

April/May/June, 2023 US\$7.95

HINDUISM TODAY

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

Dance Dance Evolution



(Cover) Aparna Ramaswamy (foreground) with members of her family's Ragamala Dance Company in a 2011 performance; (Above) worship of a sacred banyan tree during Vat Savitri Purnima, one of many examples of the Hindu reverence for nature ...page 34

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USA Contacts: Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, letters@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), April/May/June, 2023, Volume 45, No. 2. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-808-822-3012; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-3012; subscribe@hindu.org. Advertising: 1-888-464-1008, ads@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy Publications,® a non-profit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. **International Contacts:** In Malaysia: Datta Impexs, PT 6949 Jalan Casuarina 7, Desa Casuarina, Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, NSDK. Tel: 1-012-607-7310; E-mail: dattaimpexs@yahoo.com. The Russian edition is available through contacting Dinanatha Bodhiswami in Moscow: bodhiswami@gmail.com For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail letters@hindu.org. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

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COVER IMAGE: RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY

In Guyana during Diwali, temples and organizations from all across the South American nation decorate festive floats in Hindu themes. They travel through Georgetown at night in a grand parade.... Article on Page 30



The Sun God: Navendra rides on the Success Hindu Temple float portraying Surya, the Sun God, on His chariot drawn across the sky by seven horses

GLOBAL DHARMA

SANSKRIT

Panini Grammar Puzzle Solved

DR. RISHI RAJPOPAT, A PHD candidate at Cambridge University, has apparently solved a longstanding grammar problem in the *Ashtadhyayi*, a

seminal Sanskrit text written by the scholar Panini around the 6th or 5th century bce. As reported in the *Indian Express*, Panini is widely regarded as the

“father of linguistics” and has influenced European scholars since the 1800s.

The *Ashtadhyayi* explains Sanskrit’s structure. Its complex set of 4,000 rules for creating words—essentially a linguistic algorithm—has been compared to the Turing machine. Given the base and suffix for any Sanskrit word, it should produce grammatically correct words and

sentences. But for 2,500 years, scholars have been puzzled because two or more rules can apply at the same time. The “meta-rule” Panini that wrote to resolve such conflicts had traditionally been interpreted to mean that the rule appearing later in the text would prevail.

Rajpopat’s PhD thesis, *In Panini We Trust*, proposes a simpler interpretation that stays loyal to the text. The meta-rule, he argues, has been misunderstood; it actually means that for rules applying to the left and right sides of a word, one should use the rule for the right-hand side. This logic, he found, makes the *Ashtadhyayi* an accurate “language machine,” producing grammatically correct Sanskrit words and sentences almost every time.

Experts are calling this a revolutionary breakthrough, as the discovery will allow Panini’s rule-based Sanskrit grammar to be taught to computers for the first time. The linear and exact nature of the *Ashtadhyayi*’s 4,000 rules also make it suited for natural language processing (NLP) systems, as seen in the viral ChatGPT bot.

Interest in spoken Sanskrit has been increasing in recent years.

KERALA

Holy Crocodile Babiya Dies

THE ANANTHAPADMANABHA Swamy Temple in Kerala held a formal burial in late 2022 for its water-pond crocodile, Babiya. According to the *Indian Express*, Babiya was kept in a mobile freezer for hours before burial so that devotees could pay homage to the “divine soul.” Living in the temple-encircling pond with fish for 70 years,

Babiya was never known to be violent. Two years ago, he was spotted on the steps of the temple sanctum. There is no record of how Babiya reached the temple pond; there is no other water body in the vicinity. Temple lore says a British soldier shot a crocodile at the shrine in 1945, and another one appeared within a few days.



Age 70: Babiya was mostly vegetarian and subsisted on rice and jaggery prasada made by the temple; (right) his body is garlanded

THAILAND

Naga Attains State Status

THE THAI CABINET DECIDED in late 2022 to designate the Naga, a symbolic serpent in Hindu and Buddhist folklore, as a national emblem in the category of mythological creatures and part of Thailand’s “soft power,” according to Deputy Spokesperson Rachada Dhna-direk. Quoted on thaipbsworld.com, Dhna-direk added that the Naga has been part of Thai culture and way of life from time

immemorial, as exhibited by ubiquitous statues and decorations of the supernatural being in art, religious rituals, temples and festivals. It is hoped this symbolic designation will encourage Thais to study their history and culture and drive the creative economy. One event that assures that the Naga remains popular is the Naga fire-ball phenomenon. Each year at the end of October, huge crowds gather along the Mekong River to witness fireballs shooting out of the river and into the sky. Many locals believe the fireballs are released by the Naga from the depths of the river.



Artwork: The National Culture Commission drafted this prototype image of the Naga which, according to legend, has four races interacting with Buddhism, Hinduism and the Monarchy.

UNITED KINGDOM

Welcoming The UK’s First Hindu PM

RISHI SUNAK WAS ELECTED Prime Minister of the UK in October, 2022, just two months after rioting occurred in East Leicester when a Hindu temple was vandalized and its saffron flag torn down by a Muslim mob. Sunak’s Hindu identity suddenly gained worldwide attention, but it was already out-front in Britain before then.

[Livemint.com](https://www.livemint.com) notes that when he took an oath to be finance minister in 2020 by placing his hands on the *Bhagavad Gita*, it solidified his faith to the media. He firmly declares he is a “proud Hindu,” though rarely discusses

his religion in public. He keeps a murti of Ganesha on his office table. He abstains from beef and has made a public appeal to give it up. In a twist, one of Sunak’s new duties is to select bishops for the Church of England.

In an article for *Religion News Service*, author Murali Balaji says that for years now, Sunak’s use of the phrase “proud Hindu” would be interpreted in the West as referring to a person who endorses majoritarian politics in India. The idea of a proud Hindu ran counter to the shame felt by those born and raised in Western countries as Hindus. There is more to Sunak’s religious pride, the article points out. The media has largely failed to grasp the significance of the ascent of a Hindu to the leadership of a country that for two centuries subjugated Hindus in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere. Until now,

the few Hindu modern heads of state have governed Hindu-majority countries (India, Nepal

and Mauritius) or countries with large Hindu populations (Guyana, Trinidad and Singapore).



Festive: Rishi Sunak lights a diya for Diwali in Downing Street in 2020



Satisfying: A family enjoys a canteen meal after worshiping in the temple upstairs; (right) triangle-shaped dosa with sambar and chutney



USA

Feasting with the Gods

IS IT A RESTAURANT OR GOD’S abode? In the basement of the Maha Vallabha Ganapati Temple in Flushing, New York, is a hidden gem where you can get the most amazing South Indian food, says journalist Lavina Melwani on her blog after a

recent visit. Popularly known as Ganesh Canteen, it started in 1993—mainly to prepare prasada for the Deities. The canteen now also provides pure vegetarian food for devotees and others.

Clean, fast and orderly, it is a restaurant, canteen and takeout

space combined. Delicacies include over a hundred Indian vegetarian food items, from vadas and idlis to Pondicherry dosas and many North Indian dishes. Snacks are available year-round. For those who like something hot, there is mirchi bhajji—long chilli poppers—deep-fried in lentil batter.

This is probably the most unique eating-out experience

in New York, which is home to some of the world’s best restaurants. It has been hailed by *Zagat*, *The New York Times*, *Daily News* and other media, and featured in the Travel TV channel by the iconic Anthony Bourdain. Yet there are many people who don’t know about it, or how it can be a part of their daily lives. Read the rest of Lavina’s post at bit.ly/GaneshCanteen.



STATUES

Tallest Siva Inaugurated

AFTER TEN YEARS OF CON-struction, the world's tallest Siva statue officially greeted the public on October 29, 2022, amid felicitations from Morari Bapu and others. Built on a hilltop in Nathdwara, Rajasthan, India, by Tat Padam Sansthan, the "Viswas Swaroopam" or Statue of Belief rises 369 feet and is visible from 20km away.

As reported by the *Deccan Herald*, Sansthan spokesperson Jaiprakash Mali says the statue is illuminated with special lights for night viewing. The facial expression is detached, meditative. Construction used 3,000 tons of steel and iron plus 283,000 cubic meters of concrete. Coated with zinc and painted copper for rain and sun protection, the figure is built to last 250 years

and withstand winds of 250km per hour.

Inside the structure are an exhibition hall and public viewing galleries accessible by elevator at 20 feet, 110 feet and 270 feet. Facing Siva on the entry steps is a statue of Nandi, 25 feet tall and 37 feet long. The 16-acre grounds include parking, three herbal gardens, a food court, a laser fountain, handicraft shops, viewing platforms, musical fountains, souvenir shops and a pond. There is a mini-train on site for quick local sightseeing.

In a bid to combine religious devotion with fun activities to attract youth, the surrounding area, spread over nearly 32 acres, will offer bungee jumping, zip lines, go-karts, an adventure park and a jungle cafe.



Dropped: (left) failed McPlant burger; (right) Beyond Meat, with a variety of products, has seen a nearly 70% drop in its stock

VEGETARIANISM

Veggie Burger Sizzle Fizzles

AT THE START OF 2022, McDonald's launched a plant-based burger. For a while, as reported by *The Guardian*, this looked like a glimpse of the

future. But the US test run of the McPlant burger was quietly shelved in August, in one of a series of setbacks for a meatless-meat industry that only a year

ago was claiming it could change the great American menu forever. Getting US meat eaters to adopt plant-based alternatives has proven a challenge. Bhagyashree Katare, one of the authors of a trial study in Indiana, said participants may have been put off by the taste and the fact that

it is not necessarily nutritionally healthier. Its cost, about the same as meat, also diminishes its attractiveness to consumers. "If I'm spending money in a restaurant, and I'm a meat eater, why would I spend money on plant-based meat? I would rather eat an actual burger," Katare said.

work in three days. Because the temple lies unattended during winter, 30 personnel from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police will now protect it from thieves.

RESEARCH BY THE HENRY JACKSON SOCIETY UK think tank into the cause of recent Hindu-Muslim clashes in England has found no evidence of Hindu extremism. It found instead that a group of Muslim online influencers, some with links to

terrorism, peddled a false narrative of "Hindu fascism" to stir up tensions and instigate violence.

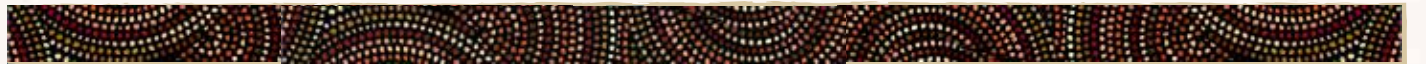
IN THE USA, MAJOR BRANDS ARE recognizing the Diwali festival, running ad campaigns and stocking relevant products. You can now pick up fireworks from Costco, greeting cards from Hallmark and party decorations from Target. It's a big difference from eight years ago, when large retailers hardly took notice.

BRIEFLY...

IN FEBRUARY, 2020 ANIES BASWEDAN, governor of Jakarta, Indonesia, attended the laying of the first stone for the Jakarta Murugan Temple on land donated by the Jakarta government. The local Tamil community had been preparing for this moment for 60 years. Consecration is hoped to occur

this year. See jktmurugan temple.org for a progress report video.

THE KEDARNATH SIVA TEMPLE in the Himalayas has replaced the silver plating in its sanctum sanctorum with gold, thanks to a generous donor. It required 560 sheets transported via 18 mules. Nineteen artisans did the



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects 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.



Founder:

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Editor-in-Chief:

Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami

Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami

Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami

Subscription and Distribution Manager:

Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami

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Sabanathan, Tom Salinas. *HPI Staff:* Chandra Sankara.

Consultants: Dr. S. P. Sabharatham Sivachariyar. *Photo*

Contributors: Thomas L. Kelly, Dinodia Picture Agency,

Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun. *Distribution:* USA: New

Leaf, EBSCO Subscription Services, WT Cox. Europe:

Publications Overseas, SWETS *Subscription Service:*

Malaysia: Datta Impexs. India: Central News Agency

Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP. *Printer:* Quad/

Graphics, Midland, Michigan.

IN MY OPINION

Traveling with My Traditions

Embracing my Indian roots in the West and taking them with me as I explore the world

BY RUCHI PATEL

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN England, in an Indian family originally from Gujarat. My great grandfather left India and traveled to Kenya on a sailboat in 1920. My grandfather was born there, and before long the whole family moved back to India. My grandfather spent his childhood in Gujarat but returned to Kenya in 1955, where my father, as a baby, opened his eyes for the first time. In an even greater transition, in 1979 my family moved to the UK. A little later, I was born in the suburbs of London, where I live today.

Even though some of my closest family members were born in far-off lands, their hearts always belonged to India, and they never forgot their customs or Hindu beliefs. It feels great being part of this community, and I am proud of my roots.

As a woman living in the Western world, I do my best to embrace Indian traditions, my inner beliefs, and the globalized world we live in. The moments when I feel I can live all this at once and be fully myself are when I follow my passion: traveling.

In 2009, when I went on my first solo backpacking trip to Thailand, my family was hesitant. It was not common for an Indian family to let their daughter travel alone, especially when, at that time, there were no smartphones and no online booking. Another era! Despite all this, my parents overcame their fears. More importantly, they trusted me, knowing my character and adaptability. I do realize now how lucky I was to have parents who were that supportive and encouraging, allowing me to live my desire to discover the world.

This trip became the first of many. Spending time in nature, being in what we could call exotic places and meeting people—locals as well as travelers—are some of the greatest pleasures in life. Being able to see the beauty of humankind is a tremendous opportunity to have.

When people ask me the main reason I have for backpacking around the globe,



PHOTO: ANNE PETRY

I say it expands my curiosity. I now know that no matter one's nationality, culture or religion, as humans we are all walking a similar path in so many different ways. Traveling is about listening, learning and understanding. What could be called differences are actually more alike than we think. Isn't that what every religion

should be about—tolerance and acceptance?

Some people may assume a little Indian girl with a backpack bigger than she is can't go far. But my capabilities and motivation have been underestimated. By traveling alone, I can sit in nature, be silent and actually feel those beautiful moments of inner peace. As someone who loves so much from our Indian traditions, the chanting and bhajans, I've come to realize they can be found in their local versions in other cultures too, especially in Asia. In the most remote places, indigenous populations have their own way to praise the Divine.

Of course, India remains one of my absolute favorite destinations. I try to visit every year. Going there feels like going to a second home, and it is always so joyful to pick up the conversation with my family and friends where we left off at my last stay.

I give gratitude to my parents for exposing and teaching me about my culture and their lives in India, which has allowed me to feel comfortable and given me a sense of belonging when I am there. I have been able to trace back to the places that my parents talked about. That made their stories come to life, which is an incredible feeling. Every time I go to India, I have a sense of fulfillment, surrounded by the culture, the way of life, the simplicity, the chaos but also the calm of the rural areas that I love so much.

My parents used to say: "Work hard, make your own way but remain grounded to your roots." I proudly can say that I do so!

RUCHI PATEL, 37, is a resident of London. She has a passion for travel and the study of world cultures and traditions.

Virtual Reality & Temple Mysticism

Comparing the Evolving Digital World and Metaverse With Experience in the Traditional Hindu Inniverse

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IT'S NO SECRET THAT TODAY'S YOUTH HAVE A deeper interest in all things digital than previous generations. As digital experience proliferates and grows more realistic and compelling, it is entirely possible that its proper use could serve to deepen the younger generations' understanding of and interest in Hinduism's perspective of the Deities and inner worlds. I have asked, "Can the experience of non-physical digital worlds help youth understand and appreciate the non-physical spiritual worlds?" To explore this, we need to look at the major digital trends.

The earliest computer-generated virtual worlds and characters are known respectively as computer-generated imagery (CGI) and computer graphics and animation (CGA).

Over the last few decades, the level of sophistication has increased remarkably, helped along by machine learning. Take the 2021 Academy-Award-winning computer-animated musical and comedic fantasy *Encanto*. Or the compelling experience of the new Avatar film. Watching these movies, viewers soon forget the characters are animations and start relating to them as real actors. In such experiences, though, the viewer is passive, unable to interact with the story.

On a parallel track, digital gaming has evolved from the early incarnations of Pong and Tetris into massive multiplayer online games (MMOs) which can bring thousands, even millions, of players together in immersive worlds. Advanced games can have graphics more realistic than movie animations and boast vast and traversable worlds; the current largest digital geography is equivalent to 62,000 square miles, almost the size of Great Britain in real life.

Recent technologies take digital experience beyond films or gaming, allowing users to actively explore a virtual environment with others who share that same space. Augmented reality (AR) superimposes a computer-generated image into the user's view of the real world, creating a composite experience. Using this technology, one can place, for example, a digital sculpture of Lord Ganesha on a desk and move around it or lift it as though it were actually in the room. Virtual Reality (VR) goes a step further, using sophisticated goggles to create a fully computer-simulated environment that may be populated by many users. The "metaverse"—a term made popular by Facebook for its AR/VR platform—combines these technologies with advanced virtual worlds as are used in MMOs. These worlds continue to be active and "alive" even when one user logs off. Such virtual landscapes can be used not only for play, but also for work, creativity or socializing.

No wonder youth are so deeply engaged with these technologies, for they marry the real world with the imagined, creating a storytelling



adventure that is literally out of this world, one with infinite possibilities. It is Grimms' Fairy Tales on steroids.

This idea of realms, material and immaterial, can be found in the ancient Hindu concept of the three worlds, *triloka*, which are the primary divisions of the cosmos. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* tells us: "Now, there are, of a truth, three worlds: the world of men, the world of the fathers, and the world of the Gods. The world of the Gods is verily the best of worlds." Our Himalayan Academy Lexicon offers this description: 1) Bhuloka: "Earth world," the physical plane; 2) Antarloka: "Inner" or "in-between world," the subtle or astral plane; 3) Sivaloka: "World of Siva" and of the Gods and highly evolved souls—the causal plane, also called Karanaloka.

Computers are used to create virtual worlds that individuals can experience through digital devices. Similarly, the Hindu temple serves as a channel to experiencing the two very real non-physical worlds—the astral plane and the causal plane. The causal plane, in particular, is difficult to experience. It is most readily accessed through worship in the temple. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, declared: "All Saivites believe that religion is the harmonious working together of the three worlds and that this harmony can be created through temple worship, wherein the beings of all three worlds can communicate."

During temple puja, the Deity comes and hovers over and within the murti in His/Her subtle body. A verse from the Saivite *Ajita Agama* states: "Sivalinga puja is for the purpose of invoking the presence of Sadasiva in the Linga." This concept is explained in the Vaishnava *Satvata Samhita*: "When the perfectly designed image is systematically installed, He occupies the consecrated image. By His gracious presence in that image, He gives concrete and visible expressions to all of His transcendental and imperceptible qualities." This is analogous to Augmented Reality (AR) technology in which youth are exploring the interface of the material world and the immaterial, finding their path to understanding the two.

To experience augmented reality, a digital device is needed with powerful microprocessors, advanced cameras and real-time object recognition. Cameras capture information from the surrounding real world, then objects are detected and mapped into the computer's understanding of the world, wherein virtual objects may be added. Sensors then detect where in the real world you are pointing the device (looking) and render your perspective in the virtual world on



AI GENERATED IMAGE USING MIDJOURNEY

the display.

What then is needed to perceive the Deity in the subtle worlds hovering within and above the murti during the puja? We need the inherent abilities of our soul. These abilities to experience the unseen increase as our devotion to the Deity deepens, just as the fidelity of virtual experiences improves with each technological advancement.

My guru gave this explanation of the process: "Hindu priests invoke the Gods to come and manifest for a few minutes within the sanctum of the temple. The Deities do come in their subtle bodies of light. They hover in and above the stone image and bless the people. If you are psychic and your third eye is open, you can see the God there and have His personal darshana."

Gurudeva started holding group pilgrimages for his devotees in 1969, and I have continued that pattern, with the most recent pilgrimage being held in 2019. Many of the programs went to India and

Future reality? Our editorial staff asked an AI to create this image using a simple three sentence descriptive prompt

Sri Lanka, where devotees had the opportunity to attend grand ceremonies at ancient temples. Many devotees had visions of the Deities, born of the intensity of pilgrimage and inner striving, in which the form of the stone or bronze murti would move or smile at them. Sometimes the experience, instead of being visual, is auditory with the Deity speaking to the devotee. Such encounters usually take place at the height of the puja, when the curtain is opened and the fully decorated Deity is being presented various lamps. More than a few devotees have had such visions at our temple here in Hawaii.

Visions can also take place when the devotee is not in the temple, such as in meditation or deep sleep. At these times the devotee is looking into the Third World or Karanaloka, where the Deities and fully liberated souls reside. This can be compared to the experience of virtual reality, when one is not at all aware of his physical surroundings, being fully immersed in a non-physical world. If you speak with a knowledgeable Sivacharya, you will learn that the temple is much like an artificial intelligence device, with hardware (granite) and software (Sanskrit mantras) all designed to take the participant into another world, the spiritual realm of Siva and great beings of light.

