee Masyu" (I don't know)—one of the four Newari phrases I can speak.

The teenage boys, apparently shy of a female photographer, initially hide behind their palms whenever I approach them; but by the end of the month-long festival, they are so comfortable with me that they literally drag me to every shrine of the Ghat and ask me to take their photos for immediate posting on social media.

After their rigorous hour-long journey of prostrations, the vratalus reach the Hanuman Ghat and either roll or walk into the freezing river. After bowing down to the Madhav Narayan statue, they lie on the steps

partially submerged in the water, emulating Vishnu sleeping. Some lie at an angle, backs on the ghat, immersing one third of their bodies, while others sit in the river holding a namaste posture in meditation. Women who have walked barefoot behind the vratalus also queue up. They have tied up their saree, exposing their shoulders and neck, and wear their hair down.

Sarojan Sharma, the head pujari, then “awakens” the vratalus from their “slumber,” blessing each with the Struti Mantra while touching him on the head and splashing river water on him. Sarojan tells us, “The Struti Mantra is a sacred tantric mantra also known as Sushma Mantra, which I cannot chant out loud or write on paper. My guru taught this mantra by chanting it into my right ear.”

The male vratalus then take three dips in the river while the women bend forward from the waist and wash their hair in groups. Both groups then offer water with their conches or hands—first to the Sun, second to the Madhav Narayan murti and lastly to the Valmikeswar Mahadev Lingam shrine on the bank. Other devotees then wash the white cloth in the river and place it on the opposite bank to dry for the next day.

With their prostrations done for the day, I take the opportunity to ask these vratalus if they are participating in this month of disciplines to fulfill any sort of wish or desire. Many reply that they are doing it as an unconditional sadhana.

Though this main event is over for the day, the town maintains a lively atmosphere, with so many people visiting from far and wide to participate. Some visitors are gifting a combination of biscuits, fruits and other small offerings, each with a five-rupee note, to all who had taken vratas for the festival. These small acts of giving are performed as a form of devotion. One couple gave me some yomari prasad. I tell them I am a visitor just like them, but they insist. Yomari is a steamed rice-flour dumpling with a molasses filling. Thirty-year-old Prem Laxmi Awal, visiting Madhav Narayan with her husband Milan from Thimi, Bhaktapur, have made these edible gifts for others as a gesture to pray for a pregnancy. A couple from Kathmandu have come to pray for their daughter’s job, which she lost when Nepal announced a nationwide lockdown in 2020.

Over the next 14 days, these prostrations will be the main event, along with the special



dhala puja performed each day at the Hanuman Ghat Ashram by the women vratalus. These disciplines continue during the second half of the festival, augmented by special pilgrimages on foot to other holy places in the area. Because of the restrictions for being able to visit only every other day, Rajeev and I must choose which of these pilgrimages will be the most important to observe.

Sacred journeys: (clockwise from right) The pujari carries Narayan ahead of the yatris; the Nakin, Krishna Laxmi Prajapati, 79, with Laxmi Sundar Prajapati, 81, in front; Trishul batti; elder women bless the vratalus before their daily trek

Sahasrara Dhara Kalasha Yatra

Sahasrara dhara kalasha literally means “a water pot with thousands of straws.” For the second half of the month-long festival, the vratalus carry these special pots on their heads. (See them being blessed in photo above.) The pilgrimage (*yatra*) they perform is called *Desh Parikrama*—meaning to circumambulate holy areas. Each kalasha (copper pot) has an embossed image of Madhav Narayan on its neck. The body of the pot is perforated with many tiny holes, each with a foot-long wheat straw inserted into it to act as a water spout. This design symbolizes the 1008-petaled lotus, the chakra at the top of the head. The kalasha is set on a two-legged wooden frame and balanced on the head with a braided straw ring. The water in the vessel is regarded as the source of all the holy rivers and oceans of the world. When the vratalus stop at certain holy locations, they swirl around to shed water from the straws as a blessing. The *sahasrara dhara kalasha yatra* starts on new-moon day.

On the 14th festival day, the day before the first yatra, the vratalus blow conches and call attention to the upcoming pilgrimage. Each one prepares his kalasha, filling it with water from the confluence, and all head to the



Til Madhav Narayan Temple to begin. Every vratalu participating in the yatra must observe *Nirahar Brata* (no food, no water) until the kalasha yatra for the day is completed. If anyone unintentionally breaks his fast, he is immediately dismissed from the kalasha yatra for the day.

Day 15, Nyatapola Temple

Chanting the Kalasha Mantra, pujari Sarojan consecrates the vratalus by pouring conch water on their heads. He then helps load the kalasha on each vratalu’s head. The vratalus give *dakshina* to the pujari and then approach Krishna Laxmi Prajapati, the 79-year-old Nakin, or female group leader. The Nakin has many responsibilities during this month-long festival. She must light the Akhanda Mata, “undying light,” on the morning of the first festival day and make sure the lamp is kept oiled and protected so that it burns throughout the festival. She starts each day of the festival by purifying and cleaning the space for the dhala puja and

by performing puja to Ganesha and Kumar. She is a guide to the young, fasting devotees and leads them in all the rituals. Each day of pilgrimage, she and her fellow devotees stand at the temple platform to consecrate the kalasha yatris before they embark on their journey.

On this day the vratalus journey to the Nyatapola Temple, Talakwa’s Jetho Ganesha Shrine, Vamsagopal Temple, a local Siva shrine, the Pottery Square and then return to the Hanuman Ghat. All throughout, the assistant pujari wears the Madhav Narayan murti suspended from his neck on a saffron stole. Holding the base of the murti firmly with both hands, he leads the kalasha yatra. People along the way offer money to God in exchange for flowers and prasad. Those who remove their shoes can touch the God, but otherwise pray from a distance.

Day 22, Trishul Batti

This year the Madhav Narayan Mela coincides with the Barah Barse Panauti Makar

Mela, also known as the Makar Mela. This large festival, a smaller-scale version of India’s Kumbha Mela, happens every twelve years. Over the next few days these festivals will overlap. All vratalus and helpers travel on foot, without shoes, to Panauti in Kavre District, a distance of almost twelve miles. As always, they all line up at Hanuman Ghat for the usual morning blessing and rolling prostrations before embarking on the journey. This time, however, the vratalus are met by about 40 other devotees from Bhaktapur, each carrying a *Trishul batti*. *Trishul-Batti* is made by wrapping ghee-coated cotton fiber around a tulsi stem to make a trident that stands on a diced gourd, all held in a plate made of leaves. The devotees light their *Trishul batti* while the pujari chants the mantras, then set the lamps afloat in the river. Cultural expert Binod Raj Sharma tells us, “*Trishul batti* is for the protection of the devotees against all evils. *Trisul* represents Siva, and this *Trishul batti* is a joining of Mahadev and Narayana.”

After finishing the day’s prostrations the vratalus depart for Panauti carrying baskets laden with their Kalash items.

Day 23, Ghats of Panauti

This next day, we witness huge crowds at the Indreshwar Temple complex and the ghats of Panauti. Most have come for the Makar Mela, which started when the Sun shifted from Sagittarius to Capricorn. We meet everyone from Bhaktapur at Panauti’s Triveni Ghat by 7:30am. After blessings, we walk with the vratalus to the Indreshwar Mahadev Temple, where they start their daily regimen of prostrations. They finish at the ghats, having covered a distance of about 1/4 mile. The Indreshwar Mahadev Temple, built in 1224 ce, is one of the oldest and largest surviving wooden temples in Nepal. According to the 14th-century manuscript *Gopal Raj Vanshavalī*, the temple was constructed by Princess Birmadevi of Panauti kingdom and took nine decades for its completion. The golden pinnacle was a gift from King Jayasingh Ramvardhan in 1383 ce.

Day 25, Pashupatinath Yatra

On the tenth day after the new moon, devotees have traveled to Kathmandu to start their kalasha yatra from Arya Ghat at the Pashupatinath Temple. After filling their kalashas with the river water from the Bagmati, the vratalus ascend to the temple through the eastern entrance before pilgrimaging across the Gaushala district to the Tamreshwar Mahadev Temple.

After paying respect to Tamreshwar Mahadev, Rajeev distributes biscuits and 10-rupee notes as offerings to all the vratalus and helpers, who then commence their 8.7-mile foot yatra to Hanuman Ghat, where they



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break their fast.

Day 27, Changu Narayan Yatra

On the twelfth day after the new moon, we drive to Changunarayan town, to the north of Bhaktapur. The vratalus have trekked here and have already arrived at the Sankha Pond, located in a champak forest. These trees produce intoxicatingly aromatic flowers in warmer months of the year (you may be familiar with champak incense). Together we

all make a short journey through the jungle hills to the Changu Narayan Temple complex. This visit symbolizes the never-ending bond between the two Narayans, Changu and Madhav.

Changu Narayan Temple, located atop Dolagiri hill, is the oldest of the area's four main Narayan temples. This two-story temple stands on a high plinth of stone and is embellished with detailed metal and wood carvings. It represents a historically important

Ancient temples: (clockwise from bottom-left) Halting at the Tamreshwar Mahadev Temple for blessings; entering Changu Narayan Temple; a younger vratalus blows a conch while trekking through the jungles above Changu Narayan town; the vratalus roll their way along the Triveni Ghat in Panauti, Kavre District; crowds assemble at the ghat

advent in the Nepali temple architecture. In the temple complex are centuries-old scriptures and stone statues of Vishnu in the forms of Sridhara Vishnu, Vaikuntha Vishnu, Vishwarup, Vishnu Vikrant and Narsimha. The complex also houses a temple for Chinamasta Devi and for Chanda Narayan, a 7th-century stone sculpture of Vishnu riding on Garuda, and a Kileshwar, a temple dedicated to Siva.

Day 29, Kamal Vinayaka

On the midday of Chaturdashi, the fourteenth day after the new moon, we rush to Kamal Vinayak Temple, also known as the Lotus Ganesha Temple, at the eastern end of Bhaktapur district. This Ganesha temple has a fairly big pond. When we arrive, the vratalus are blowing conches behind a large crowd of photographers and visitors. Helper women are singing Madhav Narayan Bhajan,



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and others are dancing. For the first time there are musicians, boys in their mid-teens playing dhimey drums and clashing cymbals, to lead the kalasha procession. I follow the procession around bus stands, hay bonfires, the Dattatreya Temple (a famous Siva Temple of Bhaktapur), and finally back to Hanuman Ghat to conclude the day's foot pilgrimage. Today's procession has the largest number of people so far.

At Hanuman Ghat, when everyone has settled down to relax a bit, we gift the vratalus with photo prints of the month's events. They tell us many photographers have come to Hanuman Ghat over the years, but none

before had ever gifted photographs. Their gratitude humbles us. Once again we end up with our bags full of prasadam in the form of biscuits, peas and plenty of sweet yomaris.

That afternoon eight Chitrakars (a family name literally meaning "artists") come to Hanuman ghat to paint the many clay pots that will be used in the final day's puja. The Chitrakar family have been offering this painting seva for three generations, according to Rajesh Chitrakar. He recounts his memories of accompanying his father to Hanuman Ghat for the first time when he was six years old. His father introduced him to the colors and the pots, and taught him to

paint religious motifs on them. Since then he has always made time for this seva.

The clay pots were made and donated by potter Jagannath Prajapati. Continuing his father's tradition, Jagannath and his brother Vishwanath Prajapati have been offering this religious service for more than 20 years. Their father, an ardent devotee of Madhav Narayan, had participated as a vratalu for 20 years, while also making each pot required for the puja. This year Jagannath has donated 60 pots in total, of varying sizes.



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Day 30, Sanḡey Puja

Sanḡey is the closing puja performed on the last day of the festival. On this day the crowd is massive. It seems as though every Bhaktapur local has come to Hanuman Ghat. The morning lighting is beautiful, and my camera frame is filled with some 20 prostrators standing against the backdrop of 200 or more women, mostly clad in red, and hundreds more spectators.

As a last prostration tribute to Madhav Narayan for this year, the vratalus trace the earthen path that circles Hanuman Ghat.



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The atmosphere comes alive with the massive crowd chanting "Madhav Narayan! Madhav Narayan!" in one voice, all combined with the mystical drone of the many conches. As the vratalus finish the prostrations and lie partially in the river, the feeling is serene. The event is so enthralling that I almost forget to take photos.

All the women are wearing red, the married ones in their bright red bridal dresses. They sit in rows around the Madhav Narayan altar and set up their puja plates. On the right side of the altar is a beautifully decorated hawan kunda, sacred fire pit. The painted pots from the day are staged all around, decorated with ritual items like flowers and ribbons. Each pot is full of sacred water and herbs.

The big day: (clockwise from left) Jagannath Prajapati and his brother Vishwanath Prajapati create clay pots; the Chitrakar paint pots for the puja; vratalus Binod Prajapati and Uddhav Khaitu hold the largest water pot from the puja; near Taleju temple, they stand beneath the pillar joyously while devotees come for blessings; The concluding fire ceremony; pujari Sarojan leads everyone through the ceremonies; each woman performs a smaller puja during the final day's event

They are said to become imbued with divine radiations from the fire ritual. When the sacred flame is lit, the assisting pujari reads verses from the *Kushkandika Yagya Vidhi*, as the head pujari Sarojan and head priestess Saroja Sharma perform the grand puja to the Madhav Narayan. Each woman performs a personal puja, following Sarojan's example. During the puja, the vratalus run back and forth, collecting puja items as needed and handling the incoming offerings from devotees. Meanwhile, the kitchen team are cooking sattvik foods such as kheer, spinach, fried potatoes and peas for the upcoming feast, which will feed the hundreds of devotees. In the middle of puja, the pujari Sarojan sings the glories of Narayana and Magh month. He narrates Ram lila from *Ramayana* and Krishna lila from *Vishnu Purana*.

Following the puja is an energetic kalasha



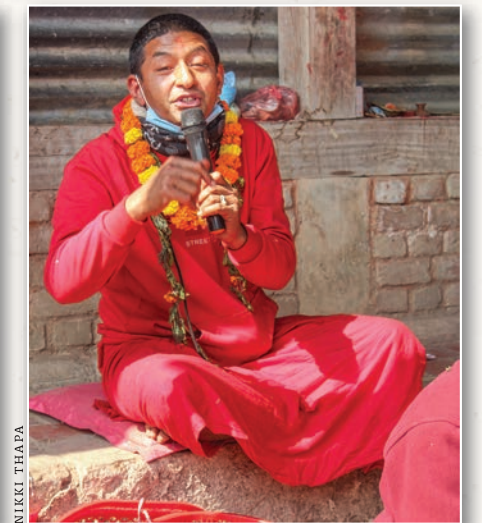
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yatra, tracing the same route as in the morning. Afterwards, all the small painted pots are gifted to vratalus as a blessing, while the Indra Kalasha (the largest pot) is offered to a bronze statue of the 17th-century king Bhupatindra Malla, which kneels on the column in front of Taleju Temple at his Bhaktapur Palace Square. Uddhav Khaitu, 73, the Naya (male group leader), carries the pot to the King with his entourage of vratalus. The Naya stands right beneath the King's statue, and devotees come up one by one for final blessings. This ends the month-long festival.

Narayan Returns Home

Although the Madhav Narayan festival officially ends with the full moon, the vratalus must perform one last ritual, Gau daan, which literally translates as "cow donation." Today this has come to refer to one of the most divine donations anyone can make in their lifetime: giving offerings to the priests

who have helped you through your spiritual disciplines. In Nepal this must take place following the month's fasting and rituals.

After bathing, the vratalus sit in a line along the Hanuman Ghat. They have their ritual items: an offering tray of flour and rice topped with money, flowers, ginger, spinach and biscuits. Both pujaris conduct the ritual, chanting the vratalus' names and family lineage names. They offer oil lamps and sprinkle river water over the vratalus' heads, repeating prayers to all Gods. The vratalus then give their offerings to the priests, honoring and thanking them for their divine invocations throughout the 30 days. Lastly, amid mild fanfare, everyone parades to Ishwari Shrestha's house to return his family's Narayan murti to him. Madhav Narayan!

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SOUTH AMERICA

Guyana's Hindu College Expands

Cove and John Ashram's Mahasivaratri celebrations include dedication of 50-foot tall statue of Lord Siva, fire worship, speeches and more

BY PARAS RAMOUTAR, GUYANA

THOUSANDS OF DEVOTEES OF THE GUYANA Sevashram Sangha paid obeisance to Lord Siva on Mahasivaratri, February 28/March 1, at their Cove and John Ashram just south of the capital city of Georgetown. It was an extra-special day for the 125 students of the ashram's recently rededicated and renamed Hindu College and Institute of Technology. One part of the celebration had concluded two days earlier—the formal *prana pratishtha* (consecration) of the 50-foot-tall Lord Siva statue just completed at the ashram's entrance. At the request of Swami Parameshananda, originally of Guyana and now head of the America Sevashram Sangha in New York, HINDUISM TODAY sent me to the country from Trinidad to cover the events, which went on all day and ended early the following morning.

The Hindu College was established in 1955 by Swami Purnananda, a direct disciple of Swami Pranavananda (1896–1941), founder

of Bharat Sevashram Sangh in 1917 in undivided Bengal. Swami Purnananda had previously spent time in Trinidad (see bit.ly/Purnananda for his full story). He or his disciples founded branches of the Sangh in Trinidad, Guyana, US and Canada. He established the school that eventually became the Hindu College to provide a good education to local youth, nearly all children of farmers. The former president of Guyana, Bharat Jagdeo, once taught at the school. Rajkumarie Singh has been its principal for the last 50 years.

A few years ago, the Jay and Sylvia Foundation of New York developed an ambitious plan to establish a computer technology department by adding a second floor to the existing building on the ashram grounds. The foundation was established by Jay and Sylvia Sobraj along with Nardeo Singh and Sravan Budhu, all of Guyanese origin and now in America. Swami Parameshananda got wind of the plan and was instrumental, along with Lake Singh of Canada, in getting it accom-

plished in record time.

The multi-million-dollar project was formally opened at the beginning of the school year in September, 2021. It has a state-of-the-art computer center focused on software, hardware and graphic technology. It is intended to prepare students for further training as coders, data security analysts, hardware engineers and Internet professionals of all types. As an added bonus, the local students now have free access to the Internet and can connect with loved ones and families around the world.

To energize the new center, the ashram's regular Sunday morning worship and fire ceremony was shifted from the nearby ashram to the new second-floor hall (seen in the photos on page 51).

Principal Singh explained her approach: "As a teacher, I worked with getting the values right, such as punctuality, regularity, adherence to truth, believing in one's self, honesty, integrity and just hard work to realize



one's dream." She emphasizes nutrition and exercise as pivotal to a child's progress. Each day begins with reading assignments which she says have helped tremendously.

Mahasivaratri Day and Night

The celebration of Siva's Great Night began at 5:30 in the morning with arati worship at the shrine to their founding guru, Swami Pranavananda. This was followed by procession with the tulsi plant and chanting of the Hare Rama/Hare Krishna Mantra. The students arrived at 8:30 in their school uniforms—though there were no classes being conducted—to participate in the day's events, most of which were held in the main hall. There was further worship of Swami Pranavananda, bhajana and havana (fire worship), as well as speeches by the present head of the Sangh in Guyana, Swami Shivasankar, and local community leaders.

The students participated in the first hour of a four-hour Ramayana satsang, then dispersed at 3pm. The formal Mahasivaratri pujas of the night began at 6pm in a sheltered area near the new Siva statue. There were more havanas, guru pujas and arati and the continuous chanting of "Om Namah Sivaya." As is traditional, the worship was repeated every three hours through the night, ending around 5:30 on the morning of March 1.



Shivaratri Day: (opposite) drone photo of the Guyana Sevashram Sangha's Cove and John Ashram with the expanded college at the left and new Siva statue (inset) toward the middle; students gathered for the day's events; fire worship conducted by Swami Shivasankar, with Attorney General Anil Nandlall to his left, Minister of Public Works Deodat Indar second to his right and Swami Parameshananda at far left in the photo

An aura of spirituality and reverence hovered over the filled Sangha, as the continuous flow of devotees—elderly men and women, mothers and fathers, students and infants thronged the hall. It was a sacred environment reflective of the Indian diaspora, which landed here in May 5, 1838.

Swami Sivasankar stated in his address to the students that Mahasivaratri is one of the biggest festivals of Hindus. "During this day, the culture observes it by remembering Lord Siva and chanting prayers, fasting, doing yoga and meditating. Ethics and the virtues of self-restraint, kindness to others, forgiveness and the discovery of Lord Siva within oneself are the primary focuses and ultimate goals.

"Devotees offer water, milk and flowers to Sivalinga and worship the Hindu God of Destruction. Siva is considered the ideal husband, and unmarried girls and women pray for a husband like Him. The temple is filled with the sound of bells and shouts of 'Shankaraji Ki Jai' and 'Mahadevi Ki Jai,' as devotees repeat five rounds and then pour water on the Sivalingam."

He elucidated three reasons to celebrate Mahasivaratri. First, it is the day in the Hindu calendar when the unmanifest, absolute formless God Sadasiva appeared in the manifest form of the Lingodbhava Murti exactly at midnight. Second, it is the ritual wedding anniversary when Lord Siva married Devi Parvati, and that Siva minus Parvati is pure, "Nirgun Brahman." Third, it is a day of thanksgiving to the Lord for protecting mankind from annihilation by drinking the poison released during the churning of the ocean, as narrated in the *Puranas*.

Swami said that according to the *Siva Purana*, Mahasivaratri puja involves six steps: taking a bath which purifies the soul, mind and body; bathing of the Sivalinga with holy water; then milk, then honey; applying vermilion paste and concluding with the offering of fruits and flowers given in hope of obtaining a long life and satisfaction of desires.

Swami Pranavananda's parents, as Swami Sivasankar recounted, underwent severe suffering in Bajitpur, a remote corner of what is now Bangladesh. As ardent devotees of Lord Siva, they undertook hard penance and rigorous austerities to propitiate the Lord, who in a dream conferred upon them a great boon by granting them a deeply religious son. When he grew up, that son became the disciple of Baba Gambhirananthji and eventually attained Supreme Realization."

Also speaking at the event was Guyana's attorney general, Anil Nandlall, who recounted for the students the huge challenges their forefathers faced when first coming to the country. Yet, even cut off from India, they still managed to preserve Hinduism because they recognized the inherent value of its religious



Scenes of the celebration: (clockwise from top) aerial photo of the ashram from the south showing various shrines in the foreground and the college in the background with the ashram buildings in between (inset: Siva shrine and pool); students prepared to welcome the guests of honor; Deodat Indar, school principal Rajkumarie Singh and Deodat Indara worship at the altar to founding guru Swami Pranavananda; swamis, guests and students conduct fire worship at the large yagna pit

practices and were able to put its principles into practice in their daily life.

Deodat Indar, minister of public works, inspired the students by saying Mahasivaratri is a "day to raise one's consciousness, to experience the divine presence within oneself to easily achieve personal success in the external world." He suggested they pray "for the ability to correct ourselves—something we may not want to do, for fairness in our dealings with other people, instead of just thinking what is best for us, and we must pray to take the right path in life." His was an apt concluding speech for the proceedings.

New Siva Statue Consecration

The resplendent 50-foot murti of Lord Siva now standing in front of the Cove and John Ash-

ram welcomes every devotee and well wisher and also blesses passersby on the nearby main highway to Guyana's south. The statue was the inspiration of Khemnauth Sookram, who in 2018 built a 80-foot Lord Hanuman overlooking the Essequibo River.

Sookram's association with the Sangha began with a chance meeting with Swami Parameshananda in 2006 in New York. Their first project together was a food aid program

for needy residents of Sookram's native village of Parika in Guyana. The food aid was later expanded to include the Hindu College boy's dormitory. After completing the Hanuman statue, Sookram requested permission to erect a Siva statue at Cove and John, saying, "I am doing this for Guru Maharaj and no one else." The concrete murti took some six months to complete.

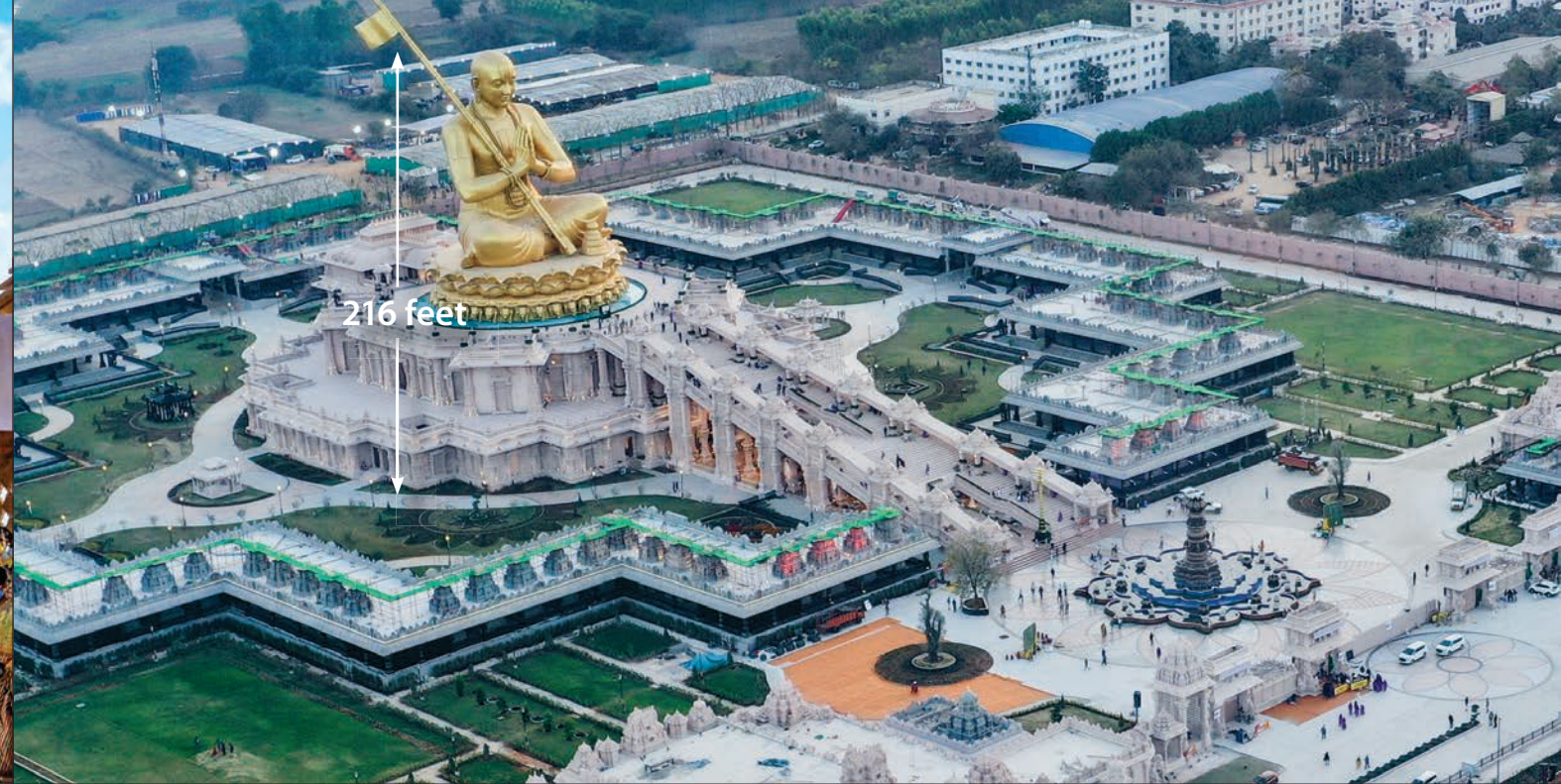
The statue's consecration was performed by Pandit Damu Prashad along with Swami Parameshananda and the Sookram family. It began with a small fire worship ceremony and then the prana pratistha rites to infuse life into the image. In the process, Pandit Prashad and others climbed the scaffolding to reach the top of the murti, where they touched the Deity's nose, mouth, eyes and ears while chanting mantras.

In an interview, the reserved Mr. Sookram would only say that he has been "gifted with a human body and the murti is a gift to God, inspired by Swami Parameshananda. This murti allows me and everyone to always remember Lord Siva." He prayed that this murti would help give the whole world everlasting happiness in this age of Kali Yuga.



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SAINTS

Luminary's Giant Tribute Unveiled

The 216-foot-tall Statue of Equality near Hyderabad honors bhakti Saint Ramanujacharya to mark celebrations of his 1,000th birth anniversary

MUCHINTAL, ONCE A NONDESCRIPT village miles from Hyderabad's international airport in South India, is now a celebrity. On February 5, 2022, Vaishnava monk Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamy inaugurated his brainchild, the world's largest extolment of Saint Ramanujacharya. With pujas, dancers and laser shows, the ceremonies completed eight years of construction at Swamiji's 45-acre Jeeyar Integrated Vedic Academy campus. Central is the Statue of Equality, the second tallest seated effigy on Earth [Thailand's Great Buddha is 302 feet]. "It will be visible from the flights landing and taking off from Shamshabad Airport" says Yellapragada Suryanarayana, construction supervisor. "We'd like a similar announcement as the one made in the air when flights have a view of the Golden Temple near Amritsar."

Let's explore Ramanujacharya and the lavish campus honoring him.

Who was Ramanujacharya?

Born in 1017ce in Kanchipuram, Ramanujacharya was a Tamil philosopher-saint who continued the bhakti tradition of South Indian Alvar saints.

Founding one of five major Vaishnava schools, his strongly theistic, qualified non-dual Vishishtadvaita Vedanta philosophy advocated devotion to Lord Vishnu as the Supreme. He was considered the greatest critic of pure advaita and revived the Bhakti movement, his preachings inspiring other bhakti schools of thought. Several scholars followed his path, and the works of many ancient poets like Annamacharya, Samarth Ramdas,

Thyagaraja, Kabir and Meerabai flowed from his theological spring.

Ramanujacharya was also a social reformer; hence the statue's name. Spreading messages of justice and equality of rights and opportunity, he advocated against discrimination in all forms and made education accessible to those who were most deprived in those days, promoting the Upanishadic phrase *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, "The world is one family." Temples were cajoled by him to open their doors to all people, including those subjected to extreme discrimination. Teaching about the protection of nature, he is said to have lived to age 120 while head of the Srirangam monastery.

Statue and Campus

When Jeeyar Swamiji decided to embark on this extraordinary project, donations flowed abundantly to meet the estimated US\$130 million cost. The Statue of Equality's facade is made of *panchaloha* metal—an ancient alloy of gold, silver, copper, brass and zinc. "The inner core is 850 tons of steel holding up the 650-ton statue," chief architect

Opening festivities: (clockwise from above): bird's-eye view; the gold statue's weight represents the years he lived; Jeeyar Swamy and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar plant a sacred tree; giant metal bell for visitors to ring; dance troupe leaps into the air

Prasad Sthapati told *The Hindu*. "The flag-staff alone is 135 feet long. It looks small but weighs six tons, and positioning it took about six weeks as it is 50 feet in the air." Steering committee member Devanatha Ramanuja Jeeyar adds, "Ramanujacharya's appearance is based on carved-stone images of the saint in Melkote and Srirangam temples." Artisans created 14 models before Jeeyar Swamy approved one. Mr. Prasad says, "We did a 3D scan of the model and approached Aerosan company of Nanjing, China, a leader in making large statues. They used our data

to create three-by-three foot *panchaloha* pieces varying in thickness between ten and 20mm. I felt very nervous when the face was being executed. Each eye is 65 feet in length and three feet high and is the key to the statue's appeal." Sthapati spent much time in Nanjing to ensure that the facial appearance is accurate.

The sculpture sits on a 27-foot-high lotus held up by 36 massive elephants, surrounded by a musical fountain for sound-and-light shows. The lotus height represents 24 *tattvas*, plus soul, God and guru. The statue's golden hue carries a 20-year guarantee from Aerosan. Although some 1500 pieces are involved, no sign of welding can be seen. It's mounted on a 54-foot-high building named Bhadravadi. The building has three floors for a temple, Vedic digital library and research center, ancient Indian texts, a theater and gallery detailing the works of the saint. Yel-

lapragada Suryanarayana says "We will have details about all the great people in the world who fought for equality, including Abraham Lincoln, BR Ambedkar and Nelson Mandela." For daily ritual worship there is a 300,000 square foot temple in Bhadravadi housing a 54 inch tall, 120kg gold murthi of the saint. On the surrounding grounds are replicas of 108 sacred shrines from across India, including Tirumala, Srirangam, Kanchi, Ahobilam, Badrinath, Muktinath, Ayodhya, Vrindavan and Kumbhakonam.

During the opening, Jeeyar Swamiji told the *Mumbai Mirror*, "Ramanujacharya was a true democrat. He never tried to convert anybody from the other faiths to his. He just tried to put the Hindu philosophy in its right perspective. There were many who understood and agreed with it, but chose to continue in their own religions. That was the democracy he practiced centuries ago."



ALL PHOTOS: DINODIA



Hinduism Is a Splendrous Lotus with Four Superb Petals

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Hinduism's Four Denominations

Saivism

Saivite Hindus worship the Supreme God as Siva, the Compassionate One. Saivites esteem self-discipline and philosophy and follow a satguru. They worship in the temple and practice yoga, striving to be one with Siva within.

Shaktism

Shaktas worship the Supreme as the Divine Mother, Shakti or Devi. She has many forms. Some are gentle, some are fierce. Shaktas use chants, real magic, holy diagrams, yoga and rituals to call forth cosmic forces and awaken the great kundalini power within the spine.

Vaishnavism

Vaishnavites worship the Supreme as Lord Vishnu and His incarnations, especially Krishna and Rama. Vaishnavites are mainly dualistic. They are deeply devotional. Their religion is rich in saints, temples and scriptures.

Smartism

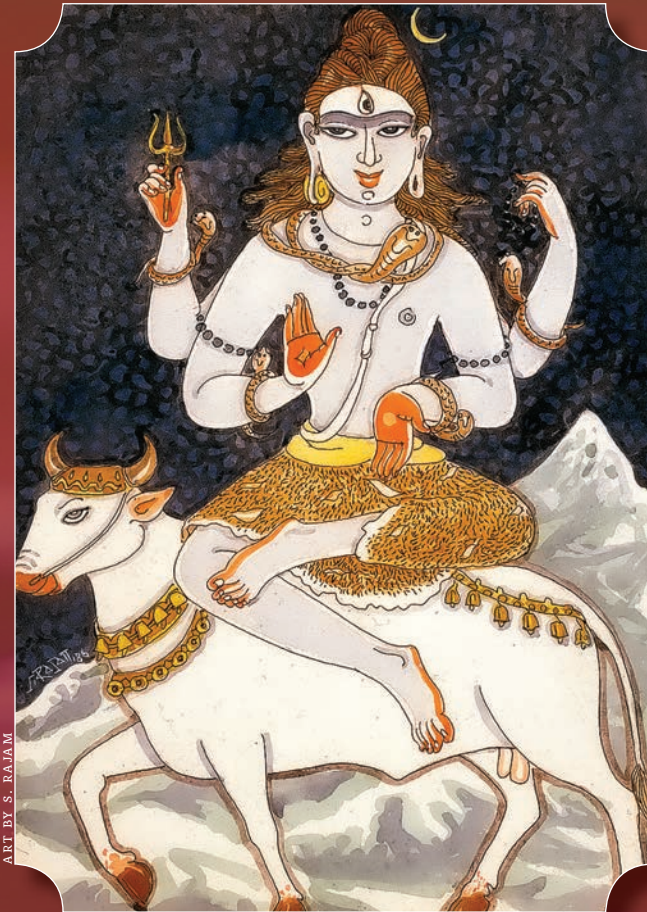
Smartas worship the Supreme in one of six forms: Ganesha, Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Surya and Skanda. Because they accept all the major Hindu Gods, they are known as liberal or nonsectarian. They follow a philosophical, meditative path, emphasizing man's oneness with God through understanding.

For over 200 years, Western scholars have struggled to understand Hinduism, a faith whose followers seemed (to outsiders) to arbitrarily worship any one of a dozen Gods as the Supreme, a religion vastly diverse in its beliefs, practices and ways of worship. Some Indologists labeled the Hinduism they encountered polytheistic; others even coined new terms, like *henotheism*, to describe this baffling array of spiritual traditions. Few, however, have realized, and fewer still have written, that India's Sanatana Dharma, or "eternal faith," known today as Hinduism and comprising over a billion followers, is a family of religions with four principal denominations—Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. This single perception is essential for understanding Hinduism and explaining it accurately to others. Contrary to prevailing misconceptions, Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Smartas, liberal Hindus, the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. Each has a multitude of guru lineages, religious leaders, priesthoods, sacred literature, monastic communities, schools, pilgrimage centers and tens of thousands of temples. They possess a wealth of art and architecture, philosophy and scholarship. These four sects hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief—karma, dharma reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-disciple tradition and the *Vedas* as scriptural authority. In this fourteen-page Insight, drawn from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Dancing with Siva*, we offer a synopsis of these four denominations, followed by a point-by-point comparison.

Each of Hinduism's philosophies, schools and lineages shares a common purpose: to further the soul's unfoldment to its divine destiny. Nowhere is this process better represented than in the growth of the renowned lotus, which, seeking the sun, arises from the mud to become a magnificent flower. Its blossom is a promise of purity and perfection.

What Is the Deeply Mystical Saiva Sect?