In the metaverse of online gaming, the virtual world continues to exist even when you are not in it. Similarly, in a temple, because of its consecrated purpose and daily pujas, some devas are always present, which is the parallel to the metaverse's always existing. During ceremonies, devotees in the physical world and devas from the Antarloka join together. At the high point of the ceremony, the Deity, in the Karanaloka, manifests for a short time. Furthermore, each temple has its own distinct inner world, so multiple temple inner worlds exist at the same time, as do multiple digital metaverses.

By relating temple worship to digital technology, we can create a bridge to younger generations. Teens experiencing a metaverse with a digital

device and parents worshiping in a temple are both interacting with nonphysical realms. One is a digital world made accessible by computers and the other is a subtle reality made accessible by temple worship.

What's to say that young people of the future might not use this technology to create and worship in a digital temple, not unlike a brahmin closing his eyes and performing *manasa* (mental) puja on a long flight to London? Consider that even the central image on this page was created not by an artist but by an AI, Midjourney! Today many temples are live-streaming their pujas, sparking debate over whether one can experience the Deity's blessings and shakti remotely through digital devices, outside the psychic force field of the physical temple. Those who tune in to our live-streamed Kauai pujas have told us, yes, to an extent.

After all, in the physical, digital and subtle worlds, all experience happens in the mind of the perceiver.





World's highest point: (top) A panoramic view of the Himalayas from the article "Beloved Mystic Mountains" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2022). Just left of center, is Mount Everest, originally named Naubandhana Mountain.

LETTERS

Taoism's Hindu Parallels

Thank you for pointing out that Taoists and Hindus most likely came to the same conclusions independently (Oct/Nov/Dec 2022). When people try to pinpoint divine knowledge to a single people or single culture, it does a disservice to other people and cultures. Cultures around the globe have developed their own wisdom and were fully capable of tapping into the divine source the same way different ethnic groups in India, Nepal and other parts of South Asia were able to.

Ravi
KITCHENHUTT.CO.ZA

A Dance Pioneer

"Giants Who Reawakened Indian Dance" (Apr/May/Jun 2011)—another dance pioneer inspired by Ruth St. Denis' Indian Dance performance "Five East Indian Dances with Music of Inayath Khan" was Martha Graham. In the spring of 1912, Martha went for her first dance program, where she was mesmerized by Ruth portraying Radha. After that epiphany, she wrote, "My fate was sealed." The rest is the history of the great Martha Graham.

Pritham Ramamurthy
PRITHAM_RAMAMURTHY@HOTMAIL.COM

The Museums of India

I loved every bit of what you have written in "Museums of India" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2022). It was a reminder of a glorious time that made the whole world want us. When I traveled for lectures to students, I saw a lot of Bharat Mata. I remember being in the Sarasvati Mahal—then only the beginning of a museum, with hardly any written explanation of the murtis and the irrepressible art of our nation! I am so grateful to read your explanations. I have lived in the USA for nearly 56 years. I was 21

when I landed here in the month of January with a seven-week old baby girl—that, too, to the mid-western USA where I survived all these years, even thrived, with my saint of a husband! I set up a family foundation in 1995 named SeedTheWorld.Org that has worked in Bharat and allowed me to read about and see many wonderful parts of my land of birth.

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Beloved Mystic Mountains

Kudos to you, Mr. Khimlal Gautam, for your outstanding achievements in ascending Everest and publishing this article introducing the history of our very own Sagarmatha, with a novel approach. It was enlightening even for me who loves to identify myself as belonging to the country of Mount Everest. The article (Oct/Nov/Dec 2022) portrays your passion and dedication toward your work and reveals the wealth of knowledge you possess on topics relating to the history of Hinduism and the Himalayas.

Samjhana Kafle
ISHOP@OUTLOOK.COM

Great read! To me, this is an entirely new discipline in Himalayan mountaineering. I am thankful to Mr. Gautam for exploring this genre. Hindu scriptures possess a great source of knowledge, from mountains to oceans. We hope the author will explore more of the religious connections with these majesties.

Anish Dahal
ANISHDAHAL937@GMAIL.COM

Jyotisha, Hindu Astrology

Great information (Oct/Nov/Dec 2015). Jyotisha describes the many planetary related effects in our life and offers solutions for planetary-related problems—mantras, tantra, yantra, gems, donation, fasting and more.

Tanay Biswas
TANAYBISWAS339@GMAIL.COM

Mumbai's Street Food Rocks!

Hey Lavina! I enjoyed reading your article (Jan/Feb/Mar 2020). I also like Maharashtra's food very much. There I enjoyed many different types of street food.

Aman Sharma
AMANSHARMA9617@GMAIL.COM

Chinmayananda: 1916-1993

Swamiji roared across the Earth preaching Vedanta and *Bhagavad Gita*. As noted in your article published after his passing (Oct 1993), he was an awakening inspiration to so many in the Western side of the world, including the Caribbean. Unto him our best. Jai Gurudev!

Mala Gangapersad
MALARAMADHAR29@GMAIL.COM

Introducing an Amazing Person

Thank you, Swamiji, for your Publisher's Desk in the Jan/Feb/Mar 2023 issue. I am grateful for the spiritual guidance provided by yourself and HINDUISM TODAY. Following

Advice from the Tirukural

Virtue is living in such a way that one does not fall into these four: envy, anger, greed and unsavory speech. 35

Don't tell yourself you'll be wise enough to practice virtue tomorrow. Do it now, for it will be your deathless companion when you die. 36

Whatever you may fail to guard, guard well your tongue, for flawed speech unfailingly invokes anguish and affliction. 127

The goodness of all one's virtues can be lost by speaking even a single word of injury. 128

that guidance has been greatly uplifting, particularly the trilogy of *Dancing with Siva*, *Living with Siva* and *Merging with Siva*. I am located in India, but my heart is inspired from a distance. With lots of love and gratitude.

Pritpal Dhaliwal
VALERIEBUMBLE@AOL.COM

Pancha Ganapati

(Oct/Nov/Dec 2020). What wonderful ethics to have whilst celebrating this festival. In our modern day and age, I believe

we should all learn to forgive one another, be more reflective and learn to live a better life. That way perhaps we can all be happier living together on our planet.

Valerie
VALERIEBUMBLE@AOL.COM

A blessed Pancha Ganapati! May your paths be cleared, may your days be filled with vibrations of love, joy, hope and peace!

Catherine Dalton
EMERALDFLAME50@LIVE.COM

Presenting Temple Worship to Modern Young People

Our publisher has insights for parents and teachers

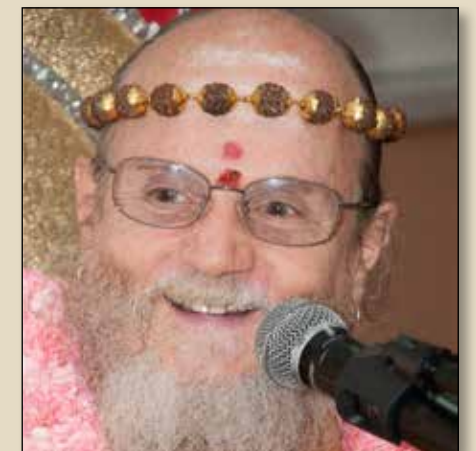
IN HIS EDITORIAL ON PAGE 10 OF THIS ISSUE, our publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, makes a bold proposal. He suggests that Hindu parents, teachers and elders can capture the interest of the young, and possibly augment their understanding, by using concepts, imagery and vocabulary youth are familiar with and inspired by. "As digital experience proliferates and grows more compelling, it is entirely possible that its proper use could serve to deepen the younger generations' understanding of and interest in Hinduism's perspective of the Deities and inner worlds."

Such concepts as *augmented reality*, *virtual reality* and *metaverse*, Satguru goes on to explain, infuse the mental lives of the youth. These "realities" are imaginary, made-up, ephemeral, yes, but they are real nonetheless in the same way dreams are only dreams, but they are real dreams. These alternate ways of thinking, Satguru points out, do resemble the esoterics of temple worship and Hindu cosmology. The idea of "interactivity" with purely mental worlds, for example, does remind us of the idea of communication or

communion with inhabitants of the inner worlds. "After all, in the physical, digital and subtle worlds, all experience happens in the mind of the perceiver," he concludes.

In proposing this new, experimental way of presenting Hindu teachings, our publisher is fulfilling HINDUISM TODAY's ongoing purpose as described in its mission statement: "to inform and inspire... to publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators." That information and those resources have consisted not only in presenting the subject matter, but also in the manner it is presented: the concept and images used, the vocabulary, relevance to daily life, etc. Therein lies the most appreciated aspect of our magazine.

Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley) pointed out in 2019 that "HINDUISM TODAY has helped frame ancient Sanatana Dharma in fresh metaphors and language, making it available and appealing to the contemporary mind." He praised the magazine again in 2023, "HINDUISM TODAY has helped pioneer Hinduism's worldwide resurgence by making its basic tenets available in the West, and in India also."



Satguru's idea could prove most useful in encouraging young ones to take advantage of their rich heritage. You can help produce and spread such ideas more widely by helping HINDUISM TODAY remain financially strong and secure. Donate now or occasionally to help meet ongoing expenses. Your gift will be especially meaningful at this time of soaring expenses. Donate at:

bit.ly/help-HT. Or contact us:
+1-888-464-1008 • support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“Let innumerable births come!
Go slowly. No hurry, no sorry, no worry!”

Siva Yogaswami (1872–1964), renowned Sri Lankan mystic

What has learning profited a man,
if it has not led him to worship
the Good Feet of Him who is pure
knowledge itself? **Tirukural 2**

People shed a whole jug of tears for wife
and children. They swim in tears for money.
But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with
a real cry. **Ramakrishna** (1859–1886)

He soon felt that the fulfillment of his
desires gave him only one grain of the
mountain of happiness he had expected.
This fulfillment showed him the eternal
error men make in imagining that their
happiness depends on the realization of
their desires. **Leo Tolstoy** (1828–1910)

Bondage is when the mind longs for
something, grieves about something,
rejects something, holds on to something,
is pleased about something or displeased
about something. **Ashtavakra** (date
unknown), *revered Hindu Sage*

Out beyond ideas of wrong doing
and right doing there is a field.
I’ll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Rumi (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

Real poetry is to lead a beautiful life. To live
poetry is better than to write it. **Matsuo
Basho** (1644–1694), *famous Edo-period poet*

Every generation has the obligation to free
men’s minds for a look at new worlds...
to look out from a higher plateau than
the last generation. **Ellison S. Onizuka**
(1948–1986), *American Astronaut*

Making others happy, through kindness
of speech and sincerity of right
advice, is a sign of true greatness. To
hurt another soul by sarcastic words,
looks or suggestions is despicable.
Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952)

All unhappiness is due to the ego. With it
comes all your trouble. If you would deny the
ego and scorch it by ignoring it, you would
be free. **Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

DID YOU KNOW? Cannonball Tree

THE CANNONBALL TREE, ALSO KNOWN AS
Couroupita guianensis or Nagalingam
maram, is a tropical tree found across
Southeast Asia and considered sacred by
Hindus. Hard spherical fruits hang from
its branches until they fully ripen, plum-
meting from their heights and smashing
onto the ground with a bang. When the
hull is breached, the capsized fruit reacts
with oxygen turning a bluish-purple
and emanating a powerful pungent odor
with similar notes to that of durian.

The fruit is only consumed by humans
for medicinal reasons. Wild animals, on the
other hand, happily devour the pulp and
seeds. The seeds are cleverly surrounded by
a fibrous, hairlike substance which protects
them from being digested on their journey
to their new earthy home. The tree’s trunk
can grow up to 50 feet tall and support a
wide canopy of dark green leaves. Covering
the tree, a waterfall of fragrant flowers
bloom in bright shades of pink and red.
Emerging from the center of these flowers



is an anemone-like ring of stamens which
contains, at its core, a tiny pure white lingam.
A cobra hood of a hundred pink staminodes
with yellow tips hovers over the lingam as
if guarding it from an unseen threat. Legend

says that the cannonball tree only flowers
on sacred grounds. Perhaps this is why the
plant can be found growing at many Hindu
and Buddhist temples around the world,
including the home of HINDUISM TODAY.

If your mind is empty, it is always ready
for anything, it is open to everything.
In the beginner’s mind there are many
possibilities, but in the expert’s mind
there are few. **Shunryu Suzuki Roshi**
(1905–1971), *Japanese Soto Zen master*

I used to go on the Internet to escape
reality, now I seek out reality to
escape the Internet. *Anonymous*

The ultimate in selfishness is to care
only for the protection, preservation
and multiplication of one’s own body.
To be attached to one’s name and shape
is selfishness. A man who knows that
he is neither body nor mind cannot be
selfish, for he has nothing to be selfish
for. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981),
A guru of the Inchagiri Sampradaya

There is absolutely no inevitability as long
as there is a willingness to contemplate
what is happening. **Marshal McLuhan**
(1911–1980), *Canadian Philosopher*

In one word, this ideal is that you are divine.
Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902)

Do not blame the world.
Find a solution. **Sri
Chinmoy** (1931–2017)

If you tell the truth, you
don’t have to remember
anything. **Mark Twain** (1835–
1910), *American author*

The happiness we are seeking
is actually accepting what is.
Haemin Sunim, *Seon Buddhist*

What is experienced 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. **Rishi
Patanjali**, (2nd Century bce)
Revered author of the Yoga Sutras

The only limit to our realization of tomorrow
will be our doubts of today. **Franklin D.
Roosevelt** (1882–1945), 32nd president of
the United States of America

If everyone were high-minded, there would
be no one to return your karma to you.



Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami,
publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

Here are the ingredients: attention,
concentration, meditation, contemplation,
samadhi. Willpower is the fuel. **Satguru
Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–
2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

BASICS

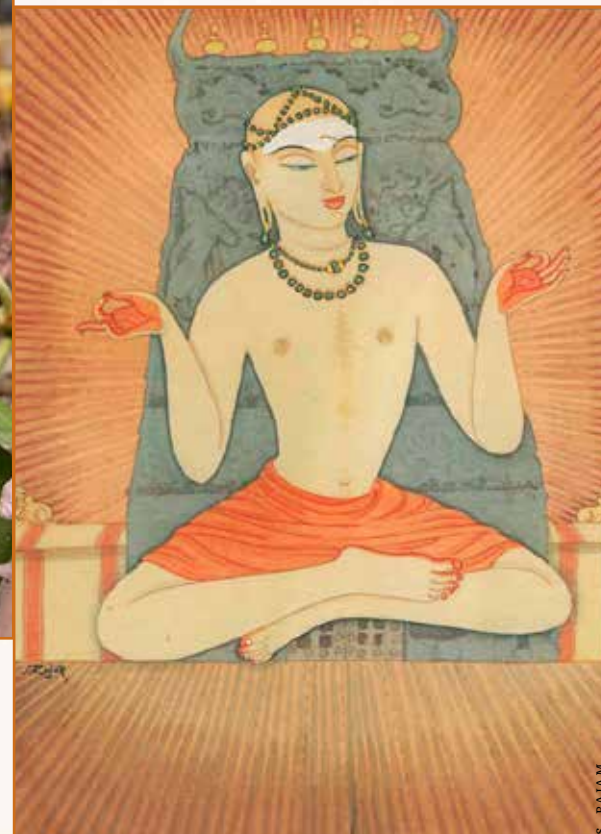
Is Temple Worship Only For Beginners?

TEMPLE WORSHIP IS FOR ALL MEN
and women at every level of spir-
itual development. Its meaning
and experience deepen as we unfold
spiritually through the stages of ser-
vice, devotion, yoga and enlightened
wisdom. We never outgrow temple
worship. It simply becomes more pro-
found and meaningful as we progress
through four spiritual levels. In the
charya pada, the stage of selfless ser-
vice, we attend the temple because we
have to, because it is expected of us.
In the kriya pada, the stage of wor-
shipful sadhanas, we attend because

we want to; our love of God is the moti-
vation. In the yoga pada, we worship
God internally, in the sanctum of the
heart; yet even the yogi immersed in
the superconscious depths of mind has
not outgrown the temple. It is there—
God’s home on the Earth plane—when
the yogi returns to normal conscious-
ness. So perfect is the temple worship
of those who have traversed the jnana
pada that they themselves become wor-
ship’s object—living, moving temples.
Yea, temple worship is never outgrown.

*Drawn from the teachings of
Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami*

.....
Temple meditation: A yogi meditates
in front of a gopuram.



Why I Hold to Hindu Values

Our religion's inherent tolerance and grasp of truth are keys to a peaceful world

BY SHREYA MAHA SENAN

HINDUISM IS KNOWN BY MANY AS THE world's oldest religion, with a history that spans several millennia. The world in which central Hindu teachings and ideas first began taking form was a world far different from the one I am growing up in now, as a young, 21-year-old university student, born in the United States and living in Montreal. And yet, true to its nature as Sanatana (eternal) Dharma, Hinduism's themes, teachings and values continue to play an ever-important, foundational role in my life, mentoring me through the many complex challenges and intricacies of modern times. Many of the themes that distinguished a dharmic life thousands of years ago remain just as relevant in the 21st century, and it is for this reason that Hinduism has stood the test of time and continues to inform, influence and inspire.

A recurrent theme in Hinduism is the significance of pursuing truth and knowledge. That pursuit refers in part to the ultimate truth: the realization of Brahman, the Absolute Reality of the universe. But to be a Hindu is also to develop a fundamental respect for the exchange of knowledge of all types, whether that be Vedic knowledge, scientific knowledge, or knowledge and mastery of the arts. My Hindu upbringing frequently instilled that respect in me. During Saraswathi Puja, I gathered all my textbooks and learning materials and prayed for another year of education and enrichment. I learned to respect my gurus as the imparters of knowledge, finding joy in thanking those gurus with gifts of guru dakshina. I also learned to respect the role of the student who partakes in that knowledge. There was always a connection between my overall spiritual journey and the countless types of learning that I could engage in.

As I have grown up, I have only grown to appreciate the importance of pursuing knowledge and truth more. I have also come to realize that in the modern world this value bears a special weight. Thanks to the widespread use of technology around us, we are surrounded by abundant information readily available at our fingertips. However, as the amount of information instantly accessible to us has propagated, misinformation and "alternative facts" have begun to propagate just as quickly. It has become increasingly easy and even tempting to prioritize the ease and speed with which we can obtain information over the quality and truth of said information. In such a world, it is even more imperative to take pride in learning and obtaining knowledge, and to make it the goal of our learning to achieve a higher, transcendent truth. A follower of Sanatana Dharma regards *vidya*—correct, irrefutable knowledge—as one of the most essential goals of their life. In the chaos of twenty-first-century life, that means maintaining that commitment no matter the noise and distractions around us.

Somewhat relatedly, another key Hindu value to call upon in the



modern world is the value of embracing multiple paths and ideas. We live in a world that grows seemingly more and more polarized with every passing day. In such times, I especially appreciate that Hinduism stands quite unique in its tolerance and acceptance of wide-ranging beliefs and ideas. To be a Hindu is to explore one's own dharma and how to think, act and grow in accordance with that dharma. It is not to accept what we are told at face value, or to believe that there is only one way or path towards finding fulfillment and peace. In the immortal words of Swami Vivekananda, "I am a Hindu. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true." Even within the umbrella of Hinduism, there is a beautifully diverse, wide-ranging spectrum of beliefs, philosophies and schools of thought with an incredible potential for dialogue and discussion about almost any aspect of life.

Both on a community and individual level, this openness is one of the liberating ways in which we are encouraged to embark on the journey to explore and develop our spirituality. In today's world, this aspect of Hinduism is one in which I find a great deal of refuge and solace. All around us, we hear of conflicts and issues arising from a lack of respect for different ideas and an unwillingness to engage in discussion. Often, when we observe so much vitriol and hate, it

can be difficult to resist the urge to join in on the mudslinging and fight fire with fire. To do so would be contrary to Hindu values, and I habitually find myself meditating on those values to remind myself that no matter what happens around me, my duty is to prioritize acceptance and open-mindedness. It is ever-important in the world around us today that we remain mindful of the principles that should unite us all, such as compassion and global kinship, regardless of our faiths, backgrounds or unique identities. Those of us who treasure this belief as fundamental to our Hindu identities therefore have a key role to play in contemporary life as advocates of respect, discourse and goodwill.

Far from feeling that a philosophy as ancient as Sanatana Dharma bears little significance in 2022, I feel that my Hindu values have given me major guiding principles with which I can navigate a complicated world. As a member of Gen Z, I find myself at the crossroads of multiple discussions on key contemporary issues, global movements and questions of morality and duty. I know that I am not at all alone in this regard. In 2020 I cofounded the McGill Dharma Society, the official campus representation for students of Dharmic faiths. I often engage in conversations with my peers in numerous Dharmic faith communities in Canada and beyond. Our discussions form bridges of connection between people of different faiths, nationalities, races, languages and identities, and those bridges, in turn, highlight the united and harmonious nature of the universe. In a world that can at times feel turbulent, uneasy and tense, Hindu values such as truth, knowledge, open-mindedness and environmental awareness are vital to regaining the sense of peace and fulfillment attainable through a life lived in pursuit of Dharma.