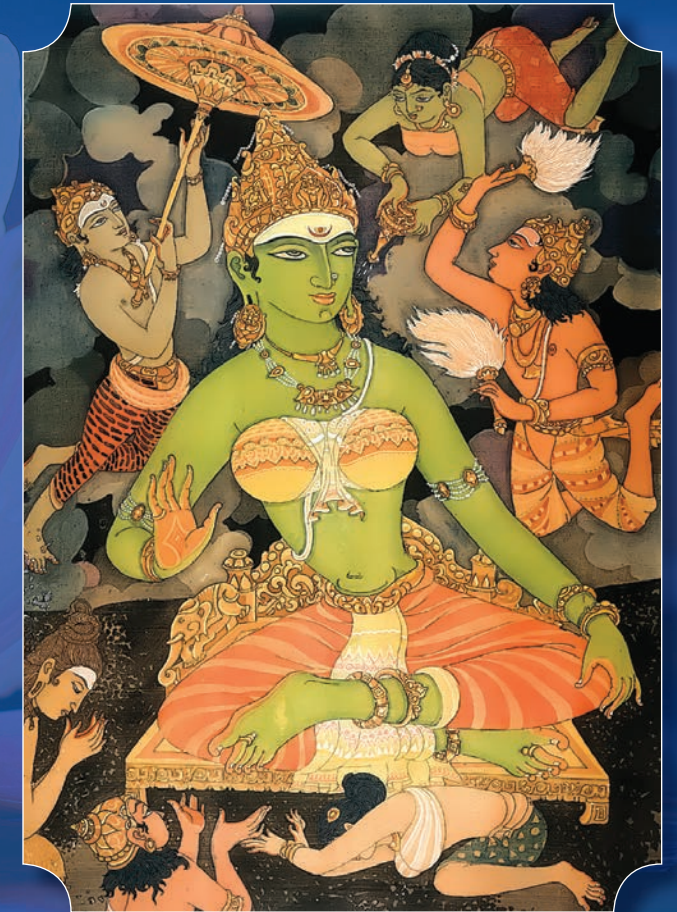
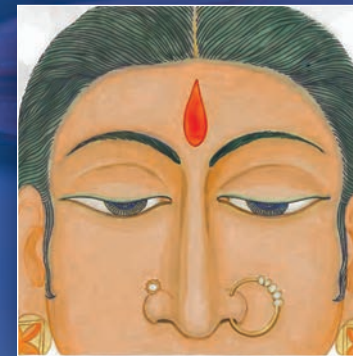
Saivism is the world's oldest religion. Worshiping God Siva, the compassionate One, it stresses potent disciplines, high philosophy, the guru's centrality and bhakti-raja-siddha yoga leading to oneness with Siva within. Aum.



Seated on Nandi, his bull mount, the perfect devotee, Lord Siva holds japa beads and the trident, symbol of love-wisdom-action, and offers blessings of protection and fearlessness. Mount Kailas, His sacred Himalayan abode, represents the pinnacle of consciousness.

What Is the Magic and Power Of Shaktism?

Shaktism reveres the Supreme as the Divine Mother, Shakti or Devi, in Her many forms, both gentle and fierce. Shaktas use mantra, tantra, yantra, yoga and puja to invoke cosmic forces and awaken the kundalini power. Aum.



Shakti, depicted in Her green form, radiates beauty, energy, compassion and protection for followers. Wearing the *tilaka* of the Shakta sect on Her forehead, She blesses devotees, who shower rosewater, hold an umbrella and prostrate at Her feet.

S AIVISM IS ANCIENT, TRULY AGELESS, FOR it has no beginning. It is the precursor of the many-faceted religion now termed Hinduism. Scholars trace the roots of Siva worship back more than 8,000 years to the advanced Indus Valley civilization. But sacred writings tell us there never was a time when Saivism did not exist. Modern history records six main schools: Saiva Siddhanta, Pashupatism, Kashmir Saivism, Vira Saivism, Siddha Siddhanta and Siva Advaita. Saivism's grandeur and beauty are found in a practical culture, an enlightened view of man's place in the universe and a

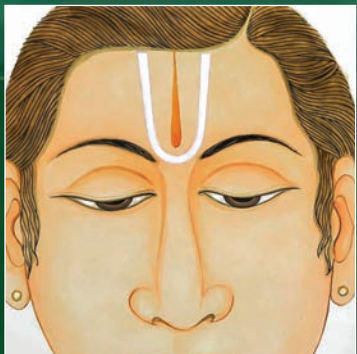
profound system of temple mysticism and siddha yoga. It provides knowledge of man's evolution from God and back to God, of the soul's unfoldment and awakening guided by enlightened sages. Like all the sects, its majority are devout families, headed by hundreds of orders of swamis and sadhus who follow the fiery, world-renouncing path to moksha. The *Vedas* state, "By knowing Siva, the Auspicious One who is hidden in all things, exceedingly fine, like film arising from clarified butter, the One embracer of the universe—by realizing God, one is released from all fetters." Aum Namah Sivaya.

W HILE WORSHIP OF THE DIVINE MOTHER extends beyond the pale of history, Shaktism arose as an organized sect in India around the fifth century. Today it has four expressions—devotional, folk-shamanic, yogic and universalist—all invoking the fierce power of Kali or Durga, or the benign grace of Parvati or Ambika. Shakta devotionalists use puja rites, especially to the Shri Chakra yantra, to establish intimacy with the Goddess. Shamanic Shaktism employs magic, trance mediumship, firewalking and animal sacrifice for healing, fertility, prophecy and power.

Shakta yogis seek to awaken the sleeping Goddess Kundalini and unite her with Siva in the sahasrara chakra. Shakta universalists follow the reformed Vedantic tradition exemplified by Sri Ramakrishna. "Left-hand" tantric rites transcend traditional ethical codes. Shaktism is chiefly advaitic, defining the soul's destiny as complete identity with the Unmanifest, Siva. Central scriptures are the *Vedas*, *Shakta Agamas* and *Puranas*. The *Devi Gita* extols, "We bow down to the universal soul of all. Above and below and in all four directions, Mother of the universe, we bow." Aum Chandikayai Namah.

What Is the Devotional Vaishnava Sect?

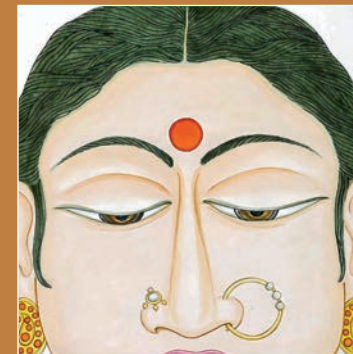
Vaishnavism is an ancient Hindu sect centering on the worship of Lord Vishnu and His incarnations, especially Krishna and Rama. Largely dualistic, profoundly devotional, it is rich in saints, temples and scriptures. Aum.



Vishnu is the infinite ocean from which the world emerges. He stands on waves, surrounded by the many-headed Seshanaga, who represents agelessness, is regarded as an extension of divine energy and an incarnation of Balarama, Lord Krishna's brother.

What Is the Universalistic Smarta Sect?

Smartism is an ancient brahminical tradition reformed by Shankara in the ninth century. Worshiping six forms of God, this liberal Hindu path is monistic, nonsectarian, meditative and philosophical. Aum.



Adi Shankara lived from 788 to 820 ce, a mere 32 years, yet he gave Hinduism a new liberal denomination—Smartism. Here, wearing sacred marks, he holds his writings and is flanked by the six Deities of the Smarta altar: Surya the Sun, Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Kumaran and Ganesha.

THE WORSHIP OF VISHNU, MEANING “PERVADER,” dates back to Vedic times. The Pancharatra and Bhagavata sects were popular prior to 300 bce. Today’s five Vaishnava schools emerged in the middle ages, founded by Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha and Chaitanya. Vaishnavism stresses prapatti, single-pointed surrender to Vishnu, or His ten or more incarnations, called avatars. Japa is a key devotional sadhana, as is ecstatic chanting and dancing, called kirtana. Temple worship and festivals are elaborately observed. Philosophically, Vaishnavism ranges from Madh-

va’s pure dualism to Ramanuja’s qualified nondualism, to Vallabha’s nearly monistic vision. God and soul are everlastingly distinct. The soul’s destiny, through God’s grace, is to eternally worship and enjoy Him. While generally nonascetic, advocating bhakti as the highest path, Vaishnavism has a strong monastic community. Central scriptures are the *Vedas*, *Vaishnava Agamas*, *Itihasas* and *Puranas*. The *Bhagavad Gita* states, “On those who meditate on Me and worship with undivided heart, I confer attainment of what they have not, and preserve what they have.” Aum Namō Narayanaya.

SMARTA MEANS A FOLLOWER OF CLASSICAL smriti, particularly the Dharma Shastras, Puranas and Itihasas. Smartas revere the *Vedas* and honor the *Agamas*. Today this faith is synonymous with the teachings of Adi Shankara, the monk-philosopher known as Shanmata Sthapanacharya, “founder of the six-sect system.” He campaigned India-wide to consolidate the Hindu faiths of his time under the banner of Advaita Vedanta. To unify the worship, he popularized the ancient Smarta five-Deity altar—Ganapati, Surya, Vishnu, Siva and Shakti—and added Kumara. From

these, devotees may choose their “preferred Deity,” or Ishta Devata. Each God is but a reflection of the one Saguna Brahman. Shankara organized hundreds of monasteries into a ten-order, dashanami system, which now has five pontifical centers. He wrote profuse commentaries on the *Upanishads*, *Brahma Sutras* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Shankara proclaimed, “It is the one Reality which appears to our ignorance as a manifold universe of names and forms and changes. Like the gold of which many ornaments are made, it remains in itself unchanged. Such is Brahman, and That art Thou.” Aum Namah Shivaya.

Comparing the Four Major Denominations

AS JUST SEEN, THE SPECTRUM of Hindu religiousness is found within four major sects or denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. Among these four streams, there are certainly more similarities than differences. All four believe in karma and reincarnation and in a Supreme Being who both is form and pervades form, who creates, sustains and destroys the universe only to create it again in unending cycles. They strongly declare the validity and importance of temple worship, the three worlds of existence and the myriad Gods and devas residing in them. They concur that there is no intrinsic evil, that the cosmos is created out of God and is permeated by Him. They each believe in maya (though their definitions differ somewhat), and in the liberation of the soul from rebirth, called moksha, as the goal of human existence. They believe in dharma and in ahimsa, noninjury, and in the need for a satguru to lead the soul toward Self Realization. They wear the sacred marks, tilaka, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, though each wears a distinct mark. Finally, they prefer cremation of the body upon death, believing that the soul will inhabit another body in the next life. While Hinduism has many sacred scriptures, all sects ascribe the highest authority to the Vedas and Agamas, though their Agamas differ somewhat. Here, now, is a brief comparison of these four denominations.

On the Personal God/Goddess

SAIVISM: Personal God and temple Deity is Siva, neither male nor female. Lords Ganesha and Karttikeya are also worshiped.

SHAKTISM: Personal Goddess and temple Deity is Shri Devi or Shakti, female, worshiped as Rajarajeshvari, Parvati, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kali, Amman, etc. —the Divine Mother.

VAISHNAVISM: Personal God and temple Deity is Vishnu, male. His incarnations as Rama and Krishna are also worshiped, as well as His divine consort, Radharani.

SMARTISM: Personal God and temple Deity is Ishvara, male or female, worshiped as Vishnu, Siva, Shakti, Ganesha and Surya or another Deity of devotee's choice, e.g., Kumara or Krishna.

On the Nature of Shakti

SAIVISM: Shakti is God Siva's inseparable power and manifest will, energy or mind.

SHAKTISM: Shakti is an active, immanent Being, separate from a quiescent and remote Siva.

VAISHNAVISM: No special importance is given to Shakti. However, there are parallels wherein the divine consorts are conceived as the inseparable powers of Vishnu and His incarnations: e.g., Krishna's Radharani and Rama's Sita.

SMARTISM: Shakti is a divine form of Ishvara. It is God's manifesting power.

On the Nature of Personal God

SAIVISM: God Siva is pure love and compassion, immanent and transcendent, pleased by our purity and *sadhana*.

SHAKTISM: The Goddess Shakti is both compassionate and terrifying, pleasing and wrathful, assuaged by sacrifice and submission.

VAISHNAVISM: God Vishnu is loving and beautiful, the object of man's devotion, pleased by our service and surrender.

SMARTISM: Ishvara appears as a human-like Deity according to devotees' loving worship, which is sometimes considered a rudimentary, self-purifying practice.

On the Doctrine of Avatara

SAIVISM: There are no divine earthly incarnations of the Supreme Being.

SHAKTISM: The Divine Mother does incarnate in this world.

VAISHNAVISM: Vishnu has ten or more incarnations.

SMARTISM: All Deities may assume earthly incarnations.

On the Soul and God

SAIVISM: God Siva is one with the soul. The soul must realize this advaitic

(monistic) Truth by God Siva's grace.

SHAKTISM: The Divine Mother, Shakti, is mediatrix, bestowing advaitic moksha on those who worship Her.

VAISHNAVISM: God and soul are eternally distinct. Through Lord Vishnu's grace, the soul's destiny is to worship and enjoy God.

SMARTISM: Ishvara and man are in reality Absolute Brahman. Within maya, the soul and Ishvara appear as two. *Jnana* (wisdom) dispels the illusion.

Spiritual Practice

SAIVISM: With bhakti as a base, emphasis is placed on *tapas* (austerity) and yoga. Ascetic.

SHAKTISM: Emphasis is on bhakti and tantra, sometimes occult, practices. Ascetic-occult.

VAISHNAVISM: Emphasis is on supreme bhakti or surrender, called *prapatti*. Generally devotional and nonascetic.

SMARTISM: Preparatory *sadhanas* are bhakti, karma, raja yoga. The highest path is through knowledge, leading to *jnana*.

Major Scriptures

SAIVISM: *Vedas, Saiva Agamas* and *Saiva Puranas*.

SHAKTISM: *Vedas, Shakta Agamas (Tantras)* and *Puranas*.

VAISHNAVISM: *Vedas, Vaishnava Agamas, Puranas* and the *Itihasas (Ramayana and Mahabharata, especially the Bhagavad Gita)*.

SMARTISM: *Vedas, Agamas* and classical *smriti*—*Puranas, Itihasas*, especially the *Bhagavad Gita*, etc.

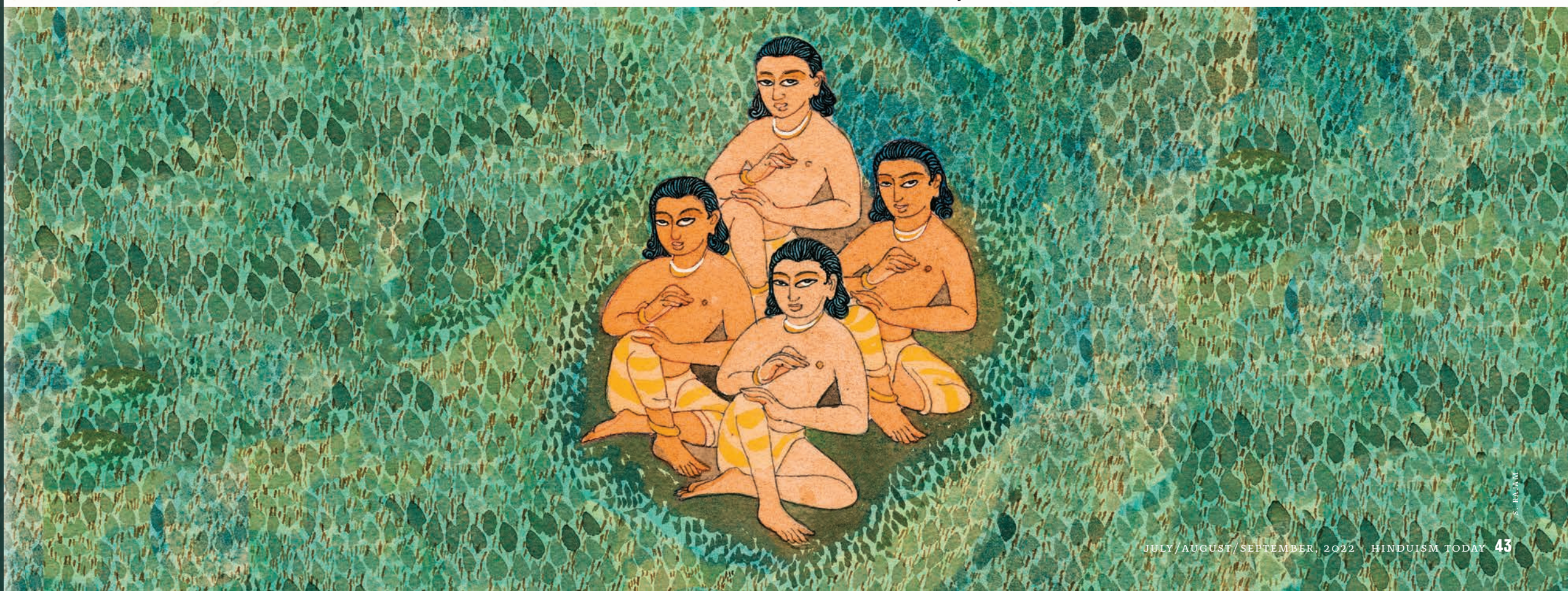
Regions of Influence

SAIVISM: Strongest in South and North India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

SHAKTISM: Most prominent in North-east India, especially Bengal and Assam.

VAISHNAVISM: Strong throughout India, North and South.

SMARTISM: Most prominent in North and South India.



Paths of Attainment



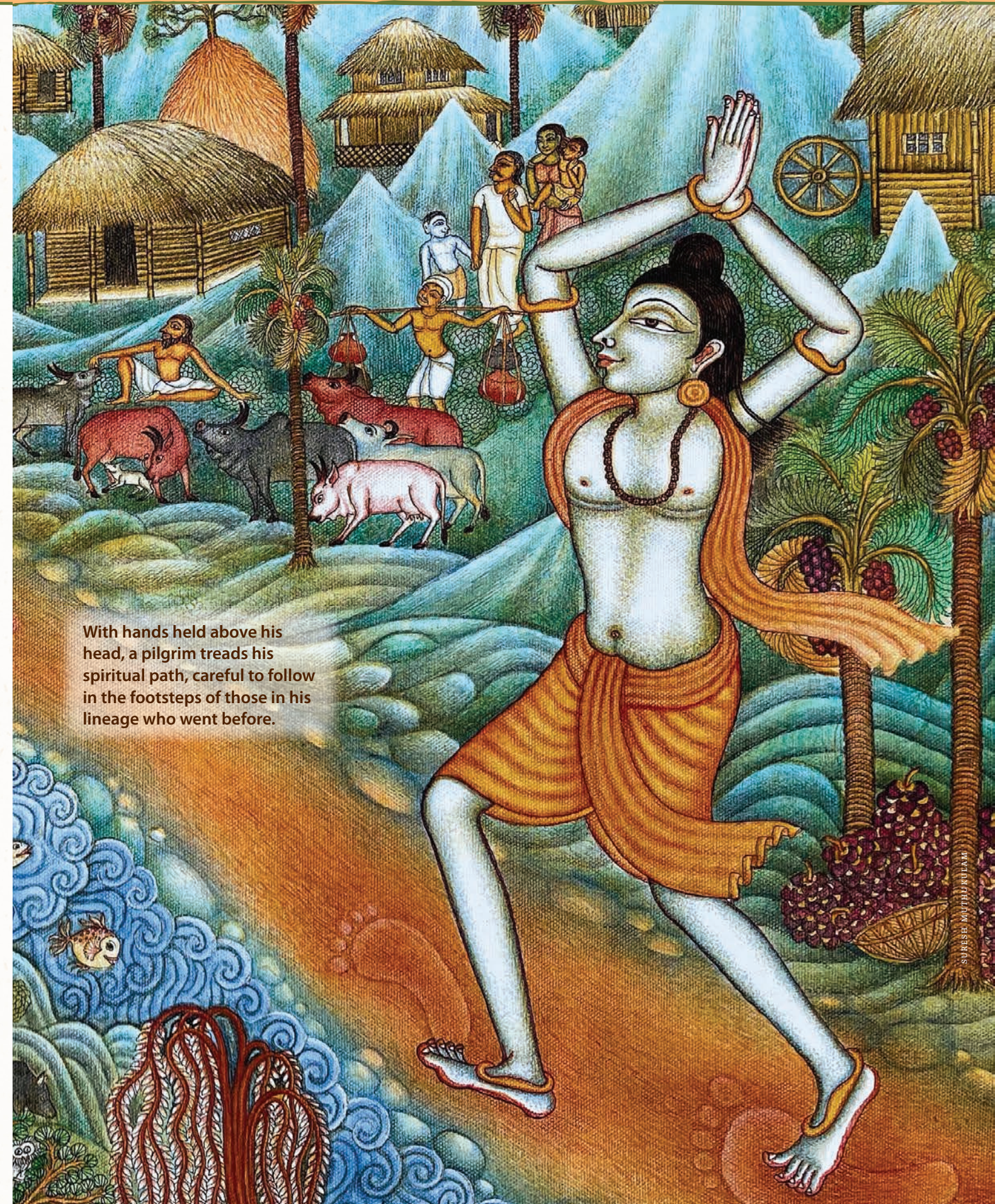
The Divine is reflected in four pots, representing Hinduism's four main denominations, their common source being the radiant Aum, the sacred mystic sound and symbol of Sanatana Dharma.

SAIVISM: The path for Saivites is divided into four progressive stages of belief and practice called charya, kriya, yoga and jnana. The soul evolves through karma and reincarnation from the instinctive-intellectual sphere into virtuous and moral living, then into temple worship and devotion, followed by internalized worship, or yoga, and its meditative disciplines. Union with God Siva comes through the grace of the satguru and culminates in the soul's maturity in the state of jnana, or wisdom. Saivism values both bhakti and yoga, devotional and contemplative sadhanas, or disciplines.

SHAKTISM: The spiritual practices in Shaktism are similar to those in Saivism, though there is more emphasis in Shaktism on God's Power as opposed to Being, on mantras and yantras, and on embracing apparent opposites: male-female, absolute-relative, pleasure-pain, cause-effect, mind-body. Certain sects within Shaktism undertake "left-hand" tantric rites, consciously using the world of form to transmute and eventually transcend that world. The "left-hand" approach is somewhat occult in nature; it is considered a path for the few, not the many. The "right-hand" path is more conservative in nature.

VAISHNAVISM: Most Vaishnavites believe that religion is the performance of bhakti sadhanas, devotional disciplines, and that man can communicate with and receive the grace of the Gods and Goddesses through the darshan (sight) of their icons. The paths of karma yoga and jnana yoga lead to bhakti yoga. Among the foremost practices of Vaishnavites is chanting the holy names of the Avatars, Vishnu's incarnations, especially Rama and Krishna. Through total self-surrender, prapatti, to Vishnu, to Krishna or to His beloved consort Radharani, liberation from samsara (the cycle of reincarnation) is attained.

SMARTISM: Smartas, the most eclectic of Hindus, believe that moksha is achieved through jnana yoga alone—defined as an intellectual and meditative but non-kundalini-yoga path. Jnana yoga's progressive stages are scriptural study (shravana), reflection (manana) and sustained meditation (dhyana). Guided by a realized guru and avowed to the unreality of the world, the initiate meditates on himself as Brahman, Absolute Reality, to break through the illusion of maya. Devotees may also choose from three other non-successive paths to cultivate devotion, accrue good karma and purify the mind. These are bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga, which certain Smartas teach can also bring enlightenment.



With hands held above his head, a pilgrim treads his spiritual path, careful to follow in the footsteps of those in his lineage who went before.



From Our Hindu Lexicon



Śaivism (Śaiva): शैव The religion followed by those who worship Siva as supreme God. Oldest of the four sects of Hinduism. The earliest historical evidence of Saivism is from the 8,000-year-old Indus Valley civilization in the form of the famous seal of Siva as Lord Pashupati, seated in a yogic pose. In the Ramayana, dated astronomically at 2000 BCE, Lord Rama worshiped Siva, as did his rival Ravana. Buddha in 624 BCE was born into a Saivite family, and records of his time speak of the Saiva ascetics who wandered the hills looking much as they do today. There are many schools of Saivism, six of which are Saiva Siddhanta, Pashupata Saivism, Kashmir Saivism, Vira Saivism, Siddha Siddhanta and Siva Advaita. They are based firmly on the *Vedas* and *Saiva Agamas*, and thus have much in

common, including the following principal doctrines: 1) the five powers of Siva—creation, preservation, destruction, revealing and concealing grace; 2) The three categories: Pati, pashu and pasha (“God, souls and bonds”); 3) the three bonds: anava, karma and maya; 4) the three-fold power of Siva: icchha shakti, kriya shakti and jnana shakti; 5) the thirty-six tattvas, or categories of existence; 6) the need for initiation from a satguru; 7) the power of mantra; 8) the four padas (stages): charya (selfless service), kriya (devotion), yoga (meditation), and jnana (illumination); 9) the belief in the Panchakshara as the foremost mantra, and in rudraksha and vibhuti as sacred aids to faith; 10) the beliefs in satguru (preceptor), Sivalinga (object of worship) and sangama (company of holy persons).



Śāktism (Śākta): शाक्त “Doctrine of power.” The religion followed by those who worship the Supreme as the Divine Mother—Shakti or Devi—in Her many forms, both gentle and fierce. Shaktism is one of the four primary sects of Hinduism. Shaktism’s first historical signs are thousands of female statuettes dated ca 5500 BCE recovered at the Mehrgarh village in India. In philosophy and practice, Shaktism greatly resembles Saivism, both faiths promulgating, for example, the same ultimate goals of advaitic union with Siva and moksha. But Shaktas worship Shakti as the Supreme Being exclusively, as the dynamic aspect of Divinity, while Siva is considered solely transcendent and is not worshiped. There are many forms of Shaktism, with endless varieties of practices which seek to capture divine energy or power for spiritual transformation. Geographically, Shaktism has two main forms, the Shrikula “family of the Goddess Shri (or Lakshmi),” which respects the brahminical tradition (a mainstream Hindu tradition which respects caste and purity rules) and is strongest in South India; and the Kalikula, “family of Kali,” which rejects brahminical tradition and prevails in Northern and Eastern India. Four major expressions of Shaktism are evident today: folk-shamanism, yoga, devotionism and universalism. Among the eminent mantras of Shaktism is: Aum Hrim Chandikayai Namah, “I bow to Her who tears apart all dualities.” There are many varieties of folk Shaktism gravitating around various forms of the Goddess, such as Kali, Durga and a number of forms of Amman. Such worship often involves animal sacrifice and fire-walking, though the former is tending to disappear.

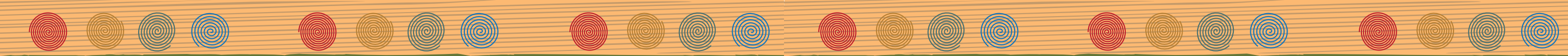


Vaishṇavism (Vaishṇava): वैष्णव One of the four major religions, or denominations of Hinduism, representing roughly half of the world’s one billion Hindus. It gravitates around the worship of Lord Vishnu as Personal God, His incarnations and their consorts. The doctrine of avatara (He who descends), especially important to Vaishnavism, teaches that whenever adharma gains ascendancy in the world, God takes a human birth to reestablish “the way.” There are either 10, 22 or 34 avatars of Vishnu, according to various scriptures. The most renowned avatars were Rama and Krishna. The last to come will be Kalki, the har-binger of a golden age on Earth. Vaishnavism stresses the

personal aspect of God over the impersonal, and bhakti (devotion) as the true path to salvation. The goal of Vaishnavism is the attainment of mukti, defined as blissful union with God’s body, the loving recognition that the soul is a part of Him, and eternal nearness to Him in Vaikuntha, heaven. Foremost among Vaishnava scriptures are the Vaishnava *Agamas*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Bhagavata Purana*. Among the earliest schools were the Pancharatas and the Bhagavatas. The five major contemporary schools (founded between 1000 and 1500) are those of Ramanuja (Shri Vaishnavism), Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha and Chaitanya. Philosophically they range from Madhva’s pure dualism to Vallabha’s lofty monistic vision.



Smartism: स्मार्त Sect based on the secondary scriptures (smṛiti). The most liberal of the four major Hindu denominations, an ancient Vedic brahminical tradition (ca 700 BCE) which from the 9th century onward was guided and deeply influenced by the Advaita Vedanta teachings of the reformist Adi Sankara. Its adherents rely mainly on the classical smṛiti literature, especially the *Itihasas* (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the latter of which includes the *Bhagavad Gita*), *Puranas* and *Dharma Shastras*. These are regarded as complementary to and a means to understanding the *Vedas*. Smartas adhere to Sankara’s view that all Gods are but various representations of Saguna Brahman. Thus, Smartas are avowedly eclectic, worshiping all the Gods and discouraging sectarianism. The Smarta system of worship, called panchayatana puja, reinforces this outlook by including the major Deity of each primary Hindu sect of ancient days: Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Siva and Shakti. To encompass a sixth important lineage, Sankara recommended the addition of a sixth Deity, Kumara. Thus he was proclaimed shanmata sthapanacharya, founder of the sixfold system. One among the six is generally chosen as the devotee’s preferred Deity, Ishta Devata. For spiritual authority, Smartas look to the regional monasteries established across India by Sankara, and to their pontiffs. These are the headquarters of ten orders of renunciate monks who spread the Advaita Vedanta teachings far and wide. Within Smartism three primary religious approaches are distinguished: ritualistic, devotional and philosophical.



Other Denominations

Hinduism is vast and varied. It has been said that it is best understood not as a religion, but as ten thousand religions gathered under a single umbrella. Below are but a few of the many peripheral faiths and followings that make up Sanatana Dharma.



AYYAPPANISM: Ayyappan (also known as Shasta, Dharmasastha or Manikandan) is the God of self-control, courage and strength, riding on a wild tiger. His origin is depicted in different ways across various regions but it's commonly said He is the son of Siva and Mohini. Popular almost exclusively in South India, worshipers of Ayyappan can be found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. A central practice of the tradition is an annual 41-day pilgrimage to His primary temple, Sabarimala, during which celibacy, teetotalism and vegetarianism must be strictly observed—a fitting tapas for devotees of the Lord of self-control.



GANAPATISM: This stream of Hinduism is wildly popular in Maharashtra, where followers of Ganapati go beyond the universal reverence Hindus have for Ganesha as the elephant-headed Lord of Obstacles and declare Him to be the Supreme Being. Ardent acolytes distinguish themselves by a red circle on their forehead, as well as the tattoo of an elephant on their shoulder.



SURYAISM: Suryaites, or Sauras, worship the solar Deity, Lord Surya, as God. While sun worship has been present in India since the time of the *Rig Veda*, the most important Saura text, the *Saura Samhita*, was written in 941ce. Temples to Surya—built from 800 to 1000ce—can be found across North India, though many were destroyed by Muslim invaders. With decimation of temples and the killing of priests

Procession: Village women carry offerings of decorated fruit baskets on their heads on their way to a local temple in Bali, Indonesia, June 25, 2012.

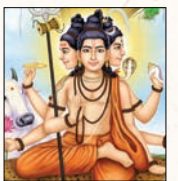
and followers, the Surya tradition declined in the 12th century. Elements of the tradition have survived and are practiced to this day, notably the important Chhath puja, celebrated in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and southern Nepal, in which prayers and austerities are offered to Surya over a four-day period.



KAUMARAM: Followers of the Kaumaram faith are found most commonly in South India and Sri Lanka. Kaumaras worship Lord Murugan as the Supreme Godhead, superior to even Siva, Shakti and Vishnu. Historically, the tradition came to prominence when it was recognized by Adi Shankara, who incorporated Lord Kumara into his six-sect theological system, along with the Deity of five other faiths, placing each on the Smarta home altar. Thus the renowned proponent of Advaita Vedanta strove to unify the various streams of worship under a single banner.



BALI HINDUISM: Widespread Hindu presence in Indonesia can be traced back to 78ce on the island of Java. As a result of Muslim invasions around 1400, Hindus were forced to consolidate in an area they could defend. Many Javanese Hindus fled to Bali, resulting in the development of Bali Hinduism. Known locally as "Agama Hindu Dharma," it is a fusion of Indian Hinduism with indigenous Indonesian animist customs. Bali's four million Hindus worship many Deities, including Ganesha and Acintya Siva, the Supreme Being, who is celebrated in *wayang* (shadow puppet) theater. He is the creator of Gods, Goddesses and all of existence.



DATTATREYA SAMPRADAYA: Followers of this sect consider Dattatreya, or Adinath, to be the Supreme Reality and Creator, the merger of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. He is depicted as a sannyasin pursuing a simple life who achieves Self-Realization by observing nature. Followers are primarily found in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Telangana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. Many traditions have ties to the Dattatreya lineage, including the Natha sampradaya, Avadhuta sampradaya, Gurucharita tradition and various bhakti traditions.



TEMPLES

Making Mandirs Cool Again

Historically, the Hindu temple was not only the religious center of each village but a social, cultural and even business/financial hub



BY RUTVIJ HOLAY, 17

SINCE PERHAPS THE BEGINNING OF time, teenagers have been sneaking out of the cave, hut or house to hang out with their friends. When we think of these hangouts today, perhaps the mall comes to mind—though increasingly it tends to be online platforms like Discord. Yet, when we go back even further—centuries further, in fact—we find that the traditional hangout has often been the local mandir.

Indeed, if one takes a look at the older literature in local languages (which tend to be less intellectual, primarily consisting of contributions composed by village folk), there are references to young people sending coded messages to each other, telling them to meet up in the mandir at night. To many modern teens (and the parents who struggle to get them into mandirs in the first place), especially in such a materialistic world, this may seem rather confusing: why would anyone decide to have fun in a place as boring as a temple? Perhaps more importantly, why should anyone care today?

Both are important questions. In their answers lies the secret to making our mandirs cool again, primarily because, in the past, all the cool things happened in the mandirs. While there certainly were pujas, other events—such as dances like Bharatanatyam and Kathak and various *sangeets* (group singing) and dramas—were regularly held in the mandirs. That these art forms often told stories to the audience made them more interesting, and perhaps even like the movies of their time. Especially in rural areas where literacy was rarer, as it was in much of the world, books were evidently not an option for entertainment, making such pastimes all the more entertaining compared to the alternatives.

The Temple's Many Functions

In such a way, the mandir became the equivalent of a movie theater: people could come together and enjoy a good story with friends and families. Perhaps even better, because, in cases where there was only one mandir in town, the vast majority of people in the village (or, in the case of bigger gatherings, mul-

tiple villages) would come to these events. Given that these were agrarian societies, with no "offices" where colleagues worked together, it would make sense that the mandir was one of the premier places in the village where people would gather.

People came to attend the mandir's religious and cultural events as well as to exchange news, talk politics or just gossip. Surprisingly, mandirs were even a place of business. Sanjeev Sandyal writes in his wide-ranging book on the peoples bordering the Indian Ocean, *The Ocean of Churn*, "Much of Indian classical music, dance, drama, sculpture, painting and other art forms evolved in the temples rather than at the royal court. What is less appreciated is that the temples were key to the financing of trade, industry and infrastructure building. It is well known that medieval temples were very wealthy, but the common impression is that this wealth was mostly due to royal grants. In reality, the reason that the temples accumulated so much wealth is that they acted as bankers and financiers!"



Invasion's Impact

At the same time, however, as a result of all of these reasons, mandirs were targeted by invaders, and started to decline in their social prestige. As Muslim invaders (such as the Umayyads and Mughals) and Christians after them, began to attack India, one of their first targets was (and still is, in the case of countries such as Pakistan) the mandirs, in part because they were not only of religious significance, but also the cultural, social and in some ways, political center of the village. Taking them over meant that the riches of some of the biggest corporations in the world at the time would belong to the invaders. While large sites like Somnath and Pandharpur were rebuilt due to their religious importance, many Hindus did not have the resources to afford similar reconstruction of the smaller mandirs in many villages. When there was no mandir, there was no gathering place, and thus no place to foment dissent and promote an "idoltrous" culture. When these mandirs were broken, so too was, in many ways, mass resistance and the teen hangouts.

In the centuries that followed this destructive period, Hindus found a way to adjust to the lack of community centers by becoming much more decentralized. When there weren't pandits around to explain the Sanskrit *Ramayana*, the Hindi *Ramacharita-manasa* grew in popularity. When no one in the village could read the tales in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, people began to listen to folk tales surrounding Radha and Krishna instead. And as the temples grew fewer, people instead heard the Bhakti Movement's Saint Tukaram remark that the body is God's mandir.

Religious Transmission Changes

As a result of these foreign invasions, the onus for passing on cultural and religious values increasingly began to fall more on individual parents, rather than on institutions like mandirs. Thus, the development of many of the art forms the mandirs encouraged

became decentralized as well, with dance (which would later on be banned by the British in the mandirs that still remained) and music being passed down from parent to child, more so than guru to shishya, a practice which continues, in some ways, to this day.

Today's Challenges

While this decentralization took away much of the mandir's historical importance, perhaps what has drawn people away from it the most has been modernization. Today, there are more things to do on our devices, especially as they've become more interconnected. The mandir and, for that matter, many things not on a screen have become more boring to kids who have more options than their forefathers ever had.

In many ways, this problem has increased as the reach of technology has grown. Even when I was younger, though we had devices in the house, the ability to connect with friends without leaving the house was still miniscule, and not something I had access to growing up until middle school.

That may be why, though not as deep as it was two thousand years ago, my friends and I felt a deeper connection to the mandir than most. Growing up, the mandir I remember most visiting was the Sarva Dev Mandir in Oxford, Massachusetts. During that time, I would stand around with friends for a few aratis, and then go play tag through the mandir halls.