First published in Hindu Vishwa, July, 2022. Edited for length.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shreya Mahasenan is a senior at McGill University in Montreal, majoring in anatomy and cell biology and minoring in political science. She enjoys playing guitar and violin, singing, ice hockey and writing.

FROM THE VEDAS

True Love

A transcendental perspective on the power behind all existence

The following is from Raimon Panikkar's translation of the Atharvaveda. The verses below are drawn from hymn 9, part 2, dedicated to Kama, God of Love.

19. Love is the firstborn, loftier than the Gods, the Fathers and men. You, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty. To you we pay homage!

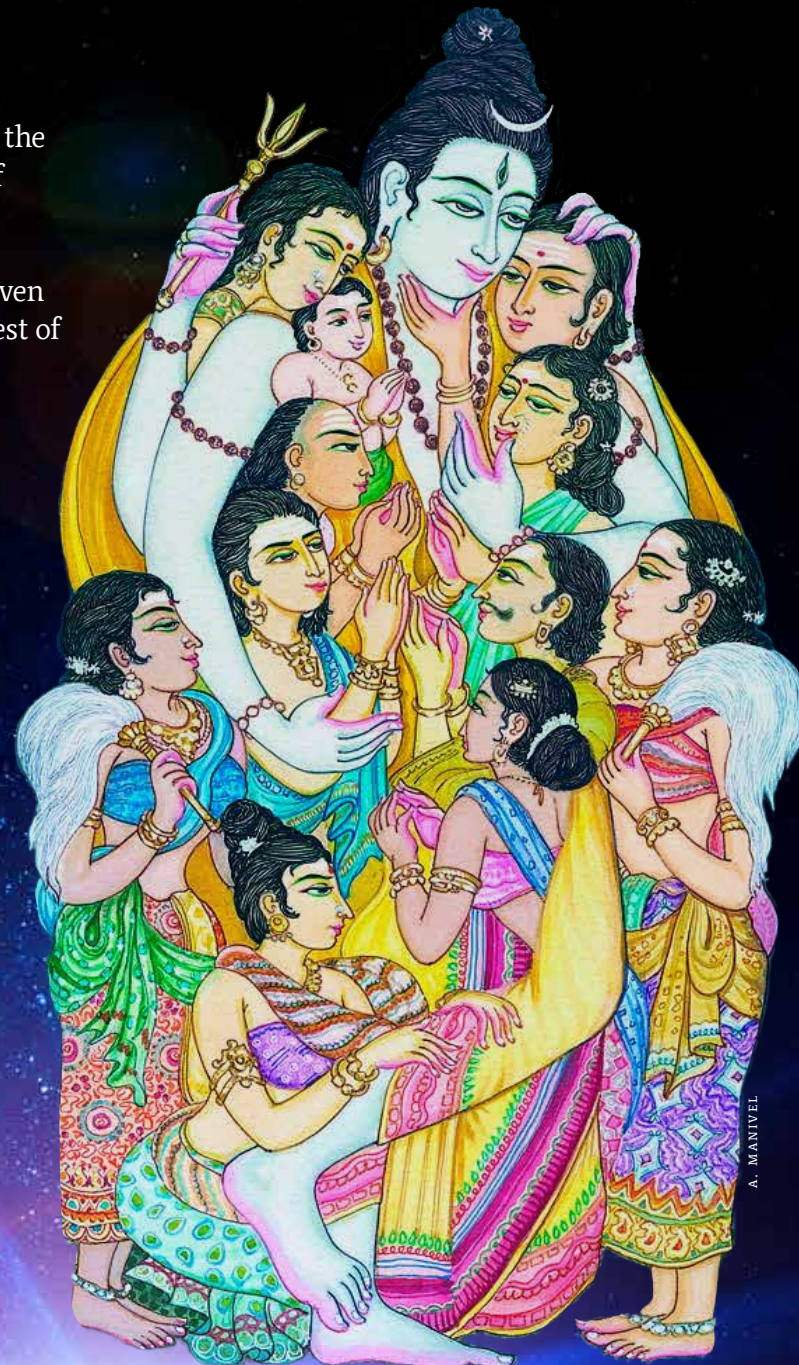
20. Greater than the breadth of Earth and Heaven or of Waters and Fire, you, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty. To you we pay homage!

21. Greater than the quarters and directions, the expanses and vistas of the sky, you, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty. To you we pay homage!

23. Greater than all things moving and inert, than the Ocean, O Passion, you, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty. To you we pay homage!

24. Beyond the reach of Wind or Fire, the Sun or the Moon, you, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty. To you we pay homage.

Raimundo Panikkar, (1918–2010), held doctorates in science, philosophy and theology. His anthology, *The Vedic Experience*, excerpted above, is the result of ten years in Banaras translating with the help of Vedic scholars.



Folk Art Thrives with Generous Patronage

Since 2004, the International Folk Art Market in New Mexico, USA, has hosted more than 1,000 creators from 100 countries in the world's largest exhibition and sale of folk crafts. Artists' earnings have exceeded US\$34 million and impacted more than a million lives in the communities they represent. Join us on a stroll to visit Indian, Nepalese and other master artists, some of whom can support dozens of families for a whole year from this long weekend's sales.

By Claire Burkert, New Mexico
Photos by Thomas Kelly

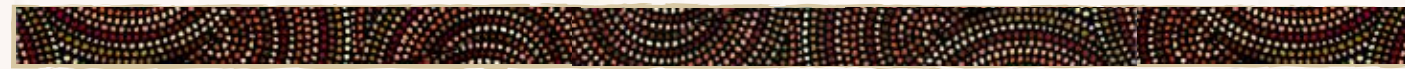
IT'S A DAY OF JOY AND ANTICIPATION: OVER 150 artisans from sixty countries are arriving on Museum Hill to set up their booths for the annual Santa Fe International Folk Art Market. Many have never been to the Market or even to the US. What does it look like to them, this assembly of large tents erected under New Mexico state's big open sky, amid the rolling hills which are still infused with the spirit of the native peoples whose home this was? I toured last year's Market to report for *Hinduism Today*—and of course couldn't resist shopping for my own apparel and home decor.

The tents of the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market are set up in early July amidst cultural museums built in an adobe style distinctive to New Mexico. Seeing the plain adobe walls, two Mithila artists from Nepal ask: "Shouldn't we paint some Gods and elephants on them?" Nepal and India are well represented at this respected market—mostly in the realm of textiles—due to their plethora of ancient crafts. Their booths sit side by side with dozens of other countries resulting in a dizzying array of styles. Enthusiasts can browse a wide variety of traditional and modern art which could take months to discover by visiting the countries themselves.

At home, most artisans struggle in the face of modern, cheap manufacturing, while at this market they are elevated and supported by well-to-do clientele and volunteers eager to help preserve the handmade. Additional prestigious markets in other countries could go a long way in boosting folk art's profile and sales. This particular market is also a rare opportunity to meet fellow artisans from around the world. While mingling to discover each other's history and talents, they find that folk art everywhere faces the same challenges of financial stability and seeking to remain environmentally friendly.



Artisans from around the world celebrate together at the entrance of the annual International Folk Art Market in July 2022 held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.



AS THE ARTISANS ARRIVE AT THEIR booths in the tents to unpack, one senses that what has taken place is something just short of a miracle. After being selected half a year earlier from a pool of 400 applicants, the artisans needed not only to make and pack their products but also to obtain passports, visas and air tickets and arrange shipping. Great credit goes to IFAM's director and staff who coordinate logistics, including dealing with last-minute emergencies: denied visas, delayed flights and shipments held up in customs. Assisting the IFAM staff is a dedicated team of 1,300 volunteers who help to welcome artisans, translate, put up and take down tents, deliver food, and much more. A huge IFAM community comes together to make this extraordinary and impactful event happen.

I serve on the IFAM's Selection Committee, which carefully reviews artisans' applications. The question often arises, "Is this folk art?" Over time our definition of folk art has evolved, allowing fresh variations of cultural traditions and welcoming innovation. In recent applications, I've noticed that more and more artisans and designers are expressing deep concerns about the sustainability of artisan communities and about the global environment. These concerns affect the materials they use and types of products they make. About 13 percent of artisans accepted to last year's Market were from India and Nepal.

Meeta Mastani

I first entered the booth of Meeta Mastani, a fabric artist working with fourth-generation printers and dyers in Rajasthan for thirty years. I learned about her company, Bindaas, when I saw my colleague Tony wearing a shirt block-printed all over with images of cameras. "That's folk art?" I asked, but then I learned more about the challenges faced by this ancient tradition, and the significance of the designer-artisan partnership to the future of the craft. "Women transfer the designs onto wood, and the men carve them out," Meeta explains, "but because block printing has increasingly been replaced by screen printing, traditional block makers are suffering."

Every part of the block printing process is by hand and is natural: the wood blocks, the dyes, the pastes. The process requires experience and skill. The many natural ingredients include limestone, indigo, pomegranate rind, alum, catechu, tree gums, leftover husk of wheat eaten by bugs, edible oil, waste iron, tamarind seed powder, myrobalan, ferrous sulfate, riverine clay and alizarin. Of concern is the great deal of water required by the natural dyeing and printing process. As water is growing dangerously scarce, the artisan community has initiated a rainwater recharge project and built a water tank that can store up to 100,000 liters of water.

Although the block-printing tradition faces threats, "Bindaas" means carefree and daring, a feeling reflected in the motifs of the shirts, saris and towels here at the Market.

"For a colonized country which has supplied the world with printed fabric for thousands of years, it is very important to use our own designs," explains Meeta. Developed in tandem with the block printers, the motifs are inspired by "the many light and playful moments in the lives around us." They include chess pieces, sandals, sunglasses, tiffin boxes, movie cameras, kites, bicycles, ice creams, footprints, scooters, motorcycles, tea cups and handbags.

The Market is the only place Bindaas sells retail. "It is special here and they look after us well," says Meeta. "I've learned here that people are the same everywhere." I observe a buyer chuckling over a t-shirt block printed with images of the pressure cooker found in every Indian kitchen. "I like play," she says, "and they look at my stuff and smile. That makes me happy."

For many hundreds of years, Indian craftspeople have practiced natural dyeing, use of natural fibers and recycling. Over the next days, I want to catch up with more of the Indian participants and learn how they are adapting to a changing world. In a threatened climate, what steps towards sustainability must artisan communities take?

Hemangini Rathore

Sudarshan means beautiful, and this is the name of a company run by Hemangini Rathore whom I spotted in the adjacent booth. She, like Meeta, has a long relationship with artisans in Rajasthan. "From a young age I learned about craft by working in village workshops," she recounts. "My parents wanted me to go to business school,



The Market gives folk artists a respected spot in the global marketplace for sharing & selling



(Clockwise from top) Rupa Trivedi and daughter Priti create dyes with recycled flowers; the Market is surrounded by pueblo-style museum buildings; Hemangini Rathore's hand-dyed jackets; Meeta Mastani develops printed shirts for her brand



but instead I studied textiles in Mumbai."

Hemangini works with several traditional printing processes to "revive, sustain and innovate folk textile crafts and empower artisans." Her booth is packed with women shopping for her kaftans, scarves, jackets and capes that employ various traditional block printing and dyeing techniques, including Dabu printing, a unique process that was revived after Indian independence. The block is printed in mud paste, which resists dye. When the fabric is dyed and then washed to remove the mud, the unique undyed pattern is revealed. This process can be repeated to make rich looking double and triple Dabu effects. Hemangini also works with traditions of Sanganer—prints of delicate floral patterns that were created in Moghul times. In recent products she has introduced Shibori, the Japanese tradition of resist dyeing through stitching.

"I learned practical skills in the villages and bumped up design and finishing. The important thing in contemporary design is not to take away," she explains. "And you have to be in the field. As in cooking a recipe, you can't sit in NYC and wave a magic wand. You need years of working on the ground to develop a relationship with the artisan community."

"Even during Covid we didn't stop," she adds. "We developed new products, we developed colors. And now we've put our block printing work out in the open air, since we can't work inside. We are back to the traditional way—Corona brought us outdoors, and block printing is, in fact, meant to be seen in natural light. Indoors with AC, you don't get the color right. Sun and breeze play with the dyes."

Hemangini relates her practice of craft to her Hindu belief: "The organic aspect of Hinduism is to not overindulge and to focus on our work. I also believe in karma. I believe I've done well because I've given back to the community. When you pay the artisans regularly, they are blessing you. Preserving crafts automatically helps everyone. I do whatever I can do to share my knowledge and to sell and to create sustainability."

Thilak Reddy

Wandering onward, I encountered Thilak Reddy who is both a traditional Kalamkari textile artist and innovator. Kalamkari is an ancient traditional fabric art using a kalam or pen, a bamboo stick with a padding of cloth above its point that helps the artist regulate the flow of ink as he draws. In the past, large naturally colored Kalamkari scrolls were displayed in temples. Expanding on traditional depictions of the tree of life or scenes from the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, Thilak has developed a range of designs expressive of earth, water, sky, flora and fauna. His team of 20 women, for whom practicing this craft is not traditional, are equal partners in his company, Kalam Shastra. "We have never changed the process—we use the same tools and materials. It is the designs that are different. We wanted to make it more into art."

He shows us charcoal that he uses for drawing the initial outline, alum as mordant, various pens and brushes, myrobalan for fixative, alizarin for yellow color, madder and modhuga flower (flame of the forest) for reds and oranges, and cake indigo for blue.

"I love it here in Santa Fe," he exclaims. "Here you are treated as an artist. If you want to do

something out of the box, you don't want to be constrained about whether it sells or not. The Market encourages me to be free. For instance, we've always made dupatta (shawls) but here people make them into caftans, pillows and table cloths. The Market's imagination is wide."

Men and women alike are trying on his naturally colored shawls, captivated by the variety of designs. Each cloth has rhythm: bold poppies reach tall and seem to bend in a breeze, a river winds between shorelines seen from above, lotus flowers float in bubbly blue water, white deer sit below graceful oak leaves. Thilak attaches the phrase "Exist loudly" to a photo of one of the pieces that he posts on Instagram. As an artist in cooperation with a team of talented women, he has developed each work so that it has a soul and identity of its own.

Rupa Trivedi

My meandering brought me to Rupa Trivedi, founder of Adiv, an urban artisanal enterprise in Mumbai. Her story is unique: "I was worshipping at the Shree Siddhivinayak Ganapati Temple in Mumbai when I saw how flower offerings were collected afterwards in bins and dumped into the sea, choking the nearby waterways."

Rupa realized she could help lessen organic sea pollution if she could utilize these spiritual materials as dyes, linking to a long folk tradition of natural dyeing. Now, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday she collects marigold, hibiscus and pieces of coconut from the temple, and once a week she collects roses and lilies from the Peer Haji Ali Dargah Mosque. Additionally, she collects onion skins and

coconut from food vendors.

Rupa began this work with two pots in a kitchen. She has applied her background in engineering to creating systems for processing this organic waste. The flowers are brought to her studio, where artisans separate the petals and dry them in the shade before grinding them into powder. "Mumbai has a moist climate, so it is important to be able to store dyes through the monsoon season," she explains. Additionally, some flowers are used fresh to create bright yellows. Rupa has taught her team how to measure the dye-stuffs and to make larger batches of dyes in order to be able to make multiple matching garments.

She employs twelve dyers and ten tailors and pattern cutters to create her fabrics. Her daughter Priti, an Indian beauty-pageant finalist who shares her mother's vision, has joined Rupa in Santa Fe. "We use one day a week for creativity," says Rupa, as Priti shows me a shirt pattern invented by a dyer who wrapped the fabric around a pipe before dyeing it. In another garment, the sewing team had decided to combine segments of silk and a cotton fabric, each fabric dyed with the same flowers but absorbing the dye differently.

Rupa sees her work in Adiv as a way to return to the values she had as a child participating in rituals in the rural village of Ganeshpuri. She hopes to bring the natural

world and Indian dye traditions to young urbanites, and believes that the blessings of the flowers will continue to flow into the world. Here in Santa Fe this is certainly the case: "We have the chance to meet so many people here," she comments, as Priti helps a customer who is admiring a garment with an impressionistic pattern of flowers created by marigold petals.

Hetal Shrivastav

Raasleela is an organization in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, led by a young designer, Hetal Shrivastav whom I came across next. The small manual she has written about Raasleela's mission explains she had entered the fashion industry but something felt wrong. She stepped back "to explore, slowly, how to bring a difference to artisans' lives and to improve conditions of the planet." She describes Raasleela as a happy family, where employees have flexible working hours and can work at home. In this happiness amongst the artisans, she says, "I find my purpose."

Indeed, some of the most unusual Raasleela products literally speak of purpose: one garment is embroidered with a postage stamp and a message from the artisan directly to the customer: "Dear Reader, I hope you and your family is doing well. I am Sumi from Gujarat, India. I live with my aunt and cousins. I am a surface designer. I love nature. I pray to God every day I will one day speak

English fluently." Striking are hand-stitched quilts with colorful abstract shapes on either side. The artisans use discarded materials—called "upcycled"—as well as cloth that is unbleached, because, as Hetal writes in her manual, "Why should marine life be disturbed just to look good? Textile chemicals are the second most

water-polluting industry!"

Buyers linger in the booth, taking time to understand both the verbal and visual expressions that artisans have created on each garment or quilt. No two are alike. Individuality is the point: "The same stitch of each artisan is different. The same stitch of the same artisan will be different, too—because they are humans, not machines," writes Hetal in her manual. "We celebrate imperfections and reject nothing!"

Asif Sheikh

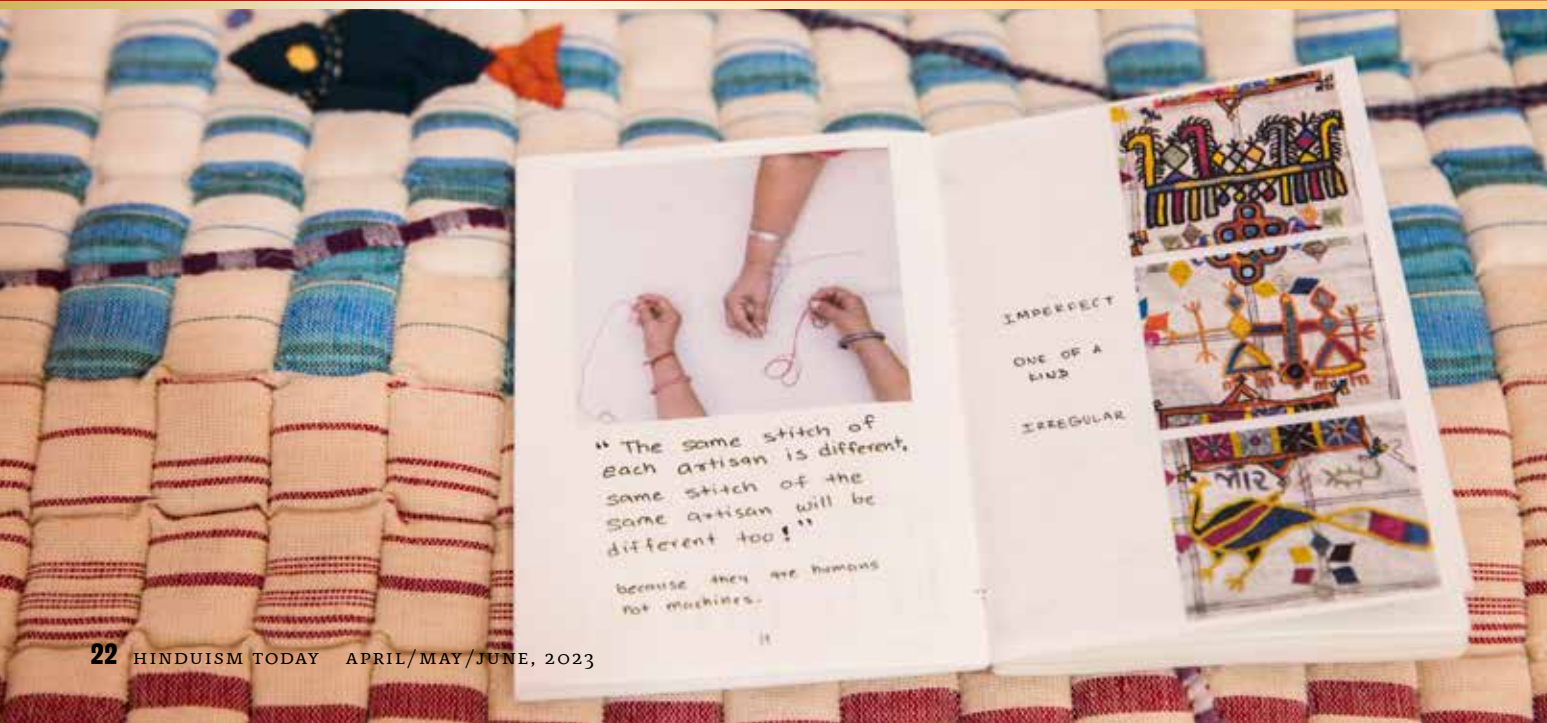
After Hetal I met Asif Sheikh. His embroidered products follow a similar dedication to the handmade, but strive for technical perfection. Asif defines himself as an artist who researches and revives embroidery. "Embroidery is God's gift to me and it is my responsibility to share this gift with artisans and to teach them this quality. Mine is the best in the world."