While normally such behavior would have been frowned upon, our mandir had a big room to the side where prasad was served after the aratis. In the meantime, the room was empty, and ours to frolic around in. We would play with any kids in the temple, including those whose names we never knew, creating a larger bond between us not as individuals, but as a Hindu community. Even more importantly, while we were in a separate room, we were always within earshot of the prayers going on. While it didn't seem like it, some



Temple activities: (opposite) traditional temple activities included festivals, processions, classes, meetings with holy people and much more; (above left) practicing rangoli floor designs on pieces of paper; (above right) storytelling with younger students

of those aratis became ingrained in our heads, and were subconsciously memorized by us.

While I was talking with old friends, some of whom played with me in this mandir nearly a decade ago, many of them agreed with my sentiments. One, Jay Manjrekar, who now is in 11th grade and resides in San Diego, California, said, "These mandirs represent my childhood. Not only was the mandir a way for me to connect with my culture, but it also allowed me to make friends. I vividly remember Navaratri in 2012, when we had a blast. Looking back and reminiscing on those times makes me feel even closer to Hinduism."

Some of our other friends, who were growing up on the other side of the country during that time, also agreed that the mandir helped deepen their bond with Hinduism, with one, Shivam Garg, recalling how whenever he visited, he loved to read "the stories on the wall, and eat the prasadam."

Looking at this next generation of children, however, I rarely see anyone having the same experiences that we did. While I sit for bhajans at our local mandir, I seldom see kids running around and having fun, and I know that, despite the great memories my generation made at the mandirs, it is only a mere fraction of the memories our forefathers made at their local mandirs centuries ago.

The Next Generation

That brings us to the question of utmost importance: how do we make sure the next generation is able to have a bond at the mandir that is much greater than ours? How do we take these kids away from the metaphorical mall (and, perhaps more relevant to mod-



Helping the poor: (left to right) young devotees engaged in handing out food to the needy; and helping prepare sandwiches for a homeless shelter



ern times, their ever ubiquitous phones) and put them back into the mandir? How do we make the mandir cool again?

To start from personal experience, it may be best to make sure mandirs are as “youth-friendly” as possible. While parents can drag kids to the mandir all they want, if they don’t want to pray, it becomes hard to change that, and the experience will only embitter them in the future. Rather, having a space for the older kids to hang out, and perhaps a larger space for younger kids to run around will make them willingly come to the mandir, and make good memories around the mandir in their minds. Perhaps more importantly, by merely being in such an environment, they will be exposed to their mother tongues, prayers, and anything else that they should imbibe to be good Hindus.

From there, bringing back plays, musical performances and dances on a regular basis is absolutely necessary. Historically speaking, there were rarely days consisting solely of prayer, as dances and *sangeet* used to be an essential part of any worship ceremony. Today, however, they seem to be relegated to festival days or talent shows. By bringing back such forms of entertainment, we give the youth something to see and do, and thus motivate them even more, especially if their friends are amongst the performers.

From there, it gets a bit harder. Even if we bring back the old mandirs where kids used to

frolic, and bring back the entertainment they had, we still have to contend with the issue of modernization and technology, and the fact that if someone does not wish to go to the mandir, there are so many other things they can do.

To start, even though most kids may not have businesses that need banking, they all do have hopes for their future, and material wants that can incentivize them to come to any place. The mandir, wherever possible, ought to provide those.

There are so many areas where mandirs need help, whether it be the distribution of food, cleaning and maintenance, or simply advertising for festivals and whatnot. If other initiatives surrounding entertainment are added in, those are more opportunities for youth to get involved, and even take on leadership roles.

Someone skilled at cooking could, after some initial training, oversee the distribution of prasadam completely on weekends, while a skilled dancer could choreograph performances for the enjoyment of the audience every Sunday. For those who are more outgoing, perhaps fundraising for the mandir or coordination of interfaith visits could be done. Especially for those who are spiritually inclined, an “internship” with the puo-

hits may provide an opportunity for them to grow their skills, and help preserve our future. Others could help generate the temple newsletter, or add to its website.

For those youth blessed with a spiritual interest, but who have less religious parents, such initiatives are a better way for them to increase temple engagement and convince their parents to take them to the mandir each weekend. Perhaps while these parents wait for their kids, they may become enthralled with everything happening in the mandir, and find the same joy in visiting that their forefathers did. In this way, our mandirs, while they may not be banks like they used to be, will provide a way for people who come to visit to benefit materially as well as spiritually.

In Conclusion

Of course, such steps are no guarantee that our mandirs will become the hangout spots that they were during the time of Kalidasa and Chandragupta Maurya. Various powers, over centuries, have worked hard to dismantle traditional Indic systems of life which had the mandir at their center. Aside from that, we live in a different world where, for all faiths, the worship house is becoming less relevant to a younger generation. It may take centuries to restore our mandirs to their original position in our culture.

That is not to say, however, that we should not get started. Before many invaders even existed, our mandirs were the center of Hindu society, and with their destruction, so too was destroyed India’s golden age. If we wish to preserve Hindu society, and ensure that our next generation cares for our way of life as much as we do, we must take steps to make our mandirs more relevant in their lives, and thus make our mandirs cool again.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EDUCATION

My Unfortunate Conversion

How Christian evangelists slowly and rather deceptively lured me into joining their faith during my college days

BY DIVYA JAIN, MICHIGAN

SPRING FLOWERS DON’T LAST FOREVER, yet they bring the most beautiful colors. The first step to conversion in spring brought me the most enriching life experience. Yet, there were chameleons hiding, and I couldn’t tell where I grew up in a Jain family of three in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India. We are a Hindi-speaking family who hold language and culture in high regard. My mother focused a lot on my Hindi and Sanskrit skills. She herself was a Hindi/Sanskrit teacher in a public school. My father, who was a geologist with the government, always had high regard for the Bharatiya culture and Hindu/Jain dharma. Ours was a middle-class family, and I have seen many such families being custodians of cultural and dharmic values.

My mother is a staunch Dharmic. She taught me mantras and their meanings, how to recite shlokas, rituals and how to worship Gods daily. My father was into the utility values of Sanatana Dharma, such as yoga, dhyana and reading different books on dharma. They both were trying to raise a good and traditional Sanatani. I see this as a beautiful carving of a child by parents as a sculptor creates an artistic image for a temple.

Basking in Indian Culture

I imbibed as much as I could. Hindu culture has many festivals, each to be celebrated with exhilaration and joy. Even though I grew up in a Jain family, I like to acknowledge myself as a *Sanatani* who is a Hindu first and a Jain later. I never saw the two Dharmic paths as separate from each other. The philosophy might be slightly different, but, as I understand it, they are not far apart. My parents taught Hinduism and Jainism to me as two Dharmic paths under one umbrella. My favorite festival has always been Holi. The colors, food, fun and most importantly the joy of wishing each other well by dissolving any differences was my favorite part. Every festival was a reason to buy clothes, cook delicious food, meet friends and family and spread goodness to more people.

Just as I grew up, so did I have an amicable experience in school and with my peers. I never went to convent school, it was always one Hindu-oriented school or another. Yoga, pranayama and meditation were an integral



part of these schools. My friends were from similar family backgrounds as mine. We were good peers, good kids and good Hindus.

What was missing from the school syllabus was the glorification of dharma. It mostly glorified Mughals and taught us secularism. I knew very little about the truth of the Mughal invasion and the ideological differences between Dharmic and Abrahamic religions.

Growing up doesn’t come easy! It brings a lot of confusion, rebellion, and a zeal to try something new. As I entered university in India, I was driving myself away from the core values of being Hindu. Being liberal sounded fun and cool. Although I didn’t approve of everything liberal, my religious views certainly were so. Arts and humanities professors were our source of information about the ongoing events of the world. But, they mostly didn’t respect Sanskrit or Hindi.

Family: Divya, her mother and daughter Ahaana Majumdar after her head-shaving sacrament in Annapurna Mandir, Indore, in 2019

They themselves were confused about the greatness of Dharma, the rich Bharatiya culture and our history. There was a subliminal tone of Western cultural superiority influencing our minds.

Alone at College in Texas

I came to the USA in 2011 after completing college in India. With my good Graduate Record Exam scores, I gained admission to the highly ranked University of Texas. The combined culture shock of both America and Texas was definitely something to face, but with the presence of Indian students on



COURTESY DIVYA JAIN

campus and as guiding forces, it became easy to settle down. I found a few good friends among these students. A year passed. Little did I know a life-changing wave was coming in my sea of emotions. The friends that I made in that first year couldn't stay with me through the second year. Some transferred universities, some dropped out and some didn't find it worth carrying forward the friendship. For an outgoing and extroverted person like myself, it was very difficult to not have friends. I was surrounding myself with loneliness and anxiety.

My Christian Phase Begins

In these times of turmoil, two eyes identified the desperation. They were of a new-found "friend" who apparently thought well of me and invited me to an on-campus gathering that happened every Thursday. Little did I know what I was invited to, much less what was coming next, but I joined him that week in this gathering. The first thing I noticed was smiling, young, pretty faces. The second thing I was amused by was the music! It was soothing and somewhat new for me. It was Christian worship music in English, which I found enchanting. Its message was clear: Jesus is the only way, and you need to submit your life to him to find your permanent spot in eternal heaven.



CRU

Not at face value: (left) Divya with two other members of Chi Alpha at a big meeting; (below) International headquarters of Cru

a permanent member of the church. I loved the idea, and started going to these sessions, which were organized by a young person in the congregation. This was another opportunity for me to know them personally and also to get more friends.

Within the first week of my first church visit in my lifetime, I had decided to go to large Thursday meetings on campus and small group meetings every Wednesday. The small group church meetings were very personal. Five to seven girls would meet and discuss the *Bible* and do some fun activities like hanging out, eating outside, playing games, and more. Every time I went to the church, I would hear things like, "Jesus is the only way, and if you follow any other way you are damned to eternal hell." It did not make sense to me, but I would ignore it totally because overcoming my loneliness was so important for me.

In the small groups I asked the question, "My faith, which is Hinduism, does not teach like this. Why does the *Bible* say so?" The reply was that the *Bible* was written by God and needs to be believed more than what any other faith says.

Most of those in the church had no idea about other faiths' teachings or world religions in general. They were totally focused on what was in the *Bible* and how to share its teachings. The other problem that I faced in the small groups was the age gap (I was a few years older) and the consequent immaturity in their understanding of Christianity and other world religions. Still, I kept attending both types of events in spite of not getting answers to my questions about the comparison between Hinduism and Christianity.

"When Will You Be Baptized?"

Eventually, I was asked by my group leader when I was going to get baptized. I did not know at the time that baptism would mean that I have converted to Christianity officially. Neither was I told that baptism is the confession to the world that I have accepted Jesus as the only God for my lifetime and I would not believe any other faith than Christianity. In spite of not knowing this, I rejected baptism because I wasn't ready. I hadn't gotten answers to my questions, and those questions were still bothering me now. I was really seeking answers, but didn't know who to go to, as the church people definitely didn't have the answers.

As time passed, I was going deeper into my Christian journey and enjoying my new-found friends. But it seemed like the goal of

WHY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

BY SEVERIN LWALI, DIRECTOR OF XAI

The United States of America is the number one destination for international students to study and earn a solid education. Our universities have been an incubator of ideas and a place to shape future leaders from all nations of the world, which is why 40 percent of the world's heads of state have studied in the United States.

Many of the international students are from countries closed to the gospel, countries we cannot send in missionaries, and countries where the Church is highly persecuted. While on American soil, it is a strategic opportunity to reach these students with the good news. We believe that God has brought the international student to the U.S. not just to receive an education, but to encounter Jesus and move from a place of friendship to their God-given mandate of leadership by making disciples who make disciples.

my conversion was not being met by my new faith teachers—they wanted me to get baptized. They might have some quota to fulfill for conversion, at least that is how it sounded to me. Since I was failing that quota, I was directed to a better teacher and a better classroom. The person who took me to church for the first time introduced me to new small group leaders and a family church which was an associated subsidiary of this on-campus church. The new teachers were mature in age and in their faith of Christianity, more convincing and more tactful. It would have been easier not to convert had I not left the first set of teachers. But now, in a better, bigger, and more convincing classroom, I was fully entrapped.

Four to five months into this experience, I was attending two churches and two small groups. Three or four days of my week were dedicated to the *Bible* and learning about the new faith! I was reading the *Bible* on my own, too. I was listening to podcasts, watching videos of apologists and discussing this new faith with friends without telling anyone about my intentions of joining the church or not.



JOHN GIBBINS/ZUMA PRESS/NEWSCOM

Jesus as the Only Way to Salvation

The irony is that I was on my way to finding new friends, whereby I was forced to find a "new God" and certainly the "only God" going forward. My family and my then-boyfriend weren't aware of these changes in my life, except that I was going to church. Neither ever opposed it. I was selective in what I discussed with them about my persuasion of a new God.

As I was growing in this new faith, I was getting a push from everyone to get baptized.

Geographical focus: (left) Chi Alpha's annual report highlights their focus on students from other countries; (below) San Diego members of Cru conduct a prayer session at a homeless shelter

I wasn't ready, and I said so. I think by now they had figured out that I was a hard nut to crack, and they left the decision to me to make when I was comfortable with it. But they never stopped the process of persuasion, coercion and convincing, and they kept pursuing it wholeheartedly.

In church, the method of worship was consistent: one would go and hear fantastic worship music followed by a sermon by the pastor. There were also other small portions: testimonials of disciples on a big screen, water baptism and missionaries' information about where they were going next or how successful they were in building a church or gaining converts in other countries.

The more personal small groups were a very good medium for addressing people's personal lives. With my "matured in faith" mentor, *Bible* reading was a must. Attendees would cry profusely during prayers to Jesus. They would confess their inefficiency in submitting to the Lord completely and show their desire to do so once they are with Jesus as Jesus' brides in eternal heaven. They were dedicated, humble followers who also saw bringing other faith people to Jesus as one of their biggest life goals. They were missionaries and were getting paid by the church to do the missions.

Joining the Flock Formally

My inquiry and journey of exploring Christianity was going well and it was approaching formalizing when I submitted in May of 2014 and declared to my small group leader that I would be baptized. She cried profusely. I wasn't sure why—I saw a sense of victory in her eyes, and a sigh of relief.

I was going to be one of those who cries while praying to Jesus, who speaks in tongues as if a spirit which has infested the body speaks through you. It had all started with the new small group that I had joined with a mature Christian. I think the decision was more of a psychological reaction to what had been fed through me. The psychological effect was stronger than just speaking in tongues; it also reflected in my behavior. When I visited my parents in India in 2014, I was abusing them for being Hindu and doing idol worship. I called them evil people because that is what the *Bible* says idol worshippers are.

I was certain and sure that my parents were not going to go to heaven, which is eternal and that can only come if they converted to Christianity and followed Jesus as their only God. The *Bible* says it over and over, and I had heard these words until my baptism hundreds of

CHI ALPHA

times. They were engraved in my brain and my brain had gotten rewired in a way that it could think of Jesus as the only way to eternal happiness, heaven and salvation.

Clash of Two Faiths

My Christian journey was going pretty well with the *Bible* reading, listening to videos about *Bible* studies, and so on until it got a shocker after my wedding in 2016, in which I married my boyfriend with whom I fell in love with in 2010.

He wasn't aware of my baptism—I hadn't told him—but he knew that I had been going to church. Through the past few years we had intense discussions about faith, religion, Hinduism and Christianity. We would compare faiths and discuss Hindu dharma in essence. All through this time, his one good friend accompanied us in our journey and discussions. One thing this friend very rightly said was that Hinduism is a karma-based religion, whereas Christianity is all faith-based. He also said one must be proud and live and die in Hinduism, which is the most advanced and logical faith. My boyfriend and his friend tried every way to convince me to be a proud Hindu, but all of it fell flat.

Six months after my marriage, I was pregnant. I did not know that Christianity had cultivated so many doubts in my mind. Confusion started seeping in my mind, and I kind of convinced myself that I should have married a Christian guy. This conviction started to slowly grab me and became depression. I was engulfed by prenatal depression and was in the most terrible pregnancy, because of other personal reasons, too. I could have dealt with these trials well enough had I been following Hindu/Jain dharma, as they offer far more clarity in understanding doubts, choices, confusions and suffering. Suffering, though, is a good thing in Christianity.

I delivered a healthy baby girl. After seeing her, I was confused as to whether to raise her as a Hindu or Christian. My conviction of raising her Christian would increase whenever I visited my small group leader and mentor back in Texas. I saw her raising her own kids as orthodox Christians, who were not allowed to learn or read about other religions!

Looking More Deeply at Dharma

My confusion led me to explore more about Hinduism and Jainism. I started to compare more and, deep down, realize that Christianity is a closed faith. I became more sure when my mentor would say things like, "Culture is human created and God is not interested in cultures," or tell me that I have to leave the utility aspects of Hinduism such as yoga, meditation, kundalini yoga and dance, be-

CONNECTION

CHI ALPHA CAMPUS MINISTRIES

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1, SUMMER 2017



CHI ALPHA



SHUTTERSTOCK

Spreading the Gospel: (above) Chi Alpha's magazine on befriending first-year students to bring them into the faith; (left) river rafting is one of the recommended group activities for evangelism

dharma that allows pluralism, teaches us to love all beings and every single entity on this Earth. Hinduism is the most ancient, logical and rational dharma.

I was craving to watch my favorite dances, classical Indian dance forms, such as Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Odissi and Manipuri. All of them have originated around devotion to Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Bhagwan Krishna, Siva and Ma Durga. I was restricting myself from watching them because I was a Christian, whose "jealous" God wouldn't like it if I showed devotion to other Gods and Goddesses. I would have been damned to an eternal hell for the same.

Back to the Quagmire

Gosh! I was scared about it. And more than scared, in all honesty, I had started hating Hindu rituals, culture, teaching and my Hindu/Jain identity. Such is the way a brain can get wired if hate is inculcated against anything. It had been a gradual process and took two years for me to be in that position where

I was hard-wired to hate other faiths than Christianity. My baptism had changed me. I wasn't the same person. After baptism, I was abusing everything Hindu from its teaching to rituals, practices, culture, mandir and murti puja. It took a huge toll on my mental health, reasoning and logical implications.

When I was away from my Christian mentor—if I wasn't talking to her over the phone, or taking suggestions on personal issues—I would feel I was coming out of the quagmire of the Christian thought process. But, as soon as I spoke with her or met her in person, I would again feel Christianity is the only way out of my life problems. It would give me a false sense of relief, and I would take ten steps back in my journey of coming back to Sanatana Dharma.

Transition back to Dharma

The final straw came when my mentor tried to justify the attack on Hindu sadhus killed in the 2020 Palghar lynching, allegedly by a mob of converted Christians. According to her, it was OK because Christians are still being persecuted by Hindus in India—the narrative fed her by the Western media.

That final experience confirmed the closed views about other religions that I saw repeatedly during my Christian journey. I decided it was all reason enough to escape that deception and move forward on my journey within the Sanatana Dharma.