"My goal is not to earn money but to earn knowledge," he says. "With my knowledge of craft, the work must go up and not down." He shows us the neatly finished back of an embroidered shawl (one can scarcely discern the back from the front) and the perfect 90-degree corners of the shawl. "In my studio we never talk about time, we talk about quality," he adds. Each piece is 100% handmade, without the use of machines. "You cannot copy craft with technology," he warns, believing crafts using machines do not deserve to be called craft at all. "Even our labels are hand-embroidered—they are never polyester."

"You have to speak when you make the craft, so I have done this with a confluence of birds for my theme this year," he says, displaying a spectacularly beautiful silk shawl with birds embroidered in fine indigo chain stitch. "Indigo from Ahmedabad was exported all over. It is a sacred color—my work is a sacred job. Last year I was missing the lavender that grows in Santa Fe," he says, showing me another collection of shawls embroidered with lavender sprigs. "I had come here since 2010 and I would always spend 10-15 days in Santa Fe to get creative energy. This city has given me so much. During Covid, I designed a lavender motif with natural indigo. I used handspun khadi (cotton) with wild silk for the lavender. When I am talking about nature, I only want to use natural materials."

Asif works with fifteen artisans in his

Fabric artists take great pride in remaining handmade, with no two creations the same



(right to left) Asif Sheikh shows an exquisitely embroidered shawl, inspired by lavender sprigs; Siju Shamji Vishram's handloomed textiles from Gujarat, with tassels made by Rabari women, make beautiful bedcovers; Raasleela's "manifesto," written by designer Hetal Shrivastav, on a quilt made with upcycled remnants



studio and 200 from all over India. He has founded the Craft Design Society (CDS), a school that teaches design and weaving to artisans' children. The free three-year course covers 22 processes of weaving. "I started embroidery at the age of seven, then did interior design," says Asif. "I gained recognition in the world, and believe I should give this recognition to others who are deserving." Next year he hopes to bring CDS weavers to the Market so that a younger generation of weavers can benefit from the experience, just as he has.

Siju Swamji and Siju Dinesh Vishram
We were not surprised to learn that Asif buys base cloth for his products from Siju Swamji Vishram and his brother Siju Dinesh Vishram, whose booth is just across the way. Renowned in Gujarat, these weavers have woven with natural fibers and dyes for generations. (Raasleela also sources unbleached cloth from these brothers.) Siju Swamji is showing a customer one of his bedcovers, a product he developed after four previous trips to the Market. Before, he had only made shawls and scarves. Inspiration for new products, he tells us, comes from looking around the Market. His brother Siju Dinesh Vishram shows me images on his phone of motifs of a Guatemalan weaver's supplementary weft that impressed him. "Here I've made Mexican friends, Hungarian friends, friends from Uzbekistan and Kyrgistan. Yesterday I met a woman artisan from Pakistan."

Siju adds, "The Market brings fine people who know art and craft and don't bargain. Sales are so good that with the income we can support ourselves and 65 families for a whole year."

Pachan Premjibhai Siju
Nearby the Vishrams booth is that of Pachan Premjibhai Siju, coming from 12 generations of weavers who wove wool and cotton textiles for local communities in Kutch, Gujarat. "I learned weaving from my father and two brothers," he writes in his brochure for his business, Three Threads. "When we faced a financial crisis, I worked at a mining company. But my health suffered in the factory environment, and so I returned to weaving."

Sadly, he was unable to obtain a visa to attend the Market. But his message to his clients is carried through his weaving. One set of motifs depicts the industries that came to Kutch with smokestacks, emitting pollution. Another shows a near-treeless dry landscape. Happier motifs include children planting trees and a watering can. "I have been thinking about climate change since I studied at SKV (Somaiya Kala Vidya, a design school for artisans in Kutch). "I created my own new extra weft motifs to portray my ideas, and so my scarves show a different story on either end."

He has also introduced lighter natural materials preferred by his clients: finer cotton, mill-spun bamboo, hand-spun lotus fibers, tussar and eri silk. Learning he also got new ideas after a WhatsApp collaboration with a group of Oaxacan weavers, I wandered over to a Oaxacan booth to see their products.

From Mexico, Peru & Finland
"It's like a dream to see all these things from different countries," says **Aurelia Gomez Jimenez**, returning to chat with me after a tour through

some of the tents. Aurelia comes from a village in Santa Maria Tlahuitoltepec in the mountains near Oaxaca, where the traditions of weaving rebozo had died out. Rebozos are woven textiles used by Mexican women in many communities to shelter their heads from sun, to wrap their torso or to carry babies and bundles. Aurelia's husband Bonaficio began learning to weave rebozos on a backstrap loom when he was eight years old. Taught the whole process of preparing the loom and weaving by his grandmother, he has revived the practice of weaving rebozos in their community and introduced a pedal loom. Today, Aurelia dyes yarns while her daughter and grandmother do the special knotting of the fringe.

These shawls in their earth colors, with long, delicate, complex fringes, hang on the wall of the Jimenezes' booth in rich testimony to their ancestors' tradition. Their dyes are luminous, making one think of the magic hour of early evening when everything is cast in warm hues. For their dyes they use the bark of oakwood and eagle trees, two local types of marigold that produce olive green and mustard yellow, juice from a plantain stem, as well as purchased indigo and cochineal.

They employ several community members (single mothers and adults with disabilities) in both weaving and making the fringes for the shawls. Weaving is Aurelia and Bonaficio's full-time work. It has helped them to have a better house and provide an education for their daughter. They are also gratified they can contribute to the community

Creations below from Peru, Mexico and Finland reflect the vibrant and earthy tones



(clockwise from top) Design educator Judy Frater shows the work of Pachan Premjibhai Siju, who developed imagery expressing his concern for the environment; Finnish weaver Hannele Kongas naturally dyes wool from the endangered Kainuu gray sheep to weave scarves and shawls; Aurelia Gomez Jimenez (left) and a friend wear the traditional Mexican hand-dyed and -woven textile called a rebozo, which she and husband Bonaficio revived; Each richly hued handwoven alpaca textile produced by Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco (CTTC), Peru, is labeled with the weaver's name—guided by Nilda Alvarez, the CTTC aims to preserve Andean weaving traditions.

of their land and ancient culture



by employing marginalized people in their workshop.

One of the world's grand masters of weaving is **Nilda Callanaupa Alvarez**, who has presented Peruvian textiles at the Market 16 times. "The Market gives an opportunity for us to show our work," says Nilda, "and it is also for building relationships with clientele. We have the chance to form intercultural relationships—it is ultimately about the artist, not only the product. With many of the artisans we are like brothers and sisters. I have friends now from Laos, Indonesia, Mexico, India...now I want to create a conference in Peru inspired by the Market and bring people there."

As a young girl tending her family's sheep, Nilda learned spinning and weaving. She saw that the weaving tradition in Cuzco was disappearing, so she started gathering weavers in the courtyard of her parents' home. "I started as a weaver and helped to start a non-profit, because it is satisfying to help so many weavers to have an income," Nilda explains. The Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cuzco (CTTC) was established in 1996. "I work with 500 weavers in ten co-ops. Every product tag shows the name of the weaver." At the Market she has learned how to set up, tell her story, interact with a client and learn what he or she likes, essential knowledge for working on the scale of the CTTC. The impact and the scope of her work are tremendous.

"The motifs in our textiles are inspired from our Andean environment and include water represented in various ways, leaves, flowers, branches, flora, animals and constellations. You'll also find motifs from pre-Colombian textiles of Peru," she explains. Yarn is made

with a drop spindle, colors of her weavings are all natural, the material wool and alpaca, the quality impeccable. The bedcovers, bags and shawls of wool and alpaca, in their rainbow stripes of deep shades of natural colors, speak of rich Andean nature and culture.

Selling under the same tent at the Market, but usually a world away, is the Finnish textile artist **Hannele Kongas**. Like Nilda, she weaves with the time-honored natural colors and is repeating traditions of her ancestors—including the Sami people of northern Norway, whose techniques she uses, and, far back, the Vikings. On the wall of her booth she hangs a large photo of the home in the stark Lapland landscape where she was born. "Finnish nature is not just a source of inspiration to me," she says. "The need to protect its fragile ecosystem guides every step of my working process."

She describes the materials and processes: "I'm a wool enthusiast; the Finnish Kainuu Grey sheep is endangered, and there are only 1,000 ewes left. It's important to me that the sheep farm is organic and that they take good care of their sheep." Hannele continues, "Using rainwater whenever possible and adding adhesive to the dyebath at the same time with dyeing, I try to save water and electricity. Cultivated dyestuffs such as madder, woad, weld, cochineal and sometimes turmeric, onion scales, nettle and tansy form the basic colors for my weaves." Below the photo of her childhood home, her scarves are hung by clothespins, just as they might have been as she grew up. The colors and soft textures evoke nature in the Finnish countryside. When I pass the booth later on, they are nearly sold out.

Anuradha Kuli

It is all too easy to get distracted, while heading in one direction at the Market, as you encounter artisans and crafts new to you. From my unplanned visits to Mexico, Peru and Finland I return once again to the Indian subcontinent to meet Anuradha Kuli and delight in her naturally dyed textiles from Assam.

Like Nilda and Hannele, Anuradha is deeply rooted in her culture. Each Assamese household still has a loom, and even a woman who is a university graduate will wish to weave a Muga *mekhela-chadar*, a local type of sari, for her wedding day. Muga silk is a golden-hued wild silk unique to Assam. In the past, the golden Muga textiles, with their smooth, glossy texture, were reserved for high officials and royalty.

Graceful and soft-spoken, Anuradha is an authority on natural dyes and sericulture. In addition to Muga silk, she uses eri silk (a white silk that can be processed without killing the silkworm) tussar silk (silk made by silkworms in a wild forest) and mulberry silk. She uses a range of natural dyes—lac and iron to make purple, turmeric, pomegranate and much else. Her natural silk saris are purchased for celebrity weddings across India and featured in India Fashion Week. It impresses me that her saris have been embraced by the urban fashion world, while the processes of making them and the motifs are so rooted in natural and rural life. She shows me motifs of an aquatic plant, a bird couple below a tree who wish to meet, a scarecrow that will chase birds away, and wheels of a bullock cart.

Coming to the Market for the first time, Anuradha feels odd to be unknown, since her

brand, "Naturally Anuradha," is famous in India's urban centers. But it seems clear that after spending time in her booth, the American clientele will fully appreciate the integrity of her extraordinary textiles.

Women Weave

When it's time to make visits to two more Indian scarf makers, I realize the Market will be open only a few more hours—and I am behind on making purchases! My first stop is WomenWeave, a charitable trust dedicated to helping female weavers earn income for their families. The scarves, in silk and cotton, have a rich range of colors. It is so hard to choose that I finally select three rather than one, happy to know that my purchases will help support the women and their families. Women in the weaving tradition are often behind the scenes, helping their husbands who are the main weavers. In this project, women are given training opportunities that help them build their skills and become recognized for their creative products.

Adil Mustak & Zakiya Katri

Next I visit the booth of Bandhani weavers Adil Mustak Khatri and his wife Zakiya. Bandhani is a tie-and-dye technique in which tiny knots are tied with cotton thread along a stenciled pattern. Where the cloth is tied, the dye cannot reach. The couple also employ another dyeing technique, in which the fabric is folded and a wooden shape is clamped to each side of the fabric to make a pattern. A third technique, Shibori, involves stitching that resists the dye. With these dyeing techniques they have created their most recent collection inspired by Islamic patterns and

architecture. "Now I think anything can be done in bandhani," comments Adil. I choose a cotton scarf, indigo dyed, with the pattern resembling a carved stone jali (screen) typical of Moghul architecture. I plan to give it to an architect friend. Then, wrapped in the soft, flowing cotton in front of the mirror, I decide to buy another for myself.

Puja Bhargava Kamath

In the booth next to the indigo-dyed scarves I see a woman buyer trying on lacquer bangles in a beautiful array of colors. Curious to learn more, I meet Puja Bhargava Kamath, who is the creative force behind a community project in Channapatna, a small town in South India. For 200 years people had been making lacquered wooden toys from the soft-ivory tree, but the market for these toys was dwindling. To help broaden the market for their products, Puja guided 20-30 men and women to make lacquered bracelets and other jewelry.

"This is a sustainable craft that uses only branches of locally grown wood, known for its medicinal properties. The branches regenerate every five years and can be harvested again," she tells me. "As the wood is shaped into the desired form on the lathe, the friction creates heat. The lacquer stick pressed against it adheres to the heated wooden surface, imparting the color and a glossy sheen. Once the wooden bangles are covered with lac, they are buffed with a leaf of a local screw pine, giving a smooth and lustrous surface." A

graduate of the National Institute of Fashion and Technology (NIFT) in Delhi, Puja explains the importance of collaboration between the designer and the artisans. Together they can create products that are not "museum copies, but something fresh, something current, something clearly and proudly from India." Convinced, I try on a beautiful olive-hued bracelet and an orange one, and proudly carry them to the cashier.

So far I have spent about \$350 dollars on my five scarves in the \$40-\$100 range and two bangles for \$30 apiece. I still plan to run back to Raasleela for a one of a kind upcycled quilt, my biggest purchase at \$500. Meanwhile, I bump into my friend Anne who is wearing Asif's embroidered indigo shawl that I had my eye on—she paid \$400 for this shawl, which is a work of art. In her bag she carries a printed jacket from Sudarshan for just \$175. The price range at the market is wide, meeting the tastes and interests of different types of buyers and collectors: a gold filigree necklace made by traditional jewelers from Spain may cost over \$2,000, while on a fine rug from Uzbekistan I could spend much more. Whatever the price, Anne and I would not be able to mail order these products from Amazon. At the Market we've seen the highest quality examples of what skilled artisans and artists can make, yet they are not sold under a luxury brand name. Moreover, we've had the opportunity to meet the makers themselves and so have learned about the whole process of making the piece that we're taking home:

Wood-based jewelry, tie-dyed shawls and silk saris are a feast for the senses



(left) Puja Bhargava Kamath designs colorful jewelry with artisans in Southern India who for 200 years had made lacquered wooden toys for a dwindling market; (right) Anuradha Kuli's award-winning silk textiles have complex supplementary weft motifs traditional to Assamese culture; (below) Indigo-dyed shawls created by Mustak Khatri and his wife Zakiya in Kutch, Gujarat



these products come with experiences.

Shalini Karn

The Market is closing soon, but we still have more artisans to visit. Amongst these are painters in very different styles. Shalini Karn is an artist in the Madhubani tradition. As a young girl, Shalini watched her mother create these delicate paintings before picking up the brush herself. "I craft my own pictorial language using traditional Mithila technique, expressing my imagination and things I've experienced firsthand," says Shalini. Some of her imagery is deeply personal, such as a depiction of a baby in a mother's womb. Other paintings comment on women's traditional roles: she depicts a woman holding a cricket bat and a woman pedaling a cycle rickshaw. An important aspect of Shalini's identity as a traditional Mithila artist is the act of giving back to other young women. "I have been running workshops for underprivileged young girls," explains Shalini, adding that she hopes "students from across the country will one day be contributing to this tradition."

Her paintings have a fresh sense of color and detail. If you examine closely what looks like a line or small dots, you see how in many of them she has depicted hundreds of tiny ants: "I feel connected in various ways to this tiny but inspiring insect," she says.

Bhaskar Chitrakar

Bhaskar Chitrakar is a painter following the Kalighat Patachitra tradition. Originally,

Kalighat artists made scroll paintings of religious themes. In mid 19th-century Kolkata, the artists started responding to social and political issues, often with a satirical style. Bhaskar began learning from his father when he was six or seven and by age 13 had completed his training.

"Kalighat painting should make people laugh," he says. He continues to paint babu-bibi, aristocratic couples of the 19th century, images often patronized by the aristocrats themselves. But Bhaskar has created new paintings in the same finely executed style, as evidenced by a painting of the Statue of Liberty, whom he has dressed in a sari. "When I was little, I dreamed of coming to the US, and this work was a way of realizing my dream." Now, after 30 years, his dream has come true.

Bhaskar likes to incorporate other styles from around the world. He admires Frida Kahlo and has painted portraits of her. He also likes to incorporate contemporary themes: in one painting Kali uses her third eye to zap a Covid germ, and in another an aristocratic boy is chasing a Covid germ as if it were a ball.

Conclusion

I meet Wendie Cook, executive director of the Citadelle Art Museum in Texas. "The work is so fantastically irreverent," she exclaims. She has purchased

a painting of a man whose head has been pooped on by a pigeon. I am more attracted to a sweeter painting of a man arriving in Santa Fe, standing in awe before one of the characteristic pueblo-style adobe buildings. He wears formal Indian attire and holds a bag with vegetables he has bought at an Indian bazaar. I see this man as the artist himself, arriving from India and entering the world where I find him.

The designers, artisans and artists I've met

AUTHOR & PHOTOGRAPHER



Author **Claire Burkert** is an American based in Kathmandu. For over 30 years she has worked with artists in Nepal and other countries, with a focus on promoting indigenous traditions of architecture, craft and design.

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in these few days have inspired me with their commitment to quality, and to this earth. They are shepherding their traditions in a way that is mindful of the changing world we live in. Let them guide us then, and let us fill our lives with their beautiful and consciously made creations.

As Siju Swamji listed his new international friends, I reflected on how the Market allows the opportunity for representatives of different nations to come together. The last night of the Market there is a dance party. I am moved to tears, watching the small Guatemalan weaver dancing with the tall jeweler from Niger. The jeweler from Israel dances with the Palestinian glass maker. The interaction between artisans is not about copying and competition. It is about learning, sharing, respecting. It is about connectivity, and how one wishes the world to be.

And now it's 5pm. Shoppers are leaving with their last purchases. I feel sadness as the booths are disassembled and products packed, either for storage or shipping back home. The artisans board buses to their hotels; soon they will be on planes again. There is a distressing racket as the tents are taken down by a team of strong volunteers. By morning, Museum Hill will look empty.

But during the five days of the Market this year, three million dollars were generated through the visits of 11,000 people. What carries on is incredible financial support for artisan communities, as well as an abundance of valuable experience, friendships and good memories. Artisans are already sending in their applications for 2023. The plans for the next Market are rolling forward, and we are penciling in our calendars for July 5-9, 2023. 🍽️

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THE NEXT SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL Folk Art Market will take place in July 2023. Stay informed by visiting the website: <https://folkartmarket.org/>. Plan your visit now!

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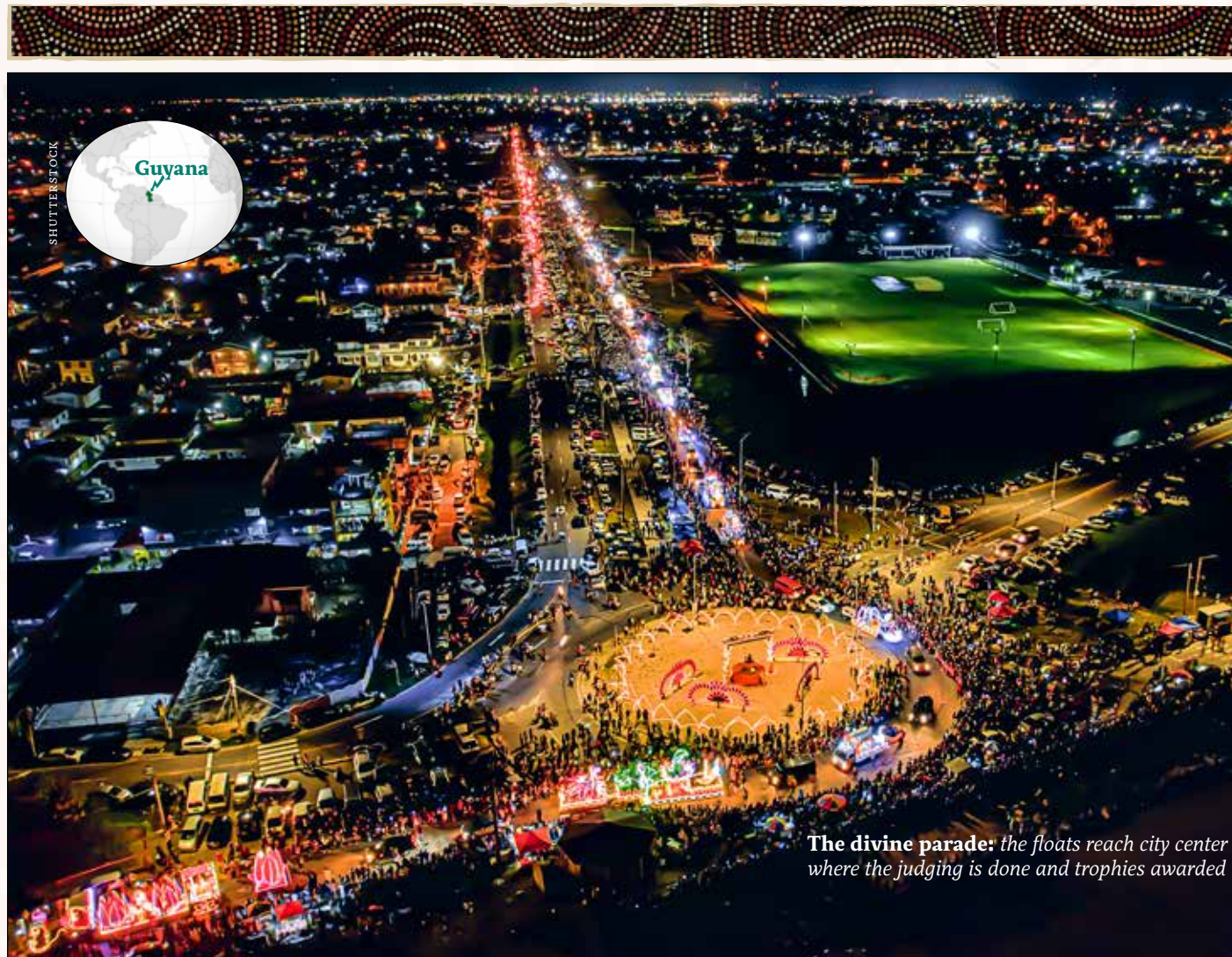
<https://folkartmarket.org/events-programs/ifam-media/>



Contemporary and imagined expressions of art

(clockwise from top) Maithil artist from Nepal, Madhumala Mandal, was happy to see a long line of buyers coming early in the morning to the Folk Art Market; displaying his painting of the Statue of Liberty wearing a sari, Kalighat artist Bhaskar Chitrakar explains that this work was a way of realizing his dream to visit the US; a block of wood from a branch of a "soft ivory" tree. The seasoned wood is chiseled and shaped on a lathe to make the jewelry (adjacent photo) designed by Puja Bhargava Kamath for her company Lai; artist Shalini Karn works within the tradition of Madhubani art to depict contemporary and imagined scenes. Here a female rickshaw driver with a baby on her back pulls a rickshaw through a busy intersection.





The divine parade: the floats reach city center where the judging is done and trophies awarded

FESTIVALS

Guyana's Diwali Parade Returns!

Temples and organizations across the country decorate elaborate floats in Hindu themes that wend their way through Georgetown at night

BY ONICKA JONES, GUYANA

AFTER A TWO-YEAR HIATUS DUE TO THE Covid-19 pandemic, the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha's highly anticipated Diwali Motorcade has returned to the streets of Georgetown with much grandeur and creativity, dazzling the eyes of Guyanese and visitors from all walks of life.

The motorcade is unique to Guyana, which is 25% Hindu and the only English-speaking country in South America. It is organized by the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha for the eve of Diwali, as a culmination of several motorcade parades held across the country.

On October 23, 2022, photographer Julian Cardogan and I ventured into the streets to witness the procession as it took off from the

Shri Krishna Mandir, Georgetown, where the event was inaugurated some 48 years ago. It concluded at the La Bonne Intention (LBI) Centre Ground on the east coast of Demerara. There, thousands of spectators had gathered for the cultural show, which featured local and international performers, food and the judging of floats that participated in the parade. Among the spectators were Guyana's president, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, and members of the diplomatic community.

We spoke with several attendees. Pandit Krishna of the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha, explained: "It's like a fresh start, and bigger in comparison to the previous years. There are a lot more floats, decorations, and appearances on the floats. We always try to

improve on the previous year's design. There is no limitation to what we do."

"I come every year," Lakeram told us. "It is much larger this year, tripled in the number—I think about 40 floats. Everybody likes the lights." Jean concurred: "Every year I dedicate my time to come to see the floats. For two years we did not see it, so it is nice to see this again."

As we traveled along the motorcade route, the focus of the night was on the train of well-lit floats—trucks, trailers and other vehicles—as they made their way from the various mandirs, showcasing their beauty and craftsmanship to convey the unifying message of Diwali.



ALL PHOTOS: JULIAN CADOGAN



Many Gods and Goddesses: (above) Goddess Lakshmi presides over a highly decorated float of the De Willem Hindu Temple; (below) enthusiastic musicians accompanied many floats



ALL PHOTOS: JULIAN CADOGAN



Masterful creations: (above, left to right) the Golden Om Dharmic Youth Organization is well known for its exceptionally elaborate floats; Saraswati, Goddess of Music; God Siva and Goddess Parvati, played by Rishav and Ashiana, respectively



Bringing People Together

The event is the brainchild of the late Guyanese pandit Reepu Daman Persaud. I spoke with his daughter, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, who related that when conceptualizing the motorcade, her father emphasized the unifying nature of the festival. Diwali's focus is light, sending messages about the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, positivity over negativity, righteousness over unrighteousness and justice over injustice.

She proudly expressed that her father was a strong believer in uniting people and sharing the positive messages of Hinduism in a manner that everyone could understand, and

the Diwali Motorcade created the platform to do so. "It is the single most powerful unifying event in Guyana. It brings together hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life in a very positive and beautiful environment. You have the motorcade moving through the streets, and it is a spiritual journey."

Over the years, the Diwali Motorcade has evolved into an activity for the entire family, with groups of people congregating at mandirs throughout the country to participate or view the final touches, while others line the streets to witness the creativity on display and listen to the bhajans and drums throughout the journey.

"The creation of each float requires teams of people, whether a community, youth group, organization or temple," Persaud explained. "Young people have a pivotal role: they are at the front of the floats, depicting the various messages and themes that are associated with the Diwali festival and portraying the various forms of that one God."

Persaud pointed out that the activities surrounding the preparation of the floats are a teaching moment for those involved. When families get together and the children ask questions, it starts the conversation. For those who are involved in the floats, it becomes an opportunity to share their experiences and understanding of the deeper, more spiritual meaning of Diwali. In this way the motorcade helps to keep Hinduism alive.

"Those who create the floats highlight the various forms of the Goddess Astha Lakshmi, the story of Lord Siva. And they celebrate the return of Ram from Ayodhya—with the lights here being a reminder of how the people celebrated that even by lighting the path," she stated.

In northern India, Diwali is regarded as commemorating Prince Ram's triumphant return to the city of Ayodhya after 14 years of exile due to the plotting of his evil stepmother and after the heroic rescue of his wife Sita,



an incarnation of Lakshmi, who had been kidnapped by the rival king Ravana.

Evolution

From very simple beginnings, the floats have evolved over the years to become today's creative masterpieces, some of which require nearly two months to gather all the needed materials and build the floats. "Back in the day," Persaud recalled, "we would decorate with a string of fairy lights. Then people started to use pictures. Later they began adding young people and LED lights. The floats evolved with the availability of technology and more decorative material. What is beautiful is that it is all locally handcrafted."

Pandit Krishna told us it is evident that young people in Guyana are well on their way to keeping the tradition alive. "If you look at the floats, you see a lot of youngsters. Even most of the organizers of the floats are youngsters. The Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha has a youth group, Dharmic Nau-jawaan, and every year they outdo themselves with preparations for Diwali."

Cross-Cultural Appeal

The participation of people of all cultures and religious beliefs demonstrates the unifying nature of this Hindu festival of lights. Several companies have been sponsoring the floats. Others support the event with creative designs and by handling logistics.

"I think the world watched," said Persaud. "I think it was breathtaking to see our people come out in such a dignified and unified way to celebrate this festival. This was something to marvel at—celebrating so many positive things in a world which has many negativities and chaotic moments where people are struggling with the cost of living and wars. We will always keep it alive because of its tremendous appeal to people. It is very clean,

family-oriented, and beautiful in so many ways."

Rajesh Dubraj, president of the Providence Hindu Temple, calls on Guyanese in the diaspora to return home to participate in the Diwali celebration and get a first-hand view of the transformation of the motorcade since it was first conceptualized.

Over 30 years ago, Auntie Maggie sat on one of the floats representing the Middle Road Mandir. Today she said her wish is to see young people carry on the tradition. "It all depends on their upbringing whether they will follow the tradition or not. As you know, young people today generally do not want to be a part of things like this," she said.

In an interview with the Department of Public Information, business owner Adaliya Culpepper mentioned that the motorcade is great for the economy. "It's very beneficial to small business owners. Because, you know, for the past couple of years, we had Covid. I think it's really good that we're opening our country again to celebrate and allow the small man to make profits on holidays like this."

Depicting Mother Lakshmi on one of the floats was a young woman named Divina. She told us she was excited to participate and looked forward to the final judging of floats. Despite having to sit still for the duration of the journey, she was visibly enthused to participate. "It is my first year, and I'm excited," she exclaimed.

What is certain is that the Diwali Motorcade has become a tradition on the national calendar—one that brings together the country's diverse multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society into a single community that embraces and celebrates its oneness. And the inspiration is spreading: Guyanese in the New York area have started their own yearly float parade.



Watching heaven go by: (clockwise from top left) various Gods and Goddesses are displayed from front to back of the float; one of the ornately dressed float riders; a young boy enjoys playing Lord Hanuman on the award-winning Philadelphia Hindu Temple float

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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ENVIRONMENT

Hinduism: Nature's Guardian

Here we explore a range of sacred plants and the unique ways Hindu beliefs in nature's divinity have helped protect and conserve our natural world

BY SAVITA TIWARI, MAURITIUS

THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY, PLANT and tree worship has been found in many religions, sects and cultures. Hindus practice this worship on a daily basis. Plants and trees are part of our stories and prayers. Sometimes they represent the Gods themselves.

Divinity resides in all *prakriti* (primal substance; original matter), including botanical life, which is greatly revered. These creations of nature are sometimes even seen as Divinities whom humans can touch, nurture and worship. After all, we depend on them for our very survival—for oxygen, food, clothing and shelter. What do they need from us? Nothing. They grow on their own, with water and sunlight, and care for themselves. They simply give—a quality of God.

Each person must get closer to *prakriti* to start their own journey towards *purusha* (Universal Spirit) within, by exploring their own path toward personal harmony with the plant world. As the blessing sloka from the *Rig Veda* says, "May *soma* together with the plants be auspicious to all."



We as Hindus interact with the world of nature both spiritually and physically, and regard plants and trees as an extension of the Divine. In religious ceremonies, leaves, flowers and fruits are used as offerings. All our prayers begin with the *dhyan* mantra, where devotees offer a handful of flowers as a token of their love, and end with the *pushpanjali* mantra, when we offer flowers to the feet of

the Lord with gratitude.

Sometimes the plant itself is the Deity, such as during *Tulsi puja*, *Manasa Devi puja*, *Vat-savitri puja* or *Amla Ekadashi*. The *Aswatha* tree is especially watered and worshiped each Saturday, as it is believed the *Tridev*—*Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Siva*—along with *Lakshmi* reside in the tree that day.

Plants and trees are also worshiped in the form of *Shakambhari Mata*, the Goddess of vegetation. The *rudraksha* tree is considered as *Siva Himself*. *Rudraksha* malas are worn by *Saivites*, just as *tulsi*-bead malas are worn by *Vaishnavas*. Then there are divine flowers, like the lotus that grows in water and the pearl flower said to grow on *kalpavriksha* in heaven.

Although all evergreen flowers can be used in prayer, some flowers are not to be offered for certain Deities. For example, the *ketki* (*pandanus*) flower is usually not offered to *Siva*, as put forth by the *Siva Purana*. Traditionally, *aksada* flowers are never used during *Vishnu puja*, and *bilva* leaves are not offered to *Surya*, the Sun.

In Hindu families, the *samskara* (mental impression) of respecting plants and

trees is ingrained early in the hearts of children by elders. Children are educated about the importance of plants through various rituals, mantras and slokas from Vedic literature, and also through mythological stories.

The *Vedas* and other Hindu texts contain countless references to the sacred use of plants. Some of the earliest are the *Rig Veda's* many references to *soma*, a plant-based tonic that was a fundamental offering in the Vedic ritual. In the popular story of *Samudra Manthan*, the churning of the ocean, fourteen treasures are said to have sprung from the ocean. One of these was *kalpavriksha*, the wish-granting tree. According to the *Padma Purana*, *Devi Parvati* asked the divine tree for a girl child and was blessed with a beautiful daughter, *Ashok Sundari*.

In another Puranic story, Sage *Markandeya* was shown a petrifying vision of universal dissolution, during which he also saw *Vishnu* as a baby lying on a banyan leaf. The vision indicated that after every destruction there is new life, starting with a human baby on a leaf—in other words, *purusha* existing on the support of *prakriti*.

A Sanskrit sloka from the *Matsya Purana* highlights the importance of reverence for trees: "Ten wells are equal to one pond, ten ponds are equal to one reservoir, ten reservoirs are equal to one son, and ten sons are equal to one single tree."

Examples of Plant Reverence

The *khejri tree*, also called *jaanti* or *shami*, is sacred in the state of *Rajasthan*. Both frost and drought resistant, it plays a key role in preserving the ecosystem in this desert state. *Khejri* also acts as a host plant for banyan and *ashwatha* trees, which need moist conditions to germinate.

A famous event from 1730 illustrates the importance of this tree. The *Bishnoi* are a *Vaishnava* people from India's Western Thar Desert. Of their guru's 29 principles, the 19th states: "Do not cut green trees; save the en-

vironment." The Maharaja of *Marwar* was building a new palace and dispatched his minister for the needed lumber. A mother and her three daughters, members of the *Bishnoi*, tried to protect a grove of *khejri* trees and were killed to end their protest. After this occurred, 83 *Bishnoi* villages joined the cause. Over the next several days, 363 adults and children gave their lives, each hugging a tree while the king's men attacked them with axes. Awed by this peaceful resistance, and horrified by the violence he had caused, the king recalled his men. He personally traveled to the site and solemnly apologized for his minister's actions. The grove became a place of pilgrimage for the *Bishnoi* people. This sacrifice became the motivation for the *Chipko* ("tree-hugging") Movement in the state of *Uttarakhand* in the 1970s, which was a campaign against commercial logging operations.

The *Bheel* tribe in *Madhya Pradesh's Jabua* district pray to the *kalam tree* (*Mitragyna parvifolia*) to grant their wishes. They believe the tree is the abode of their God *Kalamdev*. Devotees perform an elaborate ritual offering to the tree in gratitude for fulfilled prayers. This rite can cost nearly as much as a wedding, with the entire community present for the

Life with nature: (top left) *Sivalingams* adorned with sacred *bilva* leaves; (bottom left) a young woman hugs a tree; (clockwise from top right) a large banyan engulfs a temple. The banyan is one of the five most sacred trees; an offering of *parijata* flowers; a young girl offers water to a sacred tree



ceremonies, feast and other cultural events. Other names for this tree include kaim, kad-am and Hari Priya.

The **pancha vriksha**, “five sacred trees” believed to be present in Lord Indra’s garden in higher lokas, are *mandara* (prickly coral), *parijat* (night-flowering jasmine), *samtana-ka* (unidentified), *harichandana* (sandalwood) and *kalpavriksha* (banyan). It is said that mandara’s shade relieves physical ailments and mental stress and that the fragrant and mysterious parijat brings positive states of mind. The samtana tree’s leaves promote fertility, and harichandana is known for its fragrance and cooling effect. Kalpavriksha, the tree of eternity that emerged from the

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Many forms of the divine: (clockwise from bottom left) the cluster fig or gular tree; a tulsi plant at the entrance to a building; betel and mango leaves are used in an elaborate temple ceremony; Premnagar Ashram’s *pancha pallava* tree

churning ocean, was offered to Indra, who took it to heaven. It is frequently mentioned in Sanskrit literature as a wish-fulfilling tree.

The **pancha pallava** are “five leaves,” from sacred trees used in several forms of worship. The particular array varies according to location and availability, but normally includes mango, sacred fig, cluster fig, white fig and banyan leaves. Interestingly, at Premnagar Ashram in Haridwar, leaves are used from a single tree of the same name, *pancha pallava*. This remarkable tree is a combination, all five trees growing together as one.

Panchavati is a cluster of five trees that represent the five physical elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. The trees most often included in this combination are banyan, sacred fig, bilva (wood apple), amala, ashoka, cluster fig, curtain fig, neem, shami (ghaf) and mango.

Sacred Groves of India

Although no extensive research on sacred groves has been conducted, experts believe

there are between 100,000 and 150,000 sacred groves in India. These communally protected areas of nature are fragments of forests of varying sizes that usually have important religious significance for the community that protects them. Sacred groves are frequently associated with nature spirits, forest tribes, guardian Deities such as Ayyanar and Amman, animal ancestors such as tigers, serpents or gaur, or Gods and Goddesses such as Ayyappa and Durga.

The tradition of maintaining one-fourth of the land of every village for groves, in the name of folk Deities or ancestors, is centuries old. In Maharashtra, sacred groves are called *devrae*, and in Karnataka *devaru kadu*. In Tamil Nadu they are called *kovil kadu*. In Rajasthan they are called *oran* or *beehad*. Many are believed to be at least two millennia old.

In Kerala and Karnataka alone, over 1,000 Deities are associated with sacred groves. More than 365 forest Deities are worshiped in sacred groves across the Himalayan state of Manipur. The festival of Lai Haraoba is cel-



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Honoring the plant world: (clockwise from above-left) a purple sunbird sits atop a prickly coral tree flower; the author’s husband offers bilva leaves to a Sivalingam at his temple in Mauritius; oil lamps are lit around a sacred amla tree

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ebrated in special regard to these areas. There are also many man-made sacred groves surrounding temples and burial sites.

Types of Sacred Forests

Three types of sacred forest are categorized in Vedic scriptures: tapovan, mahavan and shrivan. Tapovan is a forest populated by saints and rishis for tapas (austerities and deep meditation). *Mahavan* is a term used to describe huge natural forests. Because ordinary people are not permitted to access these two forests, they are considered sanctuaries for flora and fauna. *Shrivan* refers to lush forests and groves; the name means “forests of Shri” referring to Lakshmi, Goddess of wealth. Legend says there was also a personal forest of Siva and Parvati known as *anandavan*.

Plants as Medicine

The oldest Sanskrit text on ayurveda, *Charaka Samhita*, says we need to sustain our health to achieve the four goals of human life: dharma (duty), artha (wealth), kama (enjoyment), and moksha (eventual release from the cycle of reincarnation).

The vast majority of ayurvedic preparations are plant-based. Ayurveda mentions three plants as *amrita* (divine nectar) plants: guduchi, garlic and haritaki. Ashwagandha, a winter shrub, is considered the king of ayurveda, and turmeric is the golden herb.

Besides ayurveda, other centuries-old natural plant-based medicinal systems include

siddha, which originated in South India, and sowa-rigpa from the Himalayas.

Siddha is said to have been taught to Parvati by Siva. Parvati passed it on to Nandi, who taught the 18 siddhars, the original practitioners of Siddha. One of these was Sage Agasthya, who popularized the Siddha tradition and founded the system of siddha medicine. In siddha, 108 plants known as *karpa mooligaigal* (disease herbs) are commonly utilized to treat human ailments.

The name *sowa-rigpa*, from the Bhoti language, means “knowledge of healing.” It is one of the most important healing systems practiced in India, mostly in the Himalayan areas and Tibet. It is thought to have originated in India from the Buddha.

Not only can plants and trees heal us, but they also bring the light of nature into our bodies. Plants and trees in Hinduism represent the Divine on earth. In contrast to its widespread decline within other religions, plant and tree worship in Hinduism remains vibrant on a daily basis, such as daily watering the holy tulsi plant in many Hindu households.

Conclusion

Plants and trees start their journey as seeds from the darkness under the earth and then flourish in the brightness of the sun. They can reach the mystic heights of the sky and connect humans with all three lokas (realms of existence). Understanding the almost supernatural powers of plants and trees is key to the eternal completeness most spiritual humans seek, so do not hesitate to nurture this unique spiritual connection. 🍃



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EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

GURU & SHISHYA

Exploring the Genius of India's Guru-Shishya System of Spiritual Training and Transmission

From the Teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami
With Essays by Cogen Bohanec, MA, PhD • Art by Maniam Selven



WHEN THE SOUL HAS HAD ENOUGH EXPERIENCE, it naturally seeks to be liberated, to unravel the bonds. That begins the most wonderful process in the world as the seeker steps for the first time onto the spiritual path. Of course, the whole time, through all those births and lives and deaths, the soul was undergoing a spiritual evolution, but unconsciously. Now it seeks to know God consciously. That is the difference. It's a big difference. By this conscious process of purification, of inner striving, of refining and maturing, the karmas come more swiftly, evolution speeds up and things can and usually do get more intense. Don't worry, though. That is natural and necessary. That intensity is the way the mind experiences the added cosmic energies that begin to flow through the nervous system. ¶So, here is the soul, seeking intentionally to know, "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?" A path must be found, a path that others have successfully followed, a path that has answers equally as profound as the seeker's questions. In Saivite Hinduism, we have such a path. It is called the Saiva Neri, the Path of Siva. It is a wide and unobstructed path that leads man to himself, to his true Self that lies within and beyond his personality, lies at the very core of his being. ¶I want to speak a little about this inner path today. You all know that it is a mystical path, full of mystery. You cannot learn much of it from books. Then where to look? Look to the holy scriptures, where the straight path to God is described by our saints. Look to the great masters, the siddhas, or perfected ones. Look to the satgurus, who have themselves met and overcome the challenges that still lie ahead for you. Look to them and ask them to help you to look within yourself. Much of the mysticism which is the greatest wealth of Hinduism is locked within these masters, who in our tradition are known as the satgurus, the sages and the siddhas. There is much to say on this. As Yogaswami told us, "The subject is vast and the time is short!"