My inquisition became unstoppable. Even if I would take ten steps back, I would feel a sense of urgency as I had to decide how to teach my firstborn daughter the moral principles of life. It was very important for me to work from an authoritative reference rather than quoting it for myself. Due to the difficult pregnancy, I was determined to give my daughter the best once she was out of the womb. I wanted to teach her religion, but the question was, which one?

In the process of studying and thinking through what to teach her, I was learning how much I did not know of the basic tenets of Sanatana Dharma. I did not understand how beautiful its teachings are. My confusions were slowly getting cleared. Even when I would go back to confusions, there were resources out there

to bring me back onto the path of learning. One needs to be inquisitive to keep open that door of knowledge to be gained so that ignorance may be removed.

Today, blessed with a second daughter, I am of stable mindset, no longer confused, and on a beautiful journey of spirituality via meditation, nitya puja, chanting, temple darshan and festival celebration. I simply enjoy every moment of life, whether in sickness or in health, equipped to face life's difficult problems. I love teaching both my girls about dharma, culture, heritage and the oldest and the greatest civilization on Earth—the Hindu civilization. My husband appreciates my journey home to Sanatana Dharma and how it reflects in the raising of our kids.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Divya Jain, 35, has a M.S. degree in biotechnology and is presently a stay-at-home mom, Hindu rights activist, speaker and social worker. She and her engineer husband live in Troy, Michigan. jaindivya2806@gmail.com

A Carefully-Crafted Campaign

BY THE EDITORS

ONE MIGHT THINK IT WOULD TAKE JOURNALISTIC sleuthing to uncover the ethically questionable strategies of the "friendship" or "relational" evangelism Divya Jain experienced. But that is not the case. Just google "college evangelism" to see literature completely devoted to the subject published by the campus ministries themselves. The manual at right, *The 250 Evangelism Ideas*, is published by Cru, formerly Campus Crusade for Christ, one of the largest religious organizations in the US, with an annual revenue of \$600 million, mostly from donations. It is a collection of 250-plus strategies in use at campuses across the US. Divya said she personally experienced or witnessed 40 of them at her school.

Many of Cru's methods could be called "bait and switch," with an event being announced for one purpose but with evangelism as the actual goal. For example, #38: "One block from the University of New Mexico, a church meets in a converted movie theatre. The lobby of the church is made available for students to display their artwork. A group of artistic students meets at the church to create art and to discuss the meaning of their art. This has opened doors to talk about the gospel." Another, #42, states, "Michigan State [evangelical] students are strategically placed in different influential clubs on campus" for the purpose of finding likely targets. Cru members will host parties, show movies, set up soup kitchens, go river rafting, hold pizza-eating contests and more. Some activities are specifically aimed at African American, Asian or other ethnicities. The book states, "Fraternities and sororities are one of the most strategic places



to invest your time in ministry." In all cases, the tactic is to form friendships which are subsequently dropped if the student shows no interest in being converted.

Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, much smaller than Cru, publishes a magazine called *Connection*. Its summer 2017 issue (bit.ly/ChiAlphaMag) goes into detail on targeting first-year students, "When students arrive on the university campus, they immediately begin the pursuit for community. Normally, within the first two weeks of moving on to campus, students have made the friendships and entered the affinity groups that they will adhere to for the majority of their collegiate career. This is why it is imperative that Chi Alpha is present and highly visible on campus all year long, to welcome, serve, love and share the gospel of Jesus to incoming freshman."

One student is quoted to show the impact of the program: "As a freshman, I had no idea where I would find friends in college. Luckily enough, they found me! Students from Chi Alpha met me at my car in the parking lot during move-in, helped me carry all of my stuff, and invited me to dinner that night. Though I had no interest in

Christianity, I started attending one of their life groups and realized that they weren't just acting nice—they genuinely cared for me."

Following the same strategy, Cru gives the example of Montana University, where they encourage their upperclass staff members living off-campus to move back into the school's dorms where most first-year students are housed. Cru members "are trained to think strategically about how to reach everyone in their dorm, and how to build relationships with the residents."

If you're a first-year college student, you are advised to not necessarily take at face value every proffered friendship, especially from overeager upperclass students.

EDUCATION

Remaining a Hindu in College

How I found diverse ways to deepen my religious life during my university days

BY DHANESH RISHI BUDHRAM

I AM A FIRST-GENERATION HINDU-AMERICAN WHOSE parents are from Guyana. My earlier ancestors left multiple parts of South Asia, including Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Nepal, to work as indentured servants in the sugar cane fields in the Caribbean area for the British Empire after slavery was abolished. They brought their traditions with them to their new land and developed their form of Hinduism, which I cherish.

My parents immigrated to Miami, Florida, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were founding members of the Miami Lakshmi Narayan Mandir, the city's first Hindu organization. I was very involved with the mandir as I grew up. I helped with the pujas and was an active part of their Bal Vihar, or youth group. I also played instruments such as the dholak, tabla and dhantal. During my time at Bal Vihar, I learned a lot about Sanskrit, Hindi, yoga, Hindu philosophy and Hindu scriptures.

I graduated high school in 2014 and began college at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall—an environment where my expression of faith was often belittled. My faith, the teachings of the scriptures and the understanding of rituals outside of the temple served as a great coping mechanism and helped frame me into the person I am today. Here I present my university experiences to explore how young Hindus in college can retain their cultures and religious identities without fear of becoming socially isolated.

As a Hindu, one of the first challenges I faced was not eating beef, pork or other types of red meat that were regularly available to students in the dining halls and through outside dining options. I was dependent on the on-campus dining halls for my meals. There were times where I did not have proper access to vegetarian foods and would have to eat pizza and french fries as a meal. I could not afford to eat out or to have food delivered to my dorm room regularly.

As a first-year student new to UNC and the North Carolina community, I did not know many people on campus. I did not have a vehicle, and the temples in the area were far away. There were times where I felt like I was the only Indo-Caribbean Hindu student on campus. I began to listen to pujas and khatas on YouTube and the radio.

During my time in college, I had some problems focusing on my classwork, and I became burnt out by the rigors of student life. In the summer of 2017, three years after I started college, my parents decided to have my upanaya sanskaar. I could not have it earlier in my life due to the multiple passings of family members year after year. It was then that I became initiated by my guru, Swami Chidghanand Parivrajak of the International Brahmishi Mission based in India, and received my guru mantra. From that experience, I felt greater as a Hindu since I began to meditate regularly and have a better understanding of Hinduism through my guru's teachings. I felt like I was a part of something.

Late in my semester, I learned about a student club named Hindu



Yuva that was a chapter of the national Hindu Youth for Unity, Virtues and Action and began to participate in their programs on campus. Sometimes, I was the only member present at meetings along with some of the executive board members. I enjoyed the meetings because I learned about the diversity of Hindu practices, such as the South Indian traditions. The students would discuss their favorite shlokas or a guest speaker would speak about a certain topic such as a festival. In Hindu Yuva at UNC, when celebrating a Hindu holiday, the students would organize a small puja. This happened about twice a semester.

However, over the years, I noticed that the group became more of a social club and less of a religious club. Because of our busy college schedules with exams and other assignments, some students did not attend meetings regularly. Some students who did attend seemed to be disinterested in observing holidays and were more interested in other topics on campus. Many college students, regardless of religious preference, are not very religious while in school. There were times when I received funny looks because of wearing a kurta on campus or some students would laugh if I told them I was a Hindu priest in Miami.

Occasionally, I felt like even the leadership on campus was not respectful of my Hindu

traditions. There was a visiting lecturer who became a part of Hindu Yuva and she presented Hinduism as more of a spiritual path instead of a ritualistic path. After speaking to them, I felt belittled—like my rituals did not matter. There was a time when I wanted to do a simple Durga puja on campus. I prepared a Power Point presentation about Navaratri and what Mother Durga represents in Hinduism. I prepared everything to perform the puja. When everyone came and I began the puja, this lecturer began to talk over me and skip many of the slides and points that I organized. I felt embarrassed. After she finished, she simply had everyone partake in prasadam and ended the puja portion of the event. One of the parents of a student walked up to me and asked me if I was going to do arati. At that point, I went with her, and we began to do arati together. When everyone else saw us performing arati, they left what they were doing and joined us.

Despite the negative circumstances, I met some of my closest friends through Hindu Yuva. They made me feel empowered as a Hindu—that I had a community on campus. I would speak regularly with one friend from Bihar about Hindu holidays and philosophies. Something as simple as texting her “Happy Maha Shivaratri!” made me feel good, because I felt like there was someone who worshiped like me. Another friend's family was from Calcutta, and her mother was kind enough to prepare meals for me on special occasions. A third close friend, whose family was from Hyderabad, would talk to me about her South Indian heritage and how it differed from many of the North Indian traditions that informed my Indo-Caribbean traditions. She taught me about different South Indian Hindu festivals such as Ugadi. These friends were gracious enough to take me to the mandirs in the area, including the Hindu Society of North Carolina for their Satyanarayana Vrat Khata or Ganesh Chaturthi puja and the Sri Venkateshwara Mandir for their Diwali puja.

In addition to the Hindu friends I made, I taught myself to become more well-versed in describing Hindu traditions to non-Hindus. At a college campus where there were many devout Christians, Muslims and followers of other religions, I wanted to be able to properly



COURTESY DHANESH BUDHRAM

describe my faith and traditions in the same way that other students spoke about their faiths. For example, some of my friends who were non-Hindus would ask me about the Hindu concept of the afterlife to compare to their faith. It made me feel stronger as a Hindu that I could speak to them about the concept of karma and reincarnation, and I could quote scriptures such as from chapter two of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*.

By wanting to learn more about Hinduism to converse with my friends, I began to fill in the gaps of my knowledge and expose myself to greater knowledge. Before college, I was not aware of the concept of different paramparas, or guru traditions. It was not until I learned about Srila Prabhupada, Swami Chinmayananda or Visvatma Bawra Ji Maharaj that I realized that there were so many different commentaries and ideas expressed by different Hindu reformers.

To make my space into my personal worshipping space, I set up my altar with murtis so I could do the pujas in my room. I also kept copies of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramcharitmanasa* to read. I brought a few kurtas with me so I could dress for observances or when attending religious functions. Furthermore, I made social media postings about Hindu holidays and created an online community. I explained my Hindu traditions to my roommates, so they were aware of what I was doing.

As a student, I was a biology major with chemistry and Spanish minors. My dream is to become an orthopedic surgeon. I took two elective religious studies classes at UNC that left a profound impact on me. In my second year, I took a Survey of South Asian Cultural History class where I received a great overview of the different religions and social history of South Asia. The professor I had was a scholar of *Ramlila* and there were many times I spoke to her fondly about being a Guyanese Hindu. In my fourth year, I took a course about the history of Indian classical dance forms. I learned a kuchipudi dance piece that was very difficult for me. However, that professor was very patient and helpful to me. She was also someone who encouraged me to learn more about Hinduism from a scholarly view. Both instructors made me feel like I mattered as a Caribbean Hindu or a diaspora Hindu, because I had never known about Hinduism in a scholarly approach. They did not consider me as just a “pre-med” student but were both there for me as counselors

At worship: Dhanesh with mother Indeera, father Deonarine and sister Shivani at Devi Bhavan Mandir, Florida

when I spoke to them about being away from home or my struggles of being a Hindu on campus. I did not have any other professional personnel on campus that I felt comfortable speaking to about being Hindu, other than my professors. I felt like they made me into a scholar of religious studies through the way they spoke to me and taught me about academic writing. I did not know about the difference between being a practitioner of faith versus a scholar of faith. Learning about Hinduism through that lens taught me about how the outsider perspective of a scholar leaves a different impression for a practicing Hindu.

I am currently a remote graduate student at the University of Florida pursuing my master's degree in medical pharmacology and physiology. My experiences of being Hindu in college motivated me to continue doing more to expound Hinduism. I serve my community as a volunteer priest at the Devi Bhavan Mandir in Miami, Florida. I began an independent research study about the Satyanarayana Vrat Katha and Hanuman puja in Guyana with a professor of religious studies at Florida International University. I attended the 2020 WAVES Hindu Student's Council conference, where I presented my research about how the *Shri Ramcharitmanasa* influenced Hinduism in Guyana. In March 2021, I became an intern for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's HinduPACT, an advocacy initiative.

I sincerely hope that sharing about being Hindu on campus will serve as motivation for future Hindu students to not give up on their dharma or heritage.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dhanesh Rishi Budhram is a master's student in medicine currently working as a science and math tutor who aspires to become an orthopedic surgeon. Apart from being a volunteer priest, he enjoys playing dholak, tabla, and spending time with his dog Tyson, peacocks and peahens at his home in Miami, Florida. E-mail: drbudhram1995@gmail.com.

SPORTS

Yogic Freediving

How Going Deep Within Lets One Go Deep Below



SHUTTERSTOCK

Let's dive: (clockwise from left) Using a single fin mimics a dolphin for faster diving; training sessions for adjusting to greater depths; the diaphragm muscle below lungs; Jacques Mayol in Marseille, December 1983 when, at age 56, he set a world record for descending to 105 meters on a single breath



SHUTTERSTOCK



GERARD FOUET/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

BY MAYURESH VISSWANATHAN

IF DESCENDING INTO THE COLD, DARK depths of the seas doesn't sound extreme enough for you, then you might want to try it without any breathing equipment.

Freediving is an extreme sport pushing the limits of the human body and mind underwater, all without the use of scuba gear. Brave freedivers—on one breath—can dive hundreds of meters at a time, a feat requiring complete mastery of themselves to ensure a safe dive. Within the past 40–50 years, yoga techniques and practices have upgraded the sport, allowing divers to greatly increase control of their diaphragm, breath and mind.

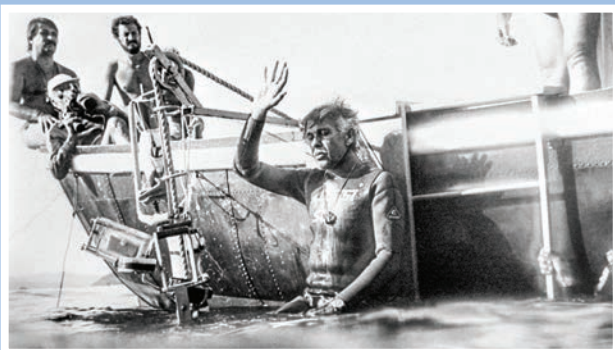
To understand the use of yoga in freediving it's essential to delve into the sport's nuances. To learn more I read Adam Skolnick's book, *One Breath: Freediving, Death, and the Quest to Shatter Human Limits*. While it may sound simple, there are over ten distinct competitions testing ability to hold one's breath for the longest time, to cover a specified distance in the shortest amount of time and to dive as deep as humanly possible. Some disciplines, such as No Limit, allow divers to use fins, weighted sleds for descent, and lift bags or counterbalance pulley systems to aid in ascension. Yet, many would agree that the 'purest' discipline is Constant Weight Without Fins, in which a diver can use only their body, optional weights and a wetsuit to

complete the dive. The world record for this finless event is an astonishing 102 meters or 335 feet, equivalent to diving the height of a 30-story building.

Competitive freediving started in the late 1950s, dominated by daredevils trying to push bodily limits. There wasn't much emphasis on breath or mind control; it was a battle of reckless bravery. Enter Jacques Mayol. As a child, he was fascinated with dolphins and dedicated much of his life to emulating their behavior by pushing physiological and mental limits in the water. Mayol is credited as the first to integrate yogic philosophy after traveling across India to learn tools for controlling his diaphragm and mind. With pranayama and various asanas, Mayol set records and permanently changed the sport. He was pivotal in the sport's transition to a practice more focused on the control of body and mind rather than pure fearlessness.

Yogic training for freediving emphasizes

diaphragmatic control. This thin, dome-shaped muscle below the lungs and heart is responsible for inhaling and exhaling; thus, control of it allows for breath control. Nearly all freedivers practice specific asanas such as the upward abdominal lock, or uddiyana bandha. The abdominal wall is sucked up as high as possible, creating a vacuum in the chest cavity. The organs in the abdominal area move up into the chest cavity and the diaphragm flattens against the spine. This exercise not only stretches the diaphragm, it allows for a better mind-muscle connection. Masters can "even ripple it in waves like a contortionist" according to Skolnick. Serious freedivers gain such incredible control of their diaphragm that they can pack air into the small alveoli (lung's air sacs) behind the shoulder blades. Skolnick said in an interview, "It requires years of slow training, building more and more depth and flexibility" to integrate yoga exercises with the physical



Follow Jacques Mayol's journeys: (from top down) with friend and competitor Enzo Maiorca (right); studying pranayama with a Hindu yogi in India; documenting his 105-meter, record-setting plunge in 1983; demonstrating the uddiyana bandha asana for stretching the diaphragm muscle

practice of freediving; hence athletes dedicate tremendous time and effort to master their craft with yoga and intercostal muscle stretches pioneered by Mayol to increase rib cage flexibility, allowing them to withstand intense barometric pressure and fill their lungs to at least 120% normal capacity. They learn to move air from the lungs into the mouth and gradually funnel it into the sinuses through the soft palate in order to equalize on the way down.

Beyond 30 meters, the pressure gradually compresses the lungs to less than a quarter of their normal size. Displaced air moves to dilated blood vessels in the heart and brain. The spleen also contracts, sending a fresh supply of red blood cells to convey oxygen more efficiently to the heart and brain. The human skeleton avoids total collapse at these depths by involuntarily constricting blood vessels in the limbs, shunting blood into the body's core, which acts as a vacuum filled with fluid to prevent further compression. Similar physiological responses occur in aquatic mammals such as sea lions during deep dives. Far down, divers' heart rates can decline to 20-30 beats per minute, which is less than half the average human pulse rate. Such a low pulse rate in healthy individuals has only been recorded in monks during periods of deep meditation. These physiological changes together are called the mammalian dive reflex.

To help overcome fear during training, yoga techniques are accompanied by submerging one's face, which stimulates nerves around the eyes and sparks the dive reflex. With conscious development of the reflex, learning to lower the heart rate even before descending, one can dive deep without feeling anxiety or the slightest urge to breathe. It's not just fear to overcome during apnea. Thorax compression, lactic acid and CO2 buildup cause strong pain. Pool training builds tolerance through disciplines of swimming as many laps as possible with and without fins on one breath. Starting in the last decade after wide dissemination of a new equalization technique, many newbies have gone very deep too soon, resulting in a proliferation of lung squeeze, in which capillaries hemorrhage blood into the alveoli, often causing damage to the tissue and causing one to spit up blood.