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Forest meeting: The artist has idealized the meeting of the illumined satguru and the devoted disciple. They are in a tropical jungle, surrounded by creatures who show no fear but are witness to the rare encounter of one who knows and another who seeks knowing.



MANIAM SELVEN

Drawing near: Disciples of a satguru gather respectfully at his feet to imbibe his wisdom and spiritual know-how. Equally important, they seek to be in his company, knowing he is ever-aware of the inner worlds, consciously communing with the Gods and devas. By proximity to him, devotees experience a closeness to the Divine.

philosophical teacher. Not all gurus are satgurus. Not all gurus have realized God themselves. The idea is to change the patterns of life, not to perpetuate them. That would be the only reason one would want to find a satguru.

Some teachers will teach ethics. Others will teach philosophy, language, worship and scriptures. Some will teach by example, by an inner guidance. Others will teach from books. Some will be silent, while others will lecture and have classes. Some will be orthodox, while others may not. The form of the teaching is not the most essential matter. What matters is that there be a true and fully realized satguru, that there be a true and fully dedicated disciple. Under such conditions, spiritual progress will be swift and certain, though not necessarily easy. Of course, in our tradition the siddhas have always taught of Siva and only Siva. They have taught the Saiva Dharma which seeks to serve and know Siva in three ways: as Personal Lord and creator of all that exists; as existence, knowledge and bliss—the love that flows through all form—and finally as the timeless, formless, causeless Self of all.

When we go to school, we are expected to learn our lessons and then to graduate. Having graduated, we are expected to enter society, take a position comparable to our level of education. We are expected to know more when we leave than when we entered, and we naturally do. When we perform sadhana, we are expected to mature inwardly, to grow and to discipline ourselves. And, in fact, we do become a better, more productive, more compassionate, more refined person.

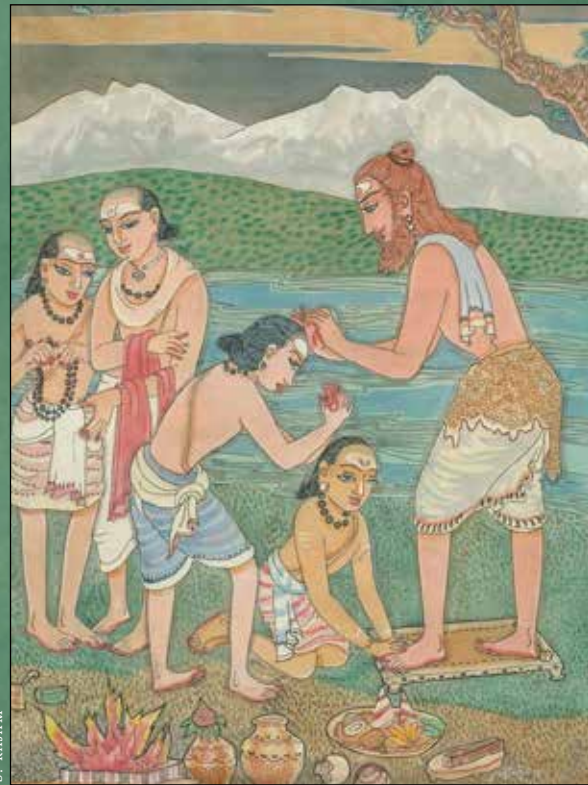
But when we perform yoga, we are expected to go within, in and in, deep within ourselves, deep within the mind. If yoga is truly performed, we graduate with knowledge based on personal experience, not on what someone else has said.

We then take our place among the jnanis—the wise ones who know, and who know what they know—to uplift others with understanding in sadhana and in yoga.

Guru Loyalty

A devotee on the path who has a satguru should not seek darshan from another guru unless he has permission from his own guru to do so. Why? Because he should not become psychically connected with the other guru. The darshan develops inner psychic bonds. Another guru does not want to influence the unfoldment of the aspirant either. However, if he has permission to absorb darshan from someone else, then of course, there has been an inner agreement between the two gurus that no connection will result, and the disciple will not be distracted from his sadhana by conflicting new methods.

It is not good for a student on the path to run around to various teachers and lecturers and gain reams of miscellaneous knowledge about the path and related occultism. He becomes magnetically attached to the students of the various teachers and sometimes to the



S. RAJAM

On the banks of the Ganga, a Sivaguru places his hands on the head of a swami candidate. A homa fire burns where the initiation rites will occur.

From the Tirumantiram

1573: He taught me the meekness of Spirit, infused in me the light of devotion, granted me the Grace of His Feet; and after interrogation holy, testing me entire, revealed to me the Real, the Unreal and Real-Unreal. Of a certain is Siva-Guru the Lord Himself.

1574: Gathering the strands of my fetters, He knotted them together and then wrenched them off; freeing me thus from my fond body, straight to mukti he led me—behold, of such holy potency is the Presence of the Guru Divine!

1576: He is beyond worlds all yet, here below, he bestows his grace abundant on the good and the devout, and in love works for the salvation of all; thus is the Holy Guru, whose praise is beyond speech, like unto Siva, the Being Pure.

1581: Guru is none but Siva—thus spoke Nandi; guru is Siva Himself—this they realize not; guru will to you Siva be, and your guide, too; guru, in truth, is the Lord that surpasses all speech and thought.

The Necessity of a Guru

It is said in our Hindu scriptures that it is necessary to have a satguru. However, it is also possible for an individual to accomplish all of this by himself without a guru. Possible, but most difficult and exceedingly rare. There may be four or five in a hundred years, or less. Scriptures explain that perhaps in past lives such a soul would have been well disciplined by some guru and is helped inwardly by God in this life. With rare exceptions, a guru is necessary to guide the aspirant on the path as far as he is willing and able to go in his current incarnation. Few will reach the Ultimate. The satguru is needed because the mind is cunning and the ego is a self-perpetuating mechanism. It is unable and unwilling to transcend itself by itself. Therefore, one needs the guidance of another who has gone through the same process, who has faithfully followed the path to its natural end and therefore can gently lead us to God within ourselves. Remember, the satguru will keep you on the path, but you have to walk the path yourself.

All gurus differ one from another depending on their parampara, their lineage, as well as on their individual nature, awakening and attainments. Basically, the only thing that a guru can give you is yourself to yourself. That is all, and this is done in many ways. The guru would only be limited by his philosophy, which outlines the ultimate attainment, and by his own experience. He cannot take you where he himself has not been. It is the guru's job to inspire, to assist, to guide and sometimes even impel the disciple to move a little farther toward the Self of himself than he has been able to go by himself.

It is the disciple's duty to understand the sometimes subtle guidance offered by the guru, to take the suggestions and make the best use of them in fulfilling the sadhanas given. Being with a satguru is an intensification on the path of enlightenment—always challenging, for growth is a challenge to the instinctive mind. If a guru does not provide this intensification, we could consider him to be more a



MANIAM SELVEN

teachers themselves. The teachers do not like this "browsing" on the part of the guru-hopper either, for it impairs the unfoldment of their own students, as it goes against the natural flow of unfoldment on the path. It is also energy draining and time-consuming for the guru or swami.

One must look at spiritual unfoldment in the same way one approaches the study of a fine art. If you were studying the vina with a very accomplished teacher, he would not appreciate it at all if you went to three or four other teachers at the same time for study behind his back. He demands that you come and go from your lesson and practice diligently in between. By this faithful and loyal obedience, you would become so satisfied with the results of your unfolding talents that you would not want to run here and there to check out what other

"The shishya is expected to cultivate his inner life as well as his outer life. The more sincere and consistent he is with his inner work and his inner friends—God, Gods and guru—the more safe and secure and blessed he will be."

maestros were teaching and become acquainted with their students. Students run from teacher to teacher only when they do not obey the teacher they have.

Harmony with the Guru

Before books were invented, the traditional way of conveying information was through the spoken word. This is called sampradaya. Sampradaya, verbal teaching, was the method that all satgurus used. A satguru can only give his shishya as much as the shishya can hold in his mind at any one time. If the shishya comes with an empty cup, the cup is filled by the guru. But if the shishya comes with a cup that is already full, nothing more can be added by the guru.

Many satgurus work with their devotees in unseen ways. They

Silent guru: *The pure quiescence of the mind, stillness, is so respected in India that there is a form of Siva, Dakshinamurti, who transmits Truth while remaining silent. Here the guru invokes this power, finding his own inner stillness as a means of inviting shishyas to dive deep within to their own motionless Self.*

have the ability to tune into the vibration of a devotee anywhere his physical body might be on the planet, feel how he is feeling and send blessings of protection and guidance. The guru-shishya system of training is personal and direct. Much is unspoken between them, so close is the mental attunement. The traditional observance of brahmacharya helps to stabilize this relationship.

An advanced shishya is one whose intuition is in absolute harmony with that of his satguru. This harmony does not occur in the beginning stages, however, when the devotee is probing the subject matter of the guru's teachings for answers. Only after he has conquered the fluctuating patterns of the thinking mind does an inner flow of harmony begin to become apparent to both guru and shishya. The shishya is expected to cultivate his inner life as well as his outer life. The more sincere and consistent he is with his inner work and his inner friends—God, Gods and guru—the more safe and secure and blessed he will be. Your relationship with your guru is growing stronger even now as you come to better know yourself and proceed in your study of these daily lessons.

Responsiveness

It is the duty of the shishya to be responsive to the satguru and not resistive. I was impressed at an ashrama in India we visited recently with how responsive everybody was to their guru. The guru there merely looks, and devotees ask, "What can I do to serve?" The guru speaks, and everyone immediately responds. No resisting: "I have something else to do. You already gave me ten things to do. How can you possibly want me to stop now and do something else? Isn't there somebody else around here who can do it?" I saw none of that there. Maybe everybody was just on their good behavior because we were there, but it certainly took a lot of practice. They must have been practicing to be on their good behavior for about five years before we arrived. Wonderful responsiveness. Because of such responsiveness, the connection between the shishya and the guru maintains a systematic growth, and the spiritual life comes up within the individual which breaks all routine and yet works within routine, is beyond all intellectual and reasoning abilities yet works within the intellect and through reason, is unpredictable yet predictable in that it is consistently unpredictable.

However, we must remember that blind obedience is never the spiritual way. It is intelligent cooperation that is the binding force in a well-run ashrama. Intelligent cooperation means obtaining an extremely clear understanding of what is requested to be done before proceeding. Often this requires asking questions, discussing the direction or project, as



L. WAYAN MARYA

Guru Bhakti

FROM THE KULARNAVA TANTRA, CHAPTER ONE

The Self is to be realized only here in this life. If here you do not find it and work out the means for your Liberation, where else is it possible? It is possible nowhere else. It has to be worked out by yourself from within yourself.

The world you reach after the physical body is shed is determined by the level of consciousness reached while in the body. So, as long as the body lasts, exert yourself towards the goal of Liberation. Remember, the physical body does not last forever. Age prowls like a leopard; diseases attack like an enemy. Death waits not to see what is done or not done. Before the limbs lose their vitality, before adversities crowd in upon you, take to the auspicious path. Therefore, choose, then worship a satguru. Worship his feet. Cherish the very sandals (paduka) which hold his feet. All knowledge is founded on those paduka. Remember and cherish those paduka, which yield infinitely more merit than any number of observances, gifts, sacrifices, pilgrimages, mantra-japa and rituals of worship.

Why the pains of long pilgrimage? Why observances that emaciate the body? All the fruit anticipated from such austerities can be easily obtained by motiveless service to the holy satguru. Therefore, bear your karma for the sake of the guru. Acquire wealth for the sake of the guru. Exert yourself for the guru, regardless of your own life.



Passing on the power: *In Ardhanarishvara's presence, we see the important transmission of spiritual knowledge and realization down through history, a power shown as a white light that radiates the same purity from one satguru to another. The gurus differ in many ways, but the light they have is the same in all ages.*

Unnecessary karmas are created while the old ones that were supposed to be eliminated smolder, waiting patiently for still another birth. Pleasure and pain are among his effective methods of instruction. Vishvaguruji is the teacher of all who turn their backs on parents, elders, teachers, gurus or swamis, laws and traditions of all kinds. It is not a lingering wonder why someone who once abandoned a loving guru or swami would want to return from the world and go through the vratyastoma reentrance procedures, no matter what it takes.

Those on the anava marga, the path of the external ego, often claim to be their own guru. Some untraditional teachers even encourage this attitude. However, being one's own guru is a false concept. Traditionally, one would be his "own guru" only if he were initiated as such, and his guru left the physical body. Even then, he would be bound by the lineage within the sect of Sanatana Dharma he dedicated his life to, and would still maintain contact with his guruji within the inner world. Therefore, he would not really ever be his own guru at all. Being one's own guru is a definite part of the anava marga, a very important part. It is raw, eccentric egoism. A teenager doesn't become his own teacher in school. A medical doctor doesn't become his own professor and then get a license to practice, signed by himself. Nor does a lawyer, an engineer or even an airline stewardess. So, logic would tell us that those pursuing something as sensitive, as personal and final as the path to perfection cannot on their own gain the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful in this endeavor.

Well, we are having fun here, aren't we? But it is also a serious subject. Think about it. In the realm of training and responsiveness, we can say that there are two basic margas, or stages: the anava marga and the jnana marga. Those on the jnana marga know they need someone in their life who has already attained what they are seeking to attain, who can see ahead of their seeing and consciously guide them. This is the traditional path of Hindu Dharma leading to Self Realization.

Those on the way of external ego have met many teachers, tested them very carefully, and have found them all not meeting up to their standards. They are the devotees of Shri Shri Shri Vishvaguru Maha-Maharaj-ji, members of his Bhogabhumi Ashram, place of pleasure. The regular daily sadhana is stimulating the desire for sex, for money, for food, for clothing.

Spirit of Parampara

Hindu temples sustain Hinduism around the world. Scriptures keep us always reminded of the path we are on and the path we are supposed to be on, but only from the satguru can you get the spirit, the shakti, the sustaining spirit, to make it all come to life in you, to make the temple meaningful and to complement the scriptures with your own sight, your own

one would do in a modern corporation, then, once all is understood, making the leader's direction your own direction. This is intelligent cooperation, not blind obedience.

The World as Guru

There are three kinds of gurus that are traditionally available to guide the soul. The first, of course, are the parents. Next is the family guru, or a guru chosen by the children. The third guru, often the most suave, the most attractive, but in reality always the most demanding, is Vishvaguruji Maha-Maharaj. He does live up to his name in all ways, for vishva means "everything and everyone in the world," and guru, of course, means "teacher." Maharaj is "great ruler." Vishvaguruji, as I call him, seemingly

"Upon the connection between guru and shishya, the spirit of the parampara travels, the spirit of the sampradaya travels. It causes the words that are said to sink deep."

teaches so patiently, yet accepts no excuses and remains unforgivingly exacting in his lessons. Everyone living on this planet has a guru, whether they know it or not. When the world becomes the teacher, the lessons can be rough or enticing, unloving or endearing, unpleasant or full of temptuous, temporary happiness. The world is relentless in its challenges, in the rewards it offers, the scars it leaves and the healing it neglects. The unrelenting Vishvaguruji works surreptitiously through the people you meet, as past-life karmas unfold into this life. He never gives direct advice or guidance, but leaves the lessons from each experience to be discovered or never discovered. His sutra is "Learn by your own mistakes." His way of teaching is through unexpected happenings and untimely events, which are timely from his point of view.



Wisdom from Sri Chinmoy

ETERNITY'S BREATH: APHORISMS AND ESSAYS

The Guru's love for his disciple is his strength. The disciple's surrender towards his Guru is his strength.

It has become a fashion nowadays for people to say that there is no necessity of an intermediary between them and God, referring not only to the traditional priest, but also to the traditional Guru. Granted, but just tell me: did you receive any help in learning the alphabet? Did you require a teacher to help you master your musical instrument? Were you given instruction to enable you to obtain your degree? If you needed a helper to do these things, do you not also require a teacher who can guide you to the knowledge of the Divine, the wisdom of the Infinite? That teacher is your Guru and no one else.

To achieve realization oneself and alone is like crossing the ocean in a raft. But to achieve realization through the Grace of a Guru is like crossing the Ocean in a swift and strong boat, which ferries you safely across the sea of ignorance to the Golden Shore.

The real work, if there be any, of a Guru is to show the world that his deeds are in perfect harmony with his teachings.



third-eye sight. Otherwise, it's just words.... It is that spirit of sampradaya that makes the traditional teachings meaningful, that gives you the power to discriminate between what is real within those teachings and what is superfluous or just plain nonsense, that gives you the power to blend Siddhanta with Vedanta, *Vedas* with *Agamas*. The irreversible spirit of the guru carries through all of the shishyas. It is basically the only gift a guru can give—that sustaining spirit. He doesn't have to give knowledge, because that has already been written down. He doesn't have to build temples, because there are more than enough temples for everyone. The rare and precious gift that he can convey is the inner spirit of his religious heritage. That is his unique gift to the world.

Nathas do not follow the way of words. Kadaitswami spoke to a lot of people. Who knows what he said? They didn't have tape recorders in those days, and doubtless he never wrote anything down, but the spirit carried through him to Chellappaguru, who didn't say

an awful lot. He wasn't following the way of words either. He spoke only divine essences of the philosophy. He didn't write 3,000 verses like Rishi Tirumular did. Nor did he give lectures to crowds like Kadaitswami did. His spirit was passed on to Satguru Siva Yogaswami, who passed his spirit on to a lot of devotees. We must remember that during the time of the British, all gurus had to keep a very low profile and that Yogaswami's great work started to flourish publicly only after the British left Sri Lanka. He passed his spirit on to lots of devotees, including me. If I had not journeyed to the northern part of Sri Lanka and gone to Siva temples, worshiped there and received initiation from Yogaswami, would I have returned to America and built a Siva temple or helped found over fifty other Hindu temples scattered around the world? No. Would we have a monastic community? No....

Only because of the existence of one satguru in this venerable line of gurus, I caught the spirit; and through this spirit the words manifest, the activities manifest, the devotees maintain that straight path,

Sadhanas from the guru: Beneath a banyan tree sits a satguru who is responsible for hundreds of shishyas and their spiritual progress. To each he gives direction, counsel and insight that is just for them. According to their karmas and natural inclinations, he calls them to perform various sadhanas—hatha yoga, daily puja, japa, dhyana, scriptural study, satsang, pilgrimage and solitary time in a remote cave.

the disciplines bear fruit, the inner sight comes, and after it comes, it stays. Without satgurus, we would only have temples and scriptures. Without satgurus, we wouldn't have the spirit, and people would stop going to temples and stop reading the scriptures.

A satguru doesn't need a lot of words to transmit the spirit to another person; but the shishyas have to be open and be kept open. The little bit of spirit extends like a slender fiber, a thin thread, from the satguru to the shishya, and it is easily broken. A little bit more of that association adds another strand, and we have two threads, then three, then four. They are gradually woven together through service, and a substantial string develops between the guru and the shishya. More strings are created, and they are finally woven together into a rope strong enough to pull a cart. You've seen in India the huge, thick ropes that pull a temple chariot. That is the ultimate goal of the guru-shishya relationship.

Upon the connection between guru and shishya, the spirit of the parampara travels, the spirit of the sampradaya travels. It causes the words that are said to sink deep. They don't just bounce off the intellect; the message goes deep into the individual. Spiritual force doesn't just happen. It's a hand-me-down process, a process of transmission, just as the development of the human race didn't just happen. It was a hand-me-down from many, many fathers and mothers and many, many reincarnations that brought us all here. Parampara is a spiritual force that moves from one person to another. I am not talking about the modern idea of bestowing shakti power, where somebody gets a little jolt and pays a little money

and that's the end of the association with the teacher. Parampara is like giving a devotee one end of a tiny silk thread. Now, if the devotee drops his end of the thread, the experiences are stopped and only words are left, just words, one word after another, another and another. The devotee then has to interpret the depth of the philosophy according to the depths of his inherent ignorance. What other measurement does he have? The relationship with the guru is a constant weaving in and out of one fiber of the thread added to another fiber, added to another fiber, added to another fiber, just like this khadi kavi robe we wear in our Order was woven. Each fiber is attached to another fiber, attached to another fiber, attached to another fiber, and finally we have a thread. Between the guru and shishya many threads are all woven together, and finally we have a firm rope that cannot be pulled apart or destroyed even by two people pulling against one another. That is sampradaya. That is parampara. That is the magical power of the Nathas.