While the physiology is impressive, the experience itself is awesome. Skolnick shares in his book: "As you go deeper and deeper, the ocean squeezes you. You feel held or cradled by the ocean. All of that gives a sense of merging with something much greater—you feel miniscule in this big blue amazing ocean." In a way, freediving engenders oneness with an all-pervasive consciousness. The diver is akin to a drop of water within the ocean of consciousness. As he plunges deeper, increasing pressure forces him to remain calm and surrender. Bodily squeeze gets so tight that the divers often describe feeling a distinct merge into a singular consciousness and a complete "loss of I." Thus, the water drop and ocean become indistinguishable; they become one. The spiritual aspect of freediving is similar to the experience of samadhi in deep meditation, both of which are fundamentally controlled by breath. Just as samadhi is a state of enlightenment, of union, the experience of merging with the ocean runs parallel.

Yoga is indispensable for a maximized body and calmed mind. To votaries of freediving it's not just another activity. Rather, Skolnick explains, "There is a reverence and love for the ocean. It's more than just a sport. It's a way of life."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mayuresh Visswanathan is currently an undergraduate student at UC Berkeley, with interests in the environment and sustainable business. He enjoys growing aquatic plants, woodworking, and staying active.



Blending with nature: (above) Adam Skolnick's book on freediving; (right) majestic kelp found on the way down



The Deepest, Longest Dives

The excerpts below by Mark Murphy are reprinted with permission from Oyster Diving. View his full blog post at <https://oysterdiving.com/blog/freediving-record/>.

Herbert Nitsch is named as "the Deepest Man on Earth" and for a very good reason! He is a multiple World Champion and the current holder of the World's Freediving Record. Nitsch (photo right) holds 33 world records and can hold his breath for more than nine minutes! How long can you hold your breath?

There are only four freedivers in the world who have gone beyond 560 feet and two divers died trying. Nitsch is the world's only diver, so far, to have gone beyond 700 and 800 feet [suffering a major stroke in so doing]. It has been the determination of passionate freedivers, pushing against the tide of naysayers, who have made what once was thought impossible, possible! Let's hear from some of the deepest divers.

In the early days, scientists and physiologists were convinced that if humans dove beyond 100 feet, their lungs would collapse. They had carried out extensive research and worked out what they could about how the human body works and

the effect immense amounts of pressure can have. But freedivers decided to risk it anyway and today they are swimming over seven times deeper than the depth initially recommended.

Martina Amati, a free diver, has tried to explain the mindset when taking up the challenge of this extreme sport. She told *The Conversation*, "There is an element of physicality but it's mainly mental. That's what is incredible about freediving. It's not about your physical ability,

but about your mental skills and training. You need to let go of everything that you know and everything that makes you feel good or bad. And so it's a very liberating process. But equally you need to stay completely aware of your body and where you are, entirely in the moment."

Freediving is one of the first underwater sports to come into existence. It has been around for a very long time. Traditionally, people used to freedive for food, sponges, coral and pearls. Free-

diving only reduced after technology advanced, introducing us to more convenient fishing and foraging methods. However, in ancient cultures freediving was incredibly common and sometimes to around 50 meters on one breath!

Today, freediving is a competitive activity and expert divers can last for up to 22 minutes submerged under the water. Stig Severinsen holds the Guinness World Record for the longest freedive under ice on a single breath of air – and he earned it while in Speedos!

Sportsman James Nestor related to *National Geographic*, "Something amazing happens the second we put our faces into water. Our heart rates lower about 25 percent. Blood begins rushing from our extremities into the core. The mind enters a meditative state. At around 250 to 300 feet, the heart rate of some divers has been recorded at about 14 beats per minute. That's about a third of a coma patient's. It shouldn't support consciousness according to physiologists. And yet, deep in the ocean it does. But no one knows exactly how."

Freediver Jody Fisher shared, "When you're doing deep diving, you might be able to see 40 or 50 metres and there's not really any sound. The only thing you probably will be hearing is your heartbeat. It feels like time has stopped."



Girivalam—A Walk to Liberate

My circumambulation of Arunachala mountain in Thiruvannamalai for three years leads me towards ending the circle of birth and rebirth



BY PADMA KRISHNAN

ON THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE KARTHIGAI deepam festival in 2018, I landed in Thiruvannamalai, or Thiru, as the ancient town is affectionately called by seekers who have made it their home. Thiru means holy in Tamil. I planned to stay three days but ended up living there, on and off, for three years.

The recorded history of the holy town dates back to the ninth century. And the geological history of Arunachala mountain in the middle of town goes back to the Archean age. The mountain is also called Annamalai, Arunagiri, Arunachalam, Arunai, Sonagiri and Sonachalam in various scriptures. It is one of the Pancha Bhuta Sthalas, five elemental Siva temples of Tamil Nadu. Siva is worshiped here as the fire element (see the July/August/September of HINDUISM TODAY online for the origin story). According to the *Puranas*, the mountain has gone through various transformations through the yugas, which are vast eras. In the Satya Yuga, it was a mountain of fire; in

the Treta yuga, it was emerald; in the Dvapara Yuga, it was gold; and in the current Kali yuga, it is a mountain of rocks. These transformations could also be correlated to the change in human consciousness in the cyclical progression of yugas.

Giri is mountain, *valam*=circumambulation; *aruna*=red/fire; and *achalam*=unmovable. While the famous monthly full-moon girivalam around the mountain attracts massive crowds, devotees do girivalam every day. It is said there will always be one person walking around the mountain at any time.

Why Do People Do Girivalam?

Devotees of Siva believe He fulfills the desires of those who circumambulate Arunachala Hill, which is considered to be a form of Siva Himself. Indeed, a mere thought of the mountain will liberate a sincere seeker from the cycle of birth and death. According to legends, the first one to perform the girivalam was Goddess Parvati, who did so to compensate for closing Lord Siva's eyes

playfully and plunging the world into darkness. After Her Arunachala penance, Lord Siva blessed Her, by giving Her His left side and thus becoming Ardhanarishvara, "half-female Lord."

Since the mountain is worshiped as Siva, walking around the mountain is done in reverence. Sincere seekers follow various rules laid down in *Puranas*, such as keeping the mind focused on Siva and walking either in silence or chanting holy names and walking with awareness.

The 8.7-mile length of the pilgrim circuit is dotted with eight ancient temples in eight directions, where Gods Indra, Agni, Yama, Niruthi, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera and Isanya worshiped Siva in the form of Arunachala. Devotees visit these temples and the main temple of Annamalaiyar during their walk.

My Many Walks

I did my first girivalam in the morning with a few friends. We started at 5:30 and stayed mostly silent. Two of my companions, from



ALL PHOTOS: ANNE PETRE



A walk to remember: (clockwise from left) Serene Arunachala mountain; sincere devotion at stops along the way; the unpaved inner path which requires special permission to tread; this massive chariot is pulled during Karthigai Deepam festival; the main Annamalaiyar Temple

Spain, had been living in Thiru for many years and walked the mountain every day. The trek took us about four hours, stopping partway for a filter coffee break. We did not enter any of the temples but prayed from outside. The next day, I walked alone in silence. I went to each and every temple and meditated in the samadhis of Adimudi Siddhar and Isanya Desikar. Devotees believe

many siddhas, illumined beings, live here and circumambulate the mountain in their subtle bodies. Their blessings help pilgrims in their sadhanas, and the fortunate might even encounter them.

After two circumambulations, I would start my regular morning walking exercise around 6am, without intending to do the girivalam as a spiritual practice; but my feet carried me around the mountain on their own volition. This happened many times, and I just went along with the flow.

The inner path that runs close to the hills has been prohibited to the public for the past few years, and one needs permission from the forest department to perform the inner girivalam. Pilgrims walk on the paved walkways and on the tar road that covers the holy circuit nowadays.

Even before the pandemic, I avoided crowded events that have potential for stampedes. During the first month of my stay, I had no intention of going for the famous full-moon girivalam. Then, on one full-moon night, I stepped out with a friend for a short after-dinner walk on the girivalam path. The palpable devotion of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims walking, their roar of "Annamalaiyarku arovara," the meditative Namah Sivaya chant from the speakers, the sound of bells, conches, songs and prayers, the moon and the hill in the moonlight, the smell of food, oil, people, popcorn, camphor, sambrani incense and holy ash enchanted us, and we decided to walk the whole circuit. We had stepped into another world, a world that ran on devotional fervor and moved in a cosmic rhythm controlled by Annamalaiyar and posed

no threat of stampede. It was an unforgettable journey! I reached home by 12:30am, totally energized and in awe. After that, I tried to do the full moon walks every month.

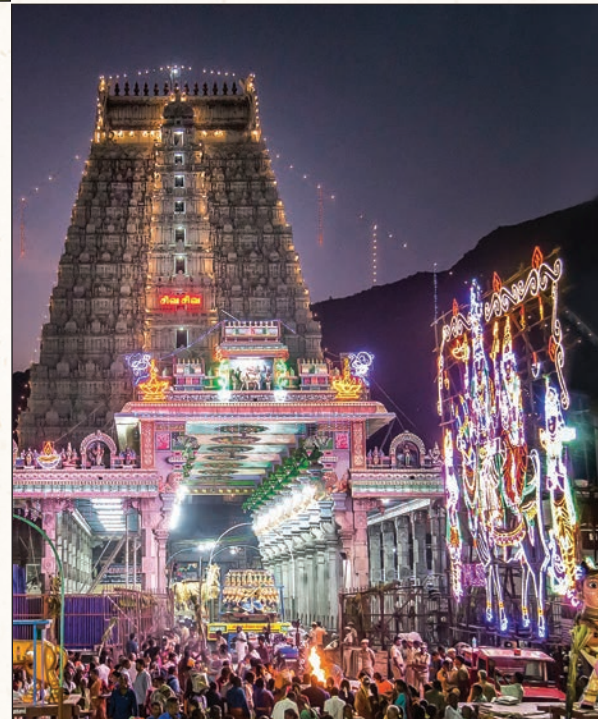
On each full moon, about 200 to 300 thousand of us from all walks of life, states of India and other countries join in one sea of movement. I did the girivalam on a new-moon night once with a friend, and the energy was very different from the full moon. I felt it was an intense inward journey. After that, I regularly walked on new-moon nights also. This is done mainly by sadhaks and is less crowded, except for special *amavasya* days. Circumambulating the mountain during *pradosham* is also considered very auspicious and attracts many devotees. I have seen barefooted people breezing around the mountain on the tarred road as if carried by a great power, some struggling with each step and others strolling casually while talking on their phones. I met a woman who does it every day and another man who has done it continuously for four years.

For those who practice intense sadhana in Thiruvannamalai the mountain is their guru; the walk is their guide; and their goal is to merge with the mountain, slipping into its eternity. Whenever I leave Thiru, not knowing when I will return to the magical mountain, I remember the words of a local woman who once walked the path with me: "Annamalaiyar will come with you wherever you go."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Padma Krishnan is an independent journalist living in India. A certified hatha yoga teacher, she is passionate about exploring commonalities in ancient mystical traditions.



Hindu Camp Was Fun!

A hundred of us enjoyed four days of classes, yoga, music, good food—and time to reflect on being young Hindus in America



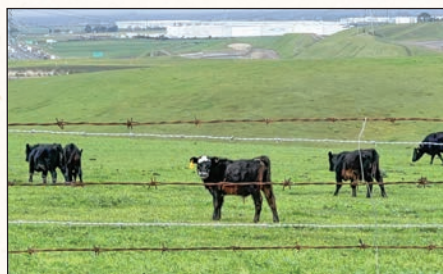
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY MUGDHA SHINDE

BY MUGDHA SHINDE, 14
CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

LAST DECEMBER, I ATTENDED A HINDU camp called SSV Prathamik Varga, run by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh. SSV stands for “Swayamsevika Shiksha Varg,” which loosely translates to “volunteer training session.” Though the main focus of the camp was how to become an ideal *swayamsevak*, or one who freely gives back to the community, there were also many Hindu ideas and traditions taught and practiced at the camp. Held near Mountain House town in California, on a HSS-owned site, the camp lasted four days.

The campsite wasn’t far from the town, around a 15-minute drive, but it was far enough that we weren’t disturbed by city activities. This was the first time after being purchased that the campsite was heavily used, so we had to figure out a lot of things as we went along, such as heating. It was cold, around 40°–50° F. Additionally, it was rainy and muddy, due to the time of year, and the location of the camp on top of a grassy hill, surrounded by grazing areas. Thus, we had

to adjust the outdoor activities, to be able to do them indoors. We had to pack a lot of jackets and heavy clothes. Generally, there wasn’t a specific “Hindu dress code”. However, for specific activities, traditional clothing was highly recommended. We also had a lot of people attending the camp, around 60 girls and 40 boys, so we had to figure out the sleeping situation as well. Each sleeping room had six sets of two-high bunkbeds. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all participants



had to be vaccinated and show a negative Covid-19 test to participate.

The camp was the first part of a three-year process to become a full *swayamsevak*.

Though there is no formal membership to be a part of HSS, completing the three years allows you to start new shakhas (local groups) and lead them. This camp covered just a third of the first year. It was for teens and young adults, led by people who had completed the three-year process. The leaders were mostly teens and young adults, though there were some special speakers who were a bit older. They all had a lot of knowledge on the topics and were well prepared to answer questions. The curriculum was set by the central HSS office, but we didn’t have to follow exactly, and ventured from it multiple times. Overall, it was a fun and informative experience.

In the mornings, we would wake up at 5:30. At 7am, we would do *surya namaskar*. It was extremely beneficial to practice, as I got a good exercise for my body each day—like a warm-up for the activities ahead. However, it was tiring to do before breakfast.

After breakfast, we had morning shakha. *Shakha* is the term used for the sessions conducted every week, usually on Sundays, all over the US, by Hindu volunteers in the community. At the camp shakha, we played games and learned music, practiced leadership and discipline by performing various activities such as the raising and lowering of the *dvaja*, or flag, and giving and following basic commands in Sanskrit. We then had lunch, which was vegetarian Indian food, prepared by shakha attendees who live close to the campsite.

During the whole camp, we were not allowed to use phones, except right before bed. I didn’t have a phone anyway, so I wasn’t affected by this rule. However, I did notice that the lack of phones made sure people interacted during the breaks. The no-phone policy also drastically reduced distractions ensuring everyone gave their whole energy and attention to the activities. By nighttime, everyone was so tired, no one had a lot of energy to mess around on their phone. I was surprised by how few people called their parents. Nevertheless, there were a few funny videos filmed.



Home and community observances:
(clockwise from left) group of older students take a selfie; dinner time; lucky campers get the top bunk; the nearby cows showed slight interest in the camp

After lunch, we had *baudhik* sessions, talks by older leaders, which focused on the intellectual side of being a *swayamsevak*. Several adults talked to us during these sessions, sometimes telling stories about great Indian personalities. At other times they talked about giving back to the community. I learned a lot of new things from these sessions, though sometimes they got a bit long. Some topics were the life of Swami Vivekananda, and what makes an ideal *swayamsevak*. After *baudhik*, we had afternoon shakha, which was basically a repeat of morning shakha. Then came a much welcomed tea break.

Between tea break and dinner, we had group conversations on topics such as the benefits of cows, and the portrayal of Hindus in society, especially in school textbooks. However, we were free to drift off to other topics, as long as they were somewhat relevant. Thus, we went from talking about cows to wearing bindis at school. Many people mentioned the comments they got for wearing a bindi at school. Some comments were genuinely out of curiosity, while others were plain rude. A lot of people mentioned they have gotten comments similar to “Is there something on your face?”

All in all, these conversations were really useful, as I got to hear from others my age about Hinduism. For example, a lot of people mentioned that they did not like that their school focused only on pictures of a “polluted” river Ganga. We unanimously agreed that while the Ganga is polluted, the prob-

lem is not specific to India. Rivers such as the Thames in London, or the Mississippi in the US are polluted as well. Moreover, people were frustrated that the textbooks do not mention the beautiful and rich culture of India and Hinduism.

After the scheduled conversations, we continued discussing issues. Many shared their stories about being a Hindu at school. The textbook situation came up again and again, and people shared their personal efforts to improve it. One girl said that she refused to take a test on her school’s Ancient India unit, because the information they were being tested on was false. Overall, it was nice to see that others had experienced some of the things I had.

After these conversations, we would have *ratri karyakram*, which translates to “night program.” These programs were a way to relax and enjoy ourselves in the night after a day of hard work. They were filled with fun group activities, and were one of my favorite parts about the camp. One night, we had a scavenger hunt. We did a talent show to wrap up the camp, in which several comedy skits were performed. Multiple people performed traditional dances, and some even performed rap songs. The night programs generally weren’t directly related to being *swayamsevak*s, being Hindu or being Indians. Mostly, they were an awesome time for everyone to socialize and make friends.

Alas, the camp came to an end, and friends had to return home. Four days earlier, I hardly knew anyone, but at the end of the camp, I knew almost everyone. At the camp, I got to socialize, make new friends from all over the San Francisco Bay Area, gain new perspectives on Hinduism and shakha, and learn a lot of new

things about my culture.

I asked some of my fellow attendees about their thoughts on the camp. One attendee, who wishes to remain anonymous, said, “I thought it was fun having roommates and meeting different types of people.” Sanjeevani Dedge, an attendee of my age, remarked, “At SSV I met so many new people who I quickly became friends with, and I was exposed to so many new things such as self defense and *yogchhap* [a musical instrument combining two sticks and cymbals that is played in the HSS marching band]. I also got to explore and learn more about my culture and have discussions about it with my friends. It was truly a life-changing experience that I will never forget.”

Some improvements for the camp would include a shorter schedule—being awake from 5:30am to 10pm was exhausting. In addition, having another short break in the day would also drastically improve student participation in the activities. Finally, having *surya namaskar* after breakfast would increase its benefits. Despite these issues, the camp was really amazing.

All in all, it was extremely fun to be with friends and experience being Hindu at a camp. In the future, I would definitely participate in similar camps, and I hope that more such camps are conducted all around the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mugdha Shinde, 14, is an 8th-grade student at Cupertino Middle School in Cupertino, California. She plays the trombone in her school’s band and enjoys cooking and baking. mugdha.shinde29@gmail.com



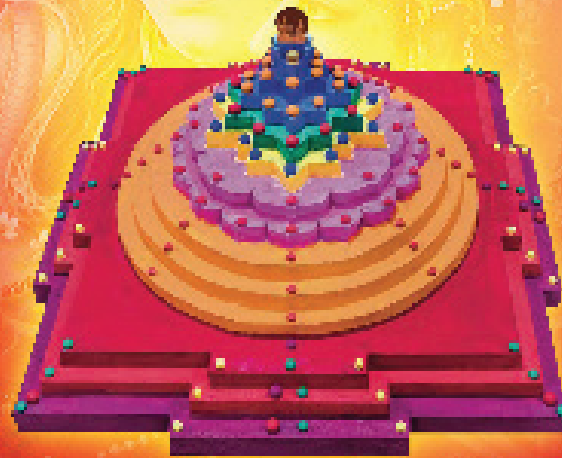
India Cultural Center and Temple



KOTILINGALINGITA

POORNA KAILASA PRASTHARAM

KOTILINGA KSHETRAM (USA)



CCT is blessed, excited and proud to announce an undertaking of a historic and remarkable project, Kotilingalingita Poorna Kailasa Prastharam (Kotilinga Kshetram) for universal peace, prosperity and creates positive energy in the nature. Kotilinga Kshetram consists of 10 million Sanskrit Lingams of various sizes over a three dimensional Vichitra of 4150' (x 4150') x 1088' (H) feet, also known as Poorna Kailasa Prastharam in Sri Vidya literature. At the top of Vichitra (Dhruva) sits a 10' ft. gold-plated bronze Vignana of Maha Kameswara and Maha Kameswari in sitting posture.

Significance & Importance of Linga Pratistha:

According to Shiva Puranam, consecration of a Shiva Lingam will erase countless number of sins from one's past lives of the devotee. The great sage Samayana has said, Lord Rama installed 10 million Shiva Lingams in Lower India to get rid of his innumerable past sins. Lord Rama installed a Bramhachari, Kailasa (Kailash) of Linga a Bramhachari, Kailasa.

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- Donors will have the opportunity to install sponsored Lingam with their own names.
- \$100 and above donor's name will be engraved on the base of their sponsored Lingam(s).
- Donors can sponsor multiple Lingam(s) to honor their family members and loved ones.
- Nithyananda will be performed every day to Kotilinga Kshetram and all donors will be collectively included in the sankalpam.

We hope you will avail this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Lingam(s) will be allocated by first come first serve basis. All interested donors, please select your choice of Lingam(s) by visiting our website (<http://www.memphis.org/kotilinga>). Sponsorship starts from \$100.

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Ph: +1 901 377 0055 - mail: kotilinga@memphis.org
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Scan the below QR code or follow
<https://www.kotilinga.org>
for Kotilinga Kshetram video.



Hindu Heritage Endowment

Helping Orphaned Children During this Pandemic

By AKHILA SATISH

"Far sweeter than divine nectar is simple boiled rice stirred by the small hands of one's own child." Tirukkural

One of the often forgotten fundamental truths of life is that no one chooses where they are born, or the circumstances of their birth. Infants and toddlers display the purest and most natural behavior among us; research studies show that they instinctively help others and act in altruistic ways. Children offer us hope for the future and a fresh, inquisitive perspective on the world. As adults, it can be easy to forget or overlook how vulnerable and dependent this precious population is on the kindness and goodness of others.



HHE supports five Hindu orphanages in India, Sri Lanka & Malaysia

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shed painful light on the sensitivity of children to external global events. In Indonesia, children were suffering in greater numbers from COVID-19, more than 150 children dying during the week of July 12, 2021 alone. In India, as of June 5, 2021, 3,632 children lost both parents to COVID-19 and 26,176 children lost one parent.

In the midst of this global crisis, it can feel overwhelming and hopeless to think of the magnitude of loss and suffering. Channeling that emotion into helpful actions, however, can feel empowering and powerful.

The Hindu Heritage Endowment has a specific fund dedicated to securing the future of children in need. The Hindu Orphanage Endowment is designed to support five children's centers in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and India, where the goal is to create an environment in which children can experience a sense of family bonding and security. This is an important and meaningful task, requiring teams of caregivers with patience, kindness and humility alongside a steady and impactful stream of resources. Donations directly support the daily needs of children and securing their futures through educational programming. Raising the children's standard of living has an effect beyond mere comfort—it enhances their self-esteem, maturation and independence. And it helps them learn and prepare for their future.

Making a donation is a fast and simple way to support children in need. However, if you have financial constraints, consider other ways to support this cause by sharing the message on social networks or choosing to support the Hindu Orphanage Endowment during a birthday or social fundraising event. Every quarter, funds are directly transferred from the Orphanage Endowment to bring each fund up to a minimum amount, which currently is \$75,000.

Donations from all around the world have helped to set up a series of orphanage endowments. Five of these children's centers who depend on HHE are listed below.

- Yogaswami Hindu Girls Home, Sittandy, Sri Lanka
- Manjung Orphanage, Malaysia
- Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage, Kerala, India
- Udayan Care, New Delhi, India
- Swami Vipulananta Children's Home, Sri Lanka

For more information about the orphanage endowments, visit www.hheonline.org/orphanages.shtml.

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	US\$ 7.16	
Roshan Harilela	250.00	
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	46.00	
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	500.00	
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.34	
Gowri Nadason	84.27	
Gayatri Rajan	50.00	
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	
Aran Sambandar	72.00	
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00	
Riorita Tkatchenko	100.00	
Anonymous	298.96	
Total	1,563.48	

Iraivan Temple Endowment		
Benevity	500.00	
Ashvin Beezadhur	270.37	
Frank Burkhardt	30.00	
Bharat & Sunita Chaudhary	100.00	
Bhola & Prabha Dhume	201.00	
Kunchitha & Girija Gurumurthy	250.00	
Anusha Iyer	250.00	
Ashley Raman	11.00	
Murari Singh	100.00	
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	23.81	
Anil Thayamballi	108.00	
Anonymous	326.40	
Total	2,170.58	

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		
Suketu & Malvi Gandhi	25.00	
Jogendra Moorooogen	1.11	
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	1.11	
Logadhasan Murugesu	23.89	
Rama Chandran & Rema Nair	1,001.00	
Mano Navaratnarajah	600.00	
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	
Manishankar Sagum	4.44	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	
Kavitha Darshini & Amitpal Singh	74.00	
Saguna Skanda	9.20	
Shailes Skanda	4.60	
Mahesh Sundaram	251.00	
Meetoo Tejwantee	66.66	
Ulasa Valayten	4.76	
Anonymous	385.00	
Total	2,801.75	

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		
Benevity	249.00	
Supreme InsInsurance Services	299.00	
Utsav Amin	249.00	
Thirujanam Arnassalon	4.44	
Manula & Easwaran		
Balasubramanian	249.00	
Rajendranauth Kapila Basdeo	249.00	
Subrahmanyam Boyareddi	249.00	
Deepak Chokshi	249.00	
Nick Clark	249.00	
Dilip Doctor	249.00	
Sriram Ganapathy	299.00	
Abhinav Gautam	249.00	
Gananathamritananda Giri	249.00	
Lalitha Kaipa	249.00	
Juhivaasana Koothan	6.62	
Narayan Krishnaswami	249.00	
Kim Leffingwell	249.00	
Rajiv Limaye	249.00	
Ashwini Maureemootoo	11.01	
Aiyappan Menon	249.00	
Hasmukh & Mina Mistry	249.00	
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.62	
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	6.62	
Udeyadeva Moorghen	6.62	
Sveta Panchal	249.00	
Karthik Prasanna	249.00	
Sraddha Prativadi	249.00	
Abhinav Raina	249.00	
Shantha Rajakrishnamurthy	299.00	

Steven S. Raman	299.00
Uday Shukla	249.00
Rajeev Singh	249.00
Nagula & Sutha Suthaker	249.00
Mayuresh Visswanathan	251.00
Krishna Viswanathan	249.00
Anonymous	322.12
Total	7,787.05

Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment		
Benevity	232.00	
Umasankaran Mohambourame	117.23	
Gowri Nadason	126.49	
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	
P. Sivasothy	77.80	
Anonymous	226.00	
Total	872.52	

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00	
Anonymous	324.00	
Total	374.00	

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		
Anonymous	375.00	

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		
Sathyainkara Balendra	2.00	
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	
Anonymous	40.00	
Total	117.00	

Hinduism Today Production Fund		
Fidelity Charitable	250.00	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.16	
Ian Johnson	60.00	
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	
Murli Melwani	1,000.00	
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.24	
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.24	
Gayatri Rajan	100.00	
Chamundi Sabanathan	576.00	
Aran Sambandar	72.00	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	
Anonymous	63.00	
Total	2,355.65	

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		
Benevity	810.75	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.16	
Roshan Harilela	250.00	
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	46.00	
Ravindranath Krishnamurthy	101.00	
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	
Hitesvara Saravan	36.00	
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	
Matthew Wiczork	20.00	
Michael Zimmermann	5.00	
Anonymous	2,526.00	
Total	3,910.66	

Hindu Education Endowment		
Fidelity Charitable	100.00	
Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00	
Total	175.00	

Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund		
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.24	
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00	
Total	94.24	

Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund		
Rogini Shummoogum	225.00	

Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund		
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		
Isani Alahan	108.00	
Lutcheemee Curpen	301.00	
Panshula Ganeshan	35.00	
Debashis Ghosh	300.00	
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	46.00	
Murugesu Kandasamy	35.15	
Akash Katir	1,008.00	
Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	35.15	
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00	
Cassan Pancham	1,500.00	
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.24	
Sumathi Raja	450.00	
Aran Sambandar	108.00	
Hitesvara Saravan	216.00	
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.43	
Karthik Suresh	108.00	
Shanthi Suresh	108.00	
Anba Dayananden Valayten	8.62	
John Wahlen	36.69	
Anonymous	1,876.21	
Total	6,545.49	

Udayan Care Endowment Fund		
Benevity	24.00	
Alok Kadakia	25.00	
Total	49.00	

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment		
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00	

Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		
Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00	

Mahajana College Fund		
Texas Instruments Foundation	1,201.00	

Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		
Texas Instruments Foundation	108.00	
Network For Good	210.00	
Phui Chan	30.00	
Emily Xin Rui Lim	20.00	
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00	
Rajiv Verma	100.00	
Total	518.00	

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		
Steven Lee	30.00	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	
Total	130.00	

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		
Canaganayagam Kugendra	40.00	

Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00	

Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment		
Vel Mahalingum	4.44	
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00	
Mano Navaratnarajah	375.00	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	
Anonymous	54.00	
Total	563.44	

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		
Anonymous	141.00	

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		
Benevity	2,000.00	
Steven Lee	30.00	
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	300.00	
Poobarlene Soobramanien	22.22	
Anonymous	1,079.96	
Total	3,482.19	

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Siva Poomi School Trust Dharmalingam Siddhan		
	108.00	

Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		
Pathmini Saravanapavan	200.00	

Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund		
Anonymous	1.00	

India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		
Anonymous	40.00	

Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		
Benevity	300.00	
Arun Aarooren	75.00	
Asmita Akerkar	21.00	
Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.16	
Rajagopal Krishnan	153.00	
Luke Labella	300.00	
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	375.00	
Natraj Narayanswami	37.00	
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	300.00	
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	
Aishwarya Vashishtha	30.00	
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	
Anonymous	86.32	
Total	1,981.48	

Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment		
Nigel Subramaniam Siva	150.00	
Total	150.00	

Hindu Temple of the Woodlands Endowment		
Anonymous	108.36	

Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund		
Arvind Chandrakantan	501.00	
Ishani Chowdhury	108.00	
Total	609.00	

Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment		
Raj Padman Padmalingam	20,000.00	

Panchangam Endowment Fund		
Benevity	100.00	

Digital Dharma Endowment		
Digital Dharma Drive 2021 Grant	10,359.00	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.16	
Chandraleela Hoezoo	108.00	
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	23.00	
Rajagopal Krishnan	153.00	
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.24	
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	11.11	
Chamundi Sabanathan	576.00	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	
Anonymous	504.04	
Total	11,854.55	

Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund		
Benevity	353.00	
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	75.00	
Murali Balaji	251.00	
Phui Chan	2.50	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.76	
Meena Joshi	101.00	
Suresh & Meena Joshi	101.00	
Murugesu Kandasamy	35.15	
Narayan Krishnaswami	251.00	
Velika Lawrence	9.99	
Bernard Lu	500.00	
Srividhya Nagarajan	201.00	
Bangalore R. Nagaroopo	51.00	
Vasudev Parameswaran	501.00	
Robert M. Petersen	50.00	
Gayatri Rajan	150.00	

Kasi Ramanathan	51.00
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Rajeshkumar Shah	753.00
Tarangadeva Sinhaputra	21.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	22.95
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.43
Avani Sukhadia	108.00
Kunjal Thaker	2.50
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Subatra Dewi Veeriah	15.00
Saravan Veylan	324.00
Anonymous	4,517.00
Total	8,705.78

Total Contributions	\$79,740.22
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Funds at Market Value, March 31, 2022	
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Grand Total	\$20,898,301.32
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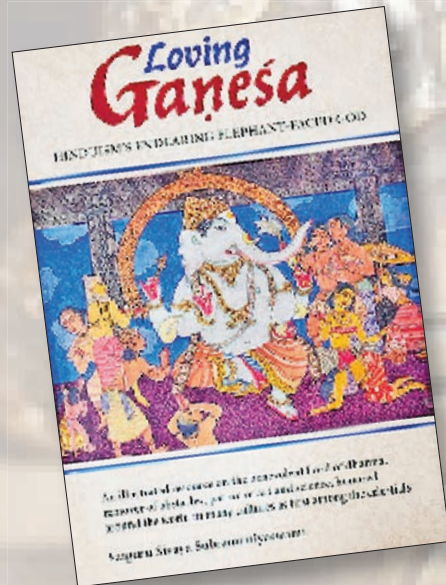


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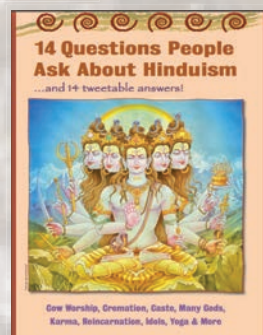
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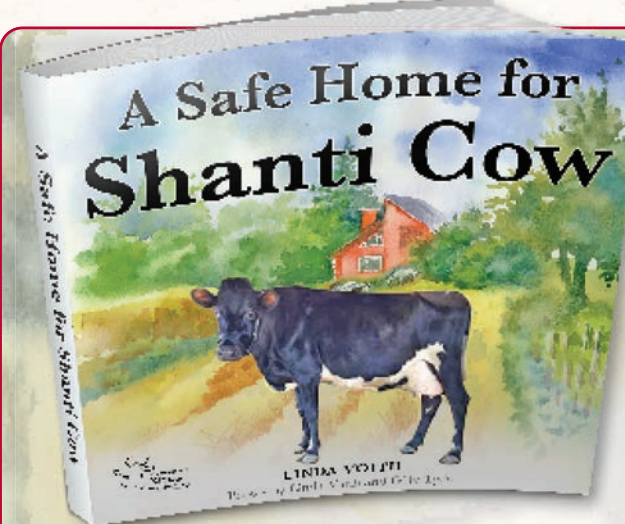
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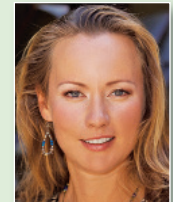
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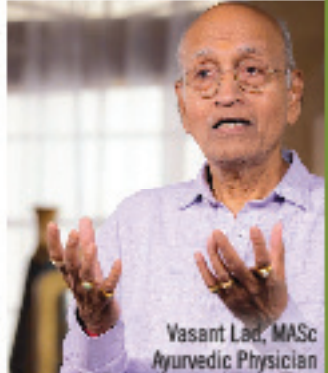
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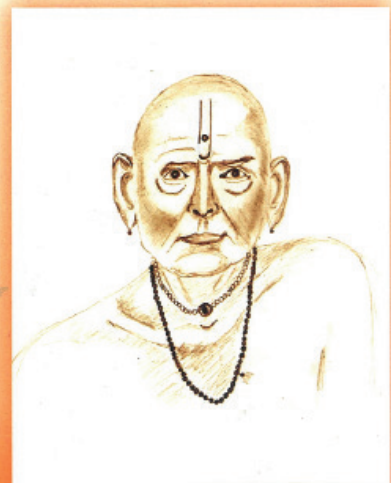
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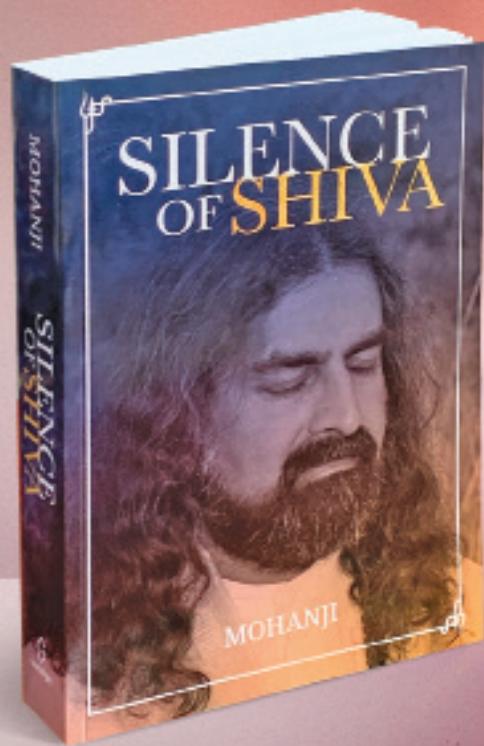
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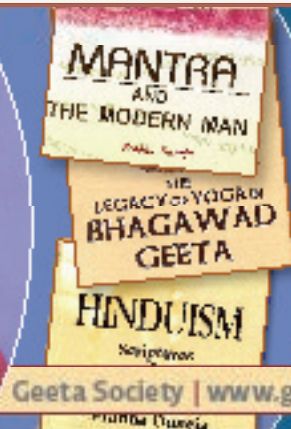
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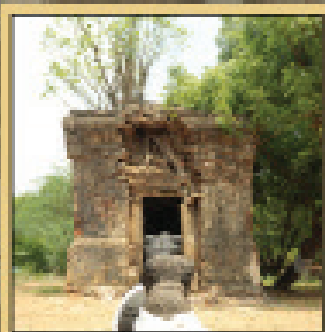
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*My Lord of Light,
Teach me the way to Thee.
What austerities must I endure?*

*"In the valley of the Kings
And in the valley of the Queens,
What struck you most?"*

*My Lord, I saw a mural:
A weighing scale with,
On one side,
The heart of a man,
On the other,
A leaf.*

*"Indeed, my child;
The lighter the heart
The higher a man will ascend.
The heavier, the lower
He will go.
Such is the Law."*

*My Lord of Light,
I heard of a king
Who summoned a rishi's wife
To his palace and said:
"Tell me how much gold you wish,
And it shall be yours."*

*She said, "Give me gold,
The weight of this Tulsi leaf."
The court laughed and mocked.*

*The gold was brought
But no amount could
Outweigh the Tulsi leaf.*

*"My Child, now
You know the way—
The Way to Me."*

*The Way to My Lord of Light, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam
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Kerala muralist Suresh Muthukulam depicts the three primary stages of yoga, one leading into the next. On the left, the youthful yogi is practicing *dharana*, concentration. He holds a Sivalinga in his hand, his eyes open as he seeks to have an unbroken sequence of thoughts about the subject. In the middle, the yogi's eyes are closed as he draws inward in *dhyana*, or contemplation. On the right he has attained *samadhi*, oneness with Siva and all things, shown by the Sivalinga in his heart. The artist reflects the long-term progression of these practices in the landscaping, which evolves from a tree's first flush to fully blossoming, from a nest of eggs to a flock of birds, from a young deer to an antlered stag. A similar change is happening in the river below.