Guru Urgency

FROM THE KULARNAVA TANTRA, CHAPTER SEVEN

Like a tigress, old age waits with open mouth to swallow the jiva. As water continually exudes from a broken vessel, so is the period of life constantly being shortened. Diseases constantly inflict wounds like enemies laying siege to a fortress. Hence one should, as early as possible, engage in the working of good to oneself and satguru. Good work should be done in times when there is no sorrow or danger, and when the senses are not disabled. The utmost period of one's life is a hundred years. Half of it is passed in sleep, and the remaining half is made useless by childhood, disease, old age, sorrow and other causes. Utterly indifferent to the spiritual work which ought to be begun by all means, sleeping during the time he should be awake, and imagining danger when he should have firm faith—alas!

How can such a jiva, cherishing the fleeting samsara so dear to him, live without fear in this body which is as evanescent as a bubble of water, enduring no longer than the stay of a bird on the branch of a tree? He seeks benefit from things which do him injury, thinks the impermanent to be permanent, sees the highest good in that which is evil, and yet he does not see that death is coming upon him. Deluded by the great maya, the jiva looks and yet sees not, reads and yet knows not. The whole of this world is at each moment sinking into the deep sea of time infested with the great alligators of death and disease. We speak of "my son," "my wife," "my wealth" and "my friend," but even as we indulge in such senseless talk, death seizes the body like a tiger. Therefore, jivas awakened to the path should be prompt in doing with all their heart such things as are calculated to benefit their satguru and themselves in this world and hereafter.



Forms of initiation: The artist shows the traditional ways that a guru gives the blessing of *diksha* to a *shishya*: by a word, by a silent thought, by a touch. On the right a *shishya* bows in humble acceptance of the guru's gift of discipleship.

This was the cumulation of a six-year relationship that I had carefully cultivated with my Guru Maharaja. When I met him, I immediately knew that he was my guru for multiple reasons. I had asked several gurus a certain set of questions that were specific to my *sadhana* ("daily spiritual practice") needs. He was the only one who knew exactly what I needed without hesitation. The result was instant; ever since the day I met him, my *sadhana* had increased dramatically. His presence in my life had made me more enthusiastic and inspired. That is a good sign that one has found one's proper guru!

After our first meeting, I spent the required (by our tradition) year-and-a-half where we observed each other, he observing if I was ready for a deep spiritual commitment, and I ensuring that we were harmonious. There are few things more painful than having someone that one considers an important, even loved, mentor suddenly reveal that they have some views that are discordant with one's core values. I had experienced that painful disappointment on other occasions with other mentors. Fortunately, many generations ago our tradition had taken appropriate measures to ensure that this wouldn't happen by mandating a year-and-a-half waiting period so gurus and disciples can mutually observe each other. Happily, he and I seemed perfectly harmonious—and the enthusiasm that I was infused with by his presence in my life proved that he was the right guru for me.

I took an initial course and exam so that our religious order could ensure that I knew our teachings sufficiently to commit to them, and I received

a preliminary initiation in 2017. I then took a much more difficult course which involved nearly two years of writing dozens of papers and taking scores of tests and exams to ensure that I had more depth in my understanding of our tradition, its theology, and its sacred texts. Finally, I was ready for that wonderful afternoon in September, 2021.

Diksha & Adhikarana

However, there was an entire lifetime that led me to this momentous moment, perhaps even many lifetimes. I had spent nearly 15 years studying various yoga traditions, living in ashrams in India, learning Sanskrit, and even getting a master's degree in Buddhism, before the importance of seeking out a guru for initiation (*diksha*) came to me.

By early 2015, my hybridized religious identity had become increasingly centered on one particular Hindu tradition. I had begun a PhD program in Hindu Studies at the Graduate



Guru Protocol

BY COGEN BOHANEC, MA, PHD

The *Manu Smriti* (2.236) provides replete instructions in protocol of the student towards the teacher. It is important for a student to demonstrate the appropriate attitude when receiving the teachings so that the guru is not merely "casting the good seed" of knowledge "on a barren land" (MS 2.112). One should rather present oneself to the guru as if one is an asset, a treasure, to the guru (MS 114-115). This may include such respectful gestures as touching the feet of the guru before and after each lesson, and holding one's hands in a respectful prayer gesture (*brahmanjali*) when receiving the lesson (MS 2.71-72).

When one is sitting in the presence of the guru, one should not occupy a seat that is higher or equal to that of the guru, but rather, one should be so seated as to be below the guru. One should arise when the guru enters the room (MS 2.117-119), and look at the guru in the face when one is being spoken to (MS 192). One should always be nicely dressed as well, and in general should "eat less, have less valuable dress and ornaments, rise earlier and retire later" than one's guru (MS 2.194).

One should not engage in conversation with a teacher when reclining, eating, or with an averted face (MS 2.175), or generally sit too comfortably when in their presence (MS 2.198). One should always use the appropriate honorifics when speaking to or about one's guru (MS 2.199), and one should leave the conversation if ever one should hear one's guru being criticized (MS 2.200). And, of course, one should never censure or defame one's guru (MS 2.201).

Some of the basic duties of an initiate include offering fuel on the sacred fire (like *Koshala*), sleeping on the ground, and in general doing what is beneficial for the guru (MS 108), such as fetching water, flowers, fuel and other amenities (MS 2.182). As we have seen, the various duties for disciples were intended for the development of the moral character and mental fortitude of the student.

Meeting My Guru by Cogen Bohanec, MA, PhD

On September 26, 2021, I met with my guru in a private room at our temple. Several years earlier, in an earnest gesture of faith, I had sacrificed my beloved hair for tonsure, after having had beautiful long hair for over 30 years. Now, a neat *shikha* (tuft of hair) on the back of my head was all that was left of my mane. This symbolized that I was serious and ready to commit to spiritual life. I was wearing a spotless white dhoti and kurta, formal dress for a very special occasion. I was to be initiated as a *brahmin* (member of the "priestly class") by my guru—His Grace, Vaisheshika Dasa Adhikari Maharaja.

I sat down before my guru, and he whispered the sacred *gayatri* mantras into my right ear, as gurus had done for disciples for thousands of years, in an unbroken connection to an unfathomable

antiquity. Spiritual traditions derive their power and authority from the strength of their connection to the past, as an accretion of the wisdom accumulated by countless lives of sages and practitioners who are ever-shaping the tradition in each successive generation. Donned in white, I was now entering deeply into that stream.

My Guru Maharaja presented me with the sacred thread (*upavita*) of a *brahmin*, and instructed me on how I would use it to observe *tri-sandhya*, that is, recitation of the sacred mantras three times a day, before sunrise, at noon, and during the evening twilight. This practice has since become my spiritual axis around which my day revolves. I can hardly describe the joy of centering myself by stopping what I'm doing three times a day, and bringing my mind, body, speech, heart, and soul back to my connection to the Beloved Divine.



Gurus are not all alike: With Lord Siva Nataraja dancing at the center, a few of the many kinds of gurus are depicted by the artist. They are men and women, maunis and public figures, solitary yogis and heads of mathas. They are skilled pundits and writers, wandering mendicants, untutored sages, forest dwellers and more.

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“surrender” is evidenced by how many Sanskrit terms are used to describe it (*sharanagati*, *prapanna*, *paridati*, *pranidhana*, etc.).

Discipleship as Austerity

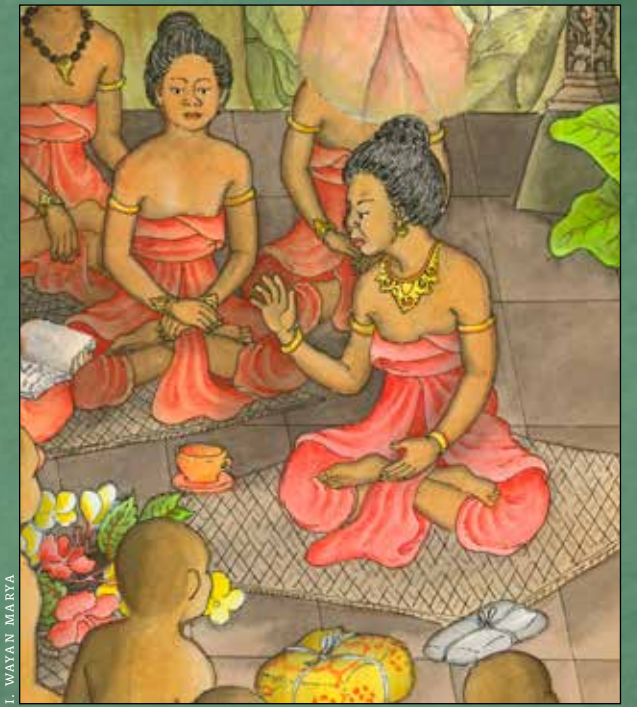
Austerity has a peculiar connotation in English. Perhaps this is because Western cultural tendencies in modern times favor consumption. Consumerism is in complete opposition to austerity, which, in its most basic form, is restricting consumption (*aparigraha*), a practice that could go a long way towards addressing various forms of systematic violence in our modern society, such as global inequities of wealth, environmental destruction, animal exploitation, habitat loss, climate change, etc.

The basic definition of *austerity*, then, is the “generative power of voluntary discomfort.” Few people realize this power as directly as students, of any culture! When we study instead of indulging in recreation, we experience discomfort, and it produces something—intelligence, disciple, character, etc. This can be observed elsewhere in our lives: the austerity of employment whereby discomfort produces income, in social activism whereby discomfort produces social change and conditions of justice, in fitness whereby discomfort produces health and wellbeing, etc. Austerity (*tapas*), the generative power of voluntary discomfort, is one of the basic truths of the human existence, challenge, and improvement.

So it is for the disciple. The basic austerity of the disciple is service, or voluntary discomfort one engages in to discover knowledge. In that sense, one must earn knowledge. Likewise, in the modern academy, we have to serve

the lineage of our discipline by showing due deference to the great thinkers of our disciplines, demonstrating mastery over their teachings, and enduring the constant austerity of having our work critiqued and rejected by scores of professors, peer-reviewers, tenure committees, etc. Before one is recognized at all by the academy, one has had to endure many years of severe discomfort for the right, the *adhikara*, to be a custodian and producer of our collective culture of knowledge.

While surrender can sound like one is giving up control, it simply means that one has faith that one’s guru knows something that one does not. It is not dissimilar in that regard to trusting authorities in any field, such as when one lays on the operating table “surrendering” oneself to the surgeon, or when one “surrenders” one’s car to a trusted mechanic, construction contractor, etc. Likewise, the first step in spiritual advancement, as in daily life, is admitting that there are those who know more than oneself about a certain topic, and having the intelligence to trust them and benefit from their wisdom that has likely been the accretion of knowledge over generations, tested by countless experts in their communities.



Types of Gurus

BY COGEN BOHANEK, MA, PHD

The term *guru* just means “teacher,” or literally “weight,” namely “one who has the weight of authority” based on their acceptance in a certain community of experts. One cannot just proclaim that one is an expert; one must be recognized as such by others in the same field of their expertise. Thus, we might have a great number of “gurus.” But, on the other hand, given the considerations of appropriation and cultural violence, it might be safest if we restrict the term *guru* to its traditional usage, namely, an expert and authority in the dharma traditions—Buddhist Dharma, Hindu Dharma, and Jain Dharma. (Dr. Sherma is a recognized authority within a Hindu tradition, so I feel it is appropriate to refer to her as my “academic guru.”)

However, not all gurus (even in the traditional sense) are those from whom we seek initiation. The early Hindu (or Vedic) traditions distinguished between two classes of teachers: the *acharya* and the *upadhyaya*. For example, *Manu-Smṛti* (MS) states that the *acharya* is “ten times greater” than the *upadhyaya*. Some might consider the *upadhyaya* in the Vedic system to be more like a tutor and the *acharya* as the guru from whom one might seek initiation (Chaudri 2008, 39).

Different traditions will have different nomenclature to make the distinction between an initiating guru or *diksha-guru*, and one from whom we learn spiritual topics, such as *shiksha-guru* (“instructing guru”), *shravana-guru* (“a guru we listen to”), or *upadhyaya* (“teacher” or “preceptor.”)

Theological Union in Berkeley, California, under the guidance of Dr. Rita Sherma who is well known in the academy for being an important preceptor, leader, initiator, and seminal thinker in her work of advocating for Hindu theology as an academic discipline. After meeting her, I knew that I had found perhaps the rarest of all gurus—a mentor and advisor who could help me navigate the turbulence of eking out a successful research project, and eventually, a successful academic career.

After five years studying Sanskrit at UC Berkeley, I realized that I wanted to help define what “Hindu traditions” means to practitioners in the modern era; how these traditions might speak to issues of global capitalism, environmental destruction, climate change, mass extinction; racial and ethnic marginalization, colonialism, gender and sexual oppression, and the horrors of modern animal agriculture (to name only a few). I wanted to use my voice as an insider in this burgeoning academic discipline of Hindu theology. With Dr. Sherma, I had found the perfect “academic guru.”

Doubtlessly, as an outsider to a given tradition, a scholar may know

aspects of that tradition better than many—or even most—who practice it. But, since the majority of data to support religious truth claims come from firsthand experience, it is difficult, if not impossible, to access the data that supports the truth claims of any religious tradition as an outsider. Spectator objectivity can only take us so far in understanding religious truth claims. Objectivity excels at exteriority, but subjectivity is required for interiority, for essences.

While an “outsider” can have immense authority to “present” a tradition, they lack the authority, the *adhikara*, to “represent” the tradition by constructing meaning within a tradition, that is, defining what *religious traditions* means rather than what it simply is. *Adhikara* allows one to have greater access to the tradition in a more intimate way, in a firsthand way, as an insider.

In the vast traditions of Hindu Dharma—properly known as either Vedic Dharma, or Sanatana Dharma, or the “infinite (*sanatana*) harmonious order (*dharma*)” of personal, interpersonal and even cosmic reality—one attains such *adhikara* through initiation, or *diksha*. This means that one has surrendered to a guru. The importance of this



Serving the Master: Siva is drawn within, perhaps contemplating the many ways that shishyas work to strengthen the satguru's mission. These include cleaning the ashram floors, editing and publishing, conducting rites, growing food, feeding guests, staffing the bookstore, caring for the cows, construction, teaching beginners, gathering flowers for the daily puja, building websites, hosting visitors, caring for the gardens, chopping wood and fetching water from the river.

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understood the divine. Who has instructed you?" Upakoshala answered, "One who is other than human. Indeed, what here had seemed completely hidden now has instantly become otherwise. The sacrificial fires have made everything seem complete" (CU 4.14.2). The guru then adds one final teaching regarding how to realize the Divine, and how to do so when engaged in religious practice, ritual and mantra (CU 4.10-17).

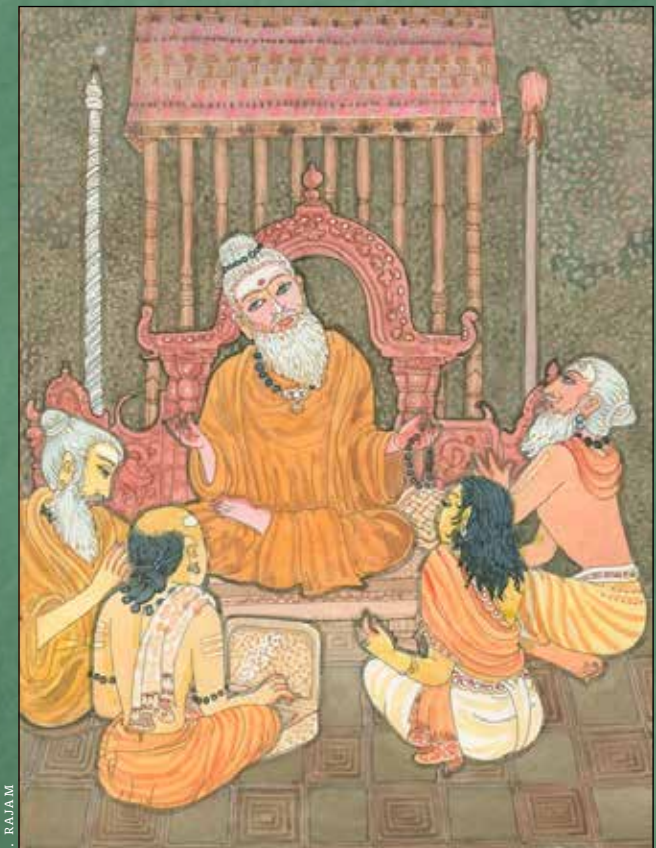
With these parables, we see the common theme that through austerity, the student prepares themselves for the most esoteric teachings. But the preparation itself is almost as edifying as the actual instruction. With the austerity of the student life, the disciple learns discipline and is able to understand the deep wisdom in everyday actions. This includes the humility to engage in service to someone or Something greater than ourselves. For King Janashruti, that involved the realization that all of his worldly accomplishments were miniscule when compared to the wisdom and humility born of spiritual practices and austerity of his guru, Raikva. The brahmacharin who approached Kapeya Shaunaka and Kakshaseni Abhipratatrin shows us that the true satisfaction and nourishment comes from spiritual wisdom rather than the pursuits of worldly comforts, and that we are deeply "fed" by the teachings of our gurus. From Satyakama Jabala we learn the importance of a disciple being truthful and honest even when we feel ashamed by who we are. Here, like with Koshala, we are taught that a great deal of spiritual wisdom is gained by the service itself. The service attitude, which when adopted, allows us to see

the wisdom of the natural world, animals, our daily rituals, and in other places, where we defer our comfort to the well-being and care of others—particularly those who hold the spiritual teachings which are the cultural treasures of humanity. If we, as disciples are to be like them (our gurus) one day—if we are to be custodians of ancient wisdom—then we must be prepared to experience difficulty in the hope that we will gain that which is far greater than worldly comfort.

As in our daily lives, with our spiritual lives we find that reward is proportional to the effort that comes from discipline. But while "discipline" implies restrictions, our fortitude in any discipline ultimately comes from a positive source: the degree of enthusiasm and inspiration that we bring to our spiritual practice. This is where a guru can perhaps be most beneficial.

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Choosing a Guru

By Cogen Bohanec, MA, PhD

The *Manu Smriti* gives the would-be disciple some good advice as to what constitutes a good teacher. These qualities are generally related to what behavior is appropriate for a brahmin in general. For example, the guru's instruction should be centered on ahimsa, as "nonviolence to all beings is the highest duty." Reflecting this, their words should always be "gentle, sweet, pure, fair, and guarded when teaching that which is to be attained by Vedanta" (MS 2.159). They should not speak words that incite fear or cause pain or injury to others (MS 2.161), and should be humble to the point they even "fear praise and homage as if it were poison" (MS 2.162-163).

It is also important to ensure that one's would-be guru doesn't differ considerably from one's core values; otherwise, it will be hard, if not impossible, to maintain the appropriate level of faith and respect in one's guru that is required for proper instruction.

So it was in ancient India, where this principle seems to have been the same but the cultural context of the gurukula was different. There are a number of didactic parables illustrating this point in the *Upanishads* and other texts.

Perhaps the most poignant story regarding the relationship between austerity discipleship is that of Upakoshala Kamalayana. After twelve years of service to the same guru (Haridrumata Gautama) as Satyakama, despite a number of other disciples completing their studies during that time, he was still inadequately prepared. When the guru's wife interceded on Upakoshala's behalf, Haridrumata Gautama (the guru) simply left for a journey without instructing poor Upakoshala. Upakoshala then decided "to fast to address his mental anguish." He confesses to the guru's wife, "Within myself there are various forms of desire. I suffer by a number of afflictions, so I will commence a fast" (*Chandogya Upanishad* 4.10.3). [Note: All translations herein are those of the current author.]

Fasting is an important and common form of austerity in dharma traditions. With fasting, we attempt to find a stability, and inner

contentment, despite the challenge of experiencing an intensified desire for food. Here, fasting and food can be a synecdoche where food represents the desire for external sources of happiness, and fasting represents our resistance to that desire and seeking rather an internal source of contentment and satisfaction that is unmoved by external circumstances. The result is that we diminish the power that worldly desires have over us. However, any restrictions should be engaged in only if we are honest with ourselves in terms of what will be too much, otherwise we risk a dangerous backlash where desire will become uncontrollable and the results can be damaging—to our spiritual, mental, and/or physical health.

Satyakama seems to have achieved the desired result. His particular service to his guru was to attend to the sacred household ritual fires kept by brahmins. While fasting, in the process of engaging in this service, the sacred fires "spoke" to him, and instructed him regarding the nature of the Divine (CU 4.10.4-4.13.2).

Like with Satyakama, when the guru returned to find Upakoshala, he asked incredulously, "Your face is radiant as if you have

Meet the Next Gen Dancers

Ranee Ramaswamy learned Bharatanatyam at an early age, but only found her destiny in it after migrating to the US and watching Alarmel Valli perform

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT A young aspiring dancer from Chennai would have to travel all the way to America to really understand the ancient Bharatanatyam dance form? This Dance of the Gods gives humans celestial power, beauty and joy, and also the strength to face the vicissitudes of life. Like a powerful wind on a sailing ship, it can propel you from one country to another on the other side of world. It can also serve as an anchor and bulwark to survive and flourish in a new world.

This is a love story of a family of devoted dancers—mother and daughters—and the dance guru who changed their lives. The guru is the legendary Indian dancer Alarmel Valli—one of India's greatest Bharatanatyam dancers, who has been conferred the Padma Bhushan by the President of India and the award of Chevalier of the Arts and Lettres by the French government. The dancers who are perpetuating her lineage in the West are a remarkable trio—mother Ranee Ramaswamy and daughters Aparna and Ashwini. These

three are the core of the Ragamala Dance Company, which has won accolades around the world.

Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy's Ragamala Dance Company, now in its 30th year, is an independent dance company based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Over the years it has had a dance dialogue with national and international artists and created many presentations, including *Fires of Varanasi: Dance of the Eternal Pilgrim* at the 45th Annual Soorya Festival in October 2022 at various locations in Kerala, India. This six-performance engagement is part of Ragamala's 2022/2023 season, which culminates with a 30th-anniversary gala celebration in July 2023.

Ironically, Ranee, Aparna and Ashwini never encountered Alarmel Valli in India. This life-changing connection was made in America, after they had moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota and the great dancer came there on tour.

The story started decades ago with Ranee, the daughter of an entomologist father and a homemaker mother, growing up in a very

traditional joint family of religious Iyer Hindu brahmins in Chennai, then called Madras. Ranee remembers learning slokas at a very early age, constantly visiting temples and also having her hair shaved in a Hindu ritual when she was a young girl.

Chennai may be the home of Bharatanatyam, but in this deeply religious family it was not given much importance. Ranee had never even seen a performance on stage. However, a class once taken at the age of five with a cousin opened her eyes to the magic of dance. Remembers Ranee, "I was so enthralled by the idea of imparting this gorgeous lesson through steps and movements with performances on stage that I begged my parents to get me classes. So when I was seven or eight, they found a teacher who had just started classes at a ladies club, and when those ended, the teacher came to teach me at home." Ranee learned dancing till the age of 15, but she never had an arangetram, a first formal performance, as her uncles and cousins did not approve of girls performing on stage—they felt the money was better saved

for her wedding and dowry!

And so, real life took over. Ranee recalls, "I had an arranged marriage at 20. By 23 I had my daughter Aparna, and by 26 I had left India. So my dance career ended like that—but then I came to Minneapolis and it flowered into something awesome and wonderful."

When she first came to Minneapolis, the Indian population (now 50,000) consisted of just 100 people. They embraced Ranee and her family as new immigrants. Social life revolved around the community and the Hindu temple. As a dancer, she was invited to perform at Diwali festivities. She recalls, "People around me really enjoyed it, and asked me if I would teach the kids, but I didn't know enough to teach them. So after a year and a half in Minneapolis I went back to India looking for teachers so that I could learn all the basics and come back." When she returned to her new adopted home, she became the dance teacher there.

When Alarmel Valli came to Minneapolis in 1978 for a performance, Ranee was mesmerized by her style of performing and took a two-week extensive residency with her. This was the teacher of her dreams, the dance training she never got, so Ranee wholeheartedly adopted her as her guru. Every year she and Aparna would travel to Chennai to study with Alarmel. That learning process has continued over the years.

"When I started learning from Valli, I saw Bharatanatyam as something amazing. It wasn't just the basic Bharatanatyam—it was so exquisite that I wanted the world to see it, not just the Indian community," says Ranee. She collaborated with American artists,

Dance in their genes: (Clockwise from above) Aparna Ramaswamy in "They Rose at Dawn," a solo performance at the Joyce Theater in New York in 2016; (below, right to left) Ranee Ramaswamy with daughters Aparna and Ashwini in the Ragamala studio in 2022; Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy, Mirabai Versions, 1991; Alarmel Valli (center, with dance timing stick), Ranee and Aparna Ramaswamy in Valli's studio in Chennai, shortly after they met.

Our Ancient Temple Dance Meets the Future



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GRAHAM TOLBERT



DARIAL SNEED



thereby making her performances more accessible to local audiences. The very first such production was held in 1994 at Great American History Theater with sitarist-composer David Whetstone, incorporating the dancers' movements to drumming and lines of poetry by Whetstone.

It was a labor of love. As co-artistic directors, the mother and daughter continued choreographing, often with Alarmel Valli, to engage the American audiences. In the ensuing years, Ragamala became an American success story by putting together funding for collaborative works with various partners including Walker Art Center, Theater Mu, the Miami University Performing Arts Series, Arts Midwest, National Endowment for the Arts and the McKnight Foundation. In 2011 the company performed at the Maximum India Festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC.

Younger daughter Ashwini joined the company after finishing college. Born and brought up in America, she brought her own perspectives to the company as choreographer associate, creating new works which took the dance story to a wider audience.

Over the years more dancers joined the company. Many ancient stories were presented with a contemporary spin, making old stories new and relevant again. *Sacred Earth*, which was presented in India while on tour, explored the relationship between nature and humans, and incorporated the philosophy and art of kolam chalk drawings on stage. *Fires of Varanasi* explores the sacred rituals around the city of Varanasi. *Written in Water* was created from Paramapadam, the original game that Snakes and Ladders is based on. Interwoven with that is a 12th-century Sufi poem about enlightenment called "The Conference of the Birds," which

describes seven transitional states of being.

These ancient stories carry truths which are relevant in today's troubled times, from the crisis in Ukraine to the hard reality of climate change, says Aparna. "So we take it very much to heart and we try to bring the old to today's stage."

She herself started young: "I was drawn to it, and had a love for the dance and the music. Because I was a new immigrant, it was a way for me to connect, in perhaps ways I didn't understand, with my cultural roots. As I got slightly older, I was just always fascinated with watching dance and listening to classical Carnatic music."

For her the meeting with Alarmel Valli was life-changing. "I was eight or nine years old when we met our teacher. In that instant I was just floored, absolutely captivated by watching her perform. And she still continues to captivate me even more deeply after all these years. So for me, it was love at first sight. From then on, we spent four months every year in India with her. So it was a very focused time, and we were so fortunate to have time studying one-on-one with her."

For Ashwini, who was born and raised in America, dance was never the laser focus of life as it was for her mother and older sister. She says, "For the first many years it was more of a hobby for me. I took dance always as an activity to appease the family and keep in the loop basically with the culture." She was interested in trying what her friends were trying—gymnastics, ice skating, piano and flute, visual art and reading. All these different experiences were a part of her life.



COURTESY RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY

She joined the company at the age of 12, participating in all the productions. After college, she came back to the dance world. "So I came home to try it out in reverse. I said if I didn't try it now it wasn't going to happen. I spent many years learning, then relearning; kind of re-shifting how I approach this art form that is so vast that you are forever a student."

Since then, Ashwini has spent a lot of time working on both the craft of

dance and choreography and is deeply involved in both fields. She had to figure out her own contribution, establishing an aesthetic within the Ragamala umbrella: "It's just through my perspective as someone who was born here and has had more influences from this country, and then kind of going back to exploring my Indian heritage through dance and through the themes I select." Indeed, Ranee, Aparna and Ashwini have each had their own varied interactions with their two homelands, which further enriches their performances and world view.

The Bharatanatyam dance vehicle is immersed in spirituality, mythological stories and metaphysical concepts. Says Aparna, "I think this incredibly rich and complicated spiritual world is in some ways so open and just so incredibly accepting. It is all accessed through the dance and the music in a way that's very, very personal and very visceral."

For mother and daughters, dance is so much more than just an incredible art form—it is as vital as a heartbeat, necessary as a breath. In the essence of living, it is, simply put, a form of prayer.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lavina Melwani is a New York-based journalist who has written on the arts, spirituality and life for several international publications. She is a columnist for CNBCTV18.com and is a co-founder of Children's Hope India. She blogs at www.lassiwithlavina.com. You can follow her @lassi_with_lavina

Modern Touch...

Traditional Sense

Continuing the art: (above left) Aparna performing a solo in Chennai, India in 2015; (above, right) a young Ranee Ramaswamy; (below, left to right) Ashwini (foreground) with the rest of the company performing in *Sacred Earth* at Celebrate Brooklyn! in 2022; world premiere of *Fires of Varanasi* at The Kennedy Center in Washington DC in 2021; Aparna rehearsing in the Ragamala studio in 2016; Ashwini and Aparna in *Fires of Varanasi* at the Joyce Theater in New York in 2021



ARUN KUMAR



JOHN WHITING



STEVEN PISANO



HISTORY

TEMPLE INSCRIPTIONS

Illuminating the pivotal role of ancient Hindu temples in the preservation of South India's history encapsulated by chronicles carved in stone

BY SUNITHA MADHAVAN, CHENNAI

FOR THOSE WHO VALUE KNOWLEDGE OF the ancient past, temples built by the Imperial Cholas are historical treasure troves. Their inscriptions impart knowledge of the forgotten past, revealing the culture and history of this mighty dynasty which dominated South India and much of Southeast Asia. The heights of the Cholas' achievements took place between the 10th and 13th centuries ce. Many gems of knowledge await us from the precepts of the great Chola rulers.

A stone temple is a bastion of information from the time it was created and from the people who constructed it. Throughout South India, not only do we find information in a structure's architecture or in the geological makeup of its stones. Here we find countless inscriptions, missives from the past, that can be dated to a period, era or regnal year of a monarch. So, too, do we find metallic records, the copper-plate charters known as *thambarasasanas*—notifications, frequently official in character, concerning proclamations

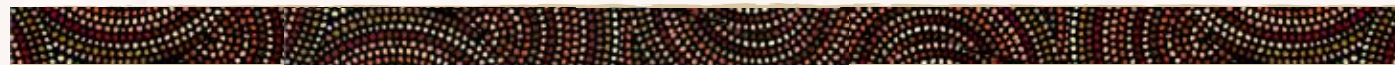
or endowments. Temple inscriptions on imperishable materials like stone and metal were intended as lasting records, not subject to revisions or interpolations. Early granite temples were replete with such inscriptions. Some of them even had in their custody the copper plate grants that documented endowments made for their upkeep. Epigraphy, the science of deciphering such inscriptions, is

the primary tool for historians to study the past, which impacts our present and future.

Discovering the Past

Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya was the first Indian epigraphist, historian and Chief Epigraphist to the Government of India. In 1906 he discovered a string of 31 copper plates weighing over 200 pounds, issued by King Rajendra Chola I, from the Vataranyesvara Temple in Thiruvallangadu village near Madras. These furnished the genealogy of the medieval Cholas starting from King Vijayalaya (middle 9th century ce), who wrested Thanjavur from the Mutharaiyars. His son Aditya Chola I vanquished the Pallavas of Kanchi, initiating the reign of Imperial Cholas. These inscriptions have provided much of what we know of the history of the dynasty.

Interesting nuggets of information from Chola temple inscriptions pepper the account on their judicious administration. They built not only magnificent temples but also irrigation tanks for



their agrarian economy to prosper. How well they were all managed is known from the inscriptions. The select highlights presented here relate chiefly to three prominent monarchs of the age, Parantaka Chola I (the son of Aditya I) Rajaraja Chola I (the great grandson of Parantaka I) and Rajendra Chola I (the son of Rajaraja Chola I).

The Pallavas, the predecessors to the Cholas, built rock hewn temples. Tamil readers of Kalki Krishnamurthi's historic novel *Sivagamiyin Sabatham* would be familiar with the monolithic constructions at Mamallapuram. Structured granite temples were the forte of the Cholas, who came later. The crest jewel among them is the stone structure at Thanjavur—Brihadishvara Temple, built by Rajaraja Chola I. The historical fiction of Kalki Krishnamurthi's magnum opus, *Ponniyin Selvan*, pivoted on the bewildering court intrigues of Rajaraja Chola I, prior to his enthronement.

The era's true history is authenticated by epigraphical evidences. The Pallavas reigned supreme in South India between 600–900 ce. Thereafter, the Chola hegemony prevailed. The heritage of the Pallava empire was kept up by the Cholas in temple architecture, administration and political systems. A temple built by one dynasty may be expanded or renovated by subsequent ruling monarchs, who leave their mark on it. The Kailasanathar Temple at Kanchipuram, originally constructed by Rajasimha Pallava (Narasimha II), contains inscriptions of both Pallava and Chola periods. We are informed it was Parantaka Chola I who covered the roof of the Siva temple at Chidambaram with gold at Vyaggraha—the Sanskrit name for Puliur, the "tiger village"—in Tamil parlance. This bears reference to Chidambaram temple, where legend has it that Vyagracharya, a sage with tiger's feet, worshiped Lord Siva.



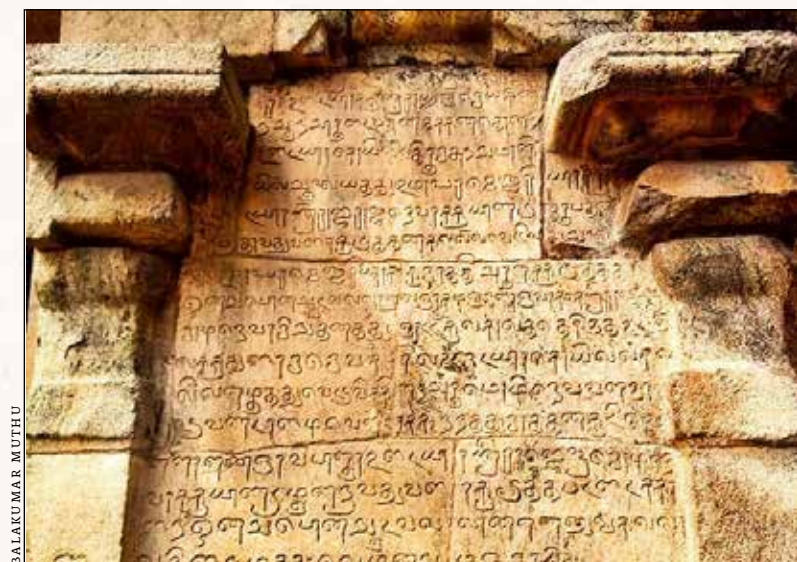
In Awe of Ancient Governance

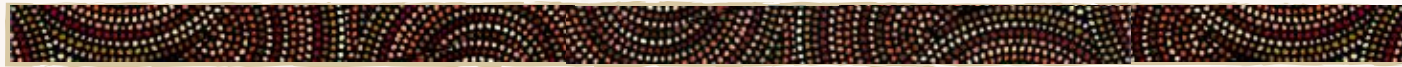
Undisputed masters of stonework, the Cholas also excelled in statecraft. Near Kanchipuram is the hamlet Uthiramerur, where a group of temples were built by Nandivarman Pallava. Of exceptional interest are inscriptions in Grantha script, Tamil language, of Parantaka Chola-I (907–955 ce) discovered there by V. Venkayya in 1898 at Vaikuntha Perumal Temple and on the walls of the Grama Sabha Mandapa of Sundara Varadaraja Temple. They register rules made by Parantaka Chola I for the proper management of village committees. The two most famous of these inscriptions were brought forward and published in 1889. During his 12th regnal year, Parantaka sent an officer to Uthiramerur with instructions that rules be framed for good governance. Laxity resulted in mismanagement of funds. Two years later, the emperor—though engrossed in expanding the empire—was paying equal attention to local administration. He sent another letter calling for stringent regulations to correct the mismanagement. The village assembly heeded

the royal request, and soon the problem was resolved. It must be noted that the emperor could not impose the decision. Only when the residents agreed would it take effect. The Cholas had perfected a highly organized system of central control which simultaneously fostered village autonomy, recognizing each village as a little republic.

Once deciphered, Uthiramerur's inscriptions wowed Westerners and awed scholars. In ancient times village administration was honed to a perfect system through elections. Though the Chola records are unique in the density of inscriptions elaborating their sys-

Preserving history: (far left) close up of temple inscriptions from 1010 ce; an artist's rendition of Rajaraja Chola I viewing the construction of Brihadishvara Temple; (above) abundant, irrigated paddy fields in a South Indian village; (below) according to inscriptions, Brihadishvara Temple was once covered in gold; Chola era temple writings etched in sandstone





UNKNOWN

Discovering the past: (above) Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya was the first modern Indian epigraphist; the 200 pound bundle of 31 copper plates he discovered at the Vataranyesvara Temple in Thiruvallangadu village. The plates detail the genealogy of the Chola rulers; (below) a painting commissioned by the British in the 1800s depicts a procession of a Siva murti through the streets of Thanjavur

tem of self-governance, inscriptions of the Pallavas and Pandyas also suggest the norm of self-governance for village life. In this millennium, when Bhumi Puja, ground blessing, was performed in December 2020 for India's new Parliament building, Prime Minister Modi lauded these inscriptions as a standing testimonial to the democratic character of



R. SHIVAJI RAO

the land from earliest times.

The second inscription of Parantaka I provides great detail on the method of electing the village government. It states that the arrangement was "for the prosperity of our village in order that wicked men may perish, and the rest may prosper." The settlement concludes: "Thus from this year onwards, as long as the sun and the moon endure, committees shall always be appointed by pot-tickets alone."

The engraved constitution of Uthiramerur reveals that the village was divided into 30 wards. The village assembly (governing body) consisted of committees—the Tank Committee, Garden Committee and Annual Committee for general supervision. These had 6, 12 and 12 members respectively—30 representatives in all, one drawn from each ward. The eligible members were nominated by the

resident villagers from every ward.

Purity in public life was held on a high pedestal. The qualifications for candidacy included age (35–70), education (knowledge of dharma in scriptures), property (residential house built on their own land, paying taxes) and conduct (acquired property through honest means). Disqualifications were also specified. Tenure of office was one year, and anyone who had served on any committee in the previous year was disallowed; the office could be held only by rotation. Those who had failed to submit accounts while in prior service were debarred from ever holding office again. If anyone had embezzled communal funds and defaulted, they, along with their family and friends, were debarred for seven generations. Thus, each village functioned as a nursery of virtue. The Sage of Kanchi, who lived for a 100 glorious years, had spoke on



WIKICOMMONS

the sublimity of the Uthiramerur inscriptions in Deivathin Kural, *The Voice of God*.

Secret ballot by pot-tickets was used for choosing committee members. A kudam (pot) was the ballot box; the ballots bearing the candidates' names were palm leaves. The ballots for each ward were packeted separately. The 30 packets were put in a pot. On the day of election, all villagers had to be present. The priests also assembled. The eldest among them lifted the pot containing the 30 packets. The contents were placed in an empty pot and shaken well. A little boy then drew one ballot from the pot and gave it to the official arbitrator, who received it with open palm and announced the name of the winning candidate from that ward. This procedure was repeated for each ward. The 30 men were thus chosen for the three committees. But if a member was found guilty of any offense while in office, he was fired at once and could never again hold office.

The inscriptions furnish incontestable proof of the exalted representative form of rural government in ancient times. Vincent A. Smith, in his book *The Early History of India*, remarks: "It is a pity that the apparently

excellent system of local self-government, really popular in origin, should have died out ages ago. Modern governments would be happier if they could command equally effective local agency."

The village assembly managed internal affairs—collecting taxes, making payments, maintaining charitable institutions and the village temple, performing works of public utility, and overseeing cultivation of land and irrigation needs. The inscriptions also suggest judicial function. The legendary report of the Madras Epigraphist demonstrates how the village community functioned effectively and efficiently in the realms of social, political, economic and religious life.

Valuing Temples

Parantaka Chola I gold gilded the roof of the Golden Hall of the dancing Siva at Chidambaram. His grandson Sundara Chola (alias Parantaka II—the father of Rajaraja I, "the Great") spent his last days there with his Queen Vanavanmahadevi. The Cholas were Saivites. Evidently this explains Rajaraja's affinity to Chidambaram Temple and the munificent gifts he made to it. Eventually



UNKNOWN

Temple patrons: (above) the golden roof at Chidambaram Temple, said to have been originally sponsored by Parantaka Chola I; the Sage of Kanchi, reads from temple inscriptions; (below) Rajaraja Chola depicted in front of the empire's powerful Navy

Rajaraja decided to build the great Siva temple at Thanjavur. Originally called Rajarajesvara (now Brihadisvara, or just "the Big Temple"), this edifice with its majestic 216-foot vimanam verily connects earth and heaven. The inscriptions tell us Rajaraja gold plated the entire structure. The mighty tower, dazzling in sunlight, is an awesome sight. Rightly has it been called Dakshinameru.

Copious inscriptions covering the base, walls and pillars of the Thanjavur Temple give detailed accounts by Rajaraja the Great (985–1014 CE) and his immediate family. Dr. E. Hultzsch and V. Venkayya published these inscriptions with their translation in English in Volume II of the series *South Indian Inscriptions*, a colossal feat that rolled out the red carpet for scholars to write factual history of the region.

A Greater Survey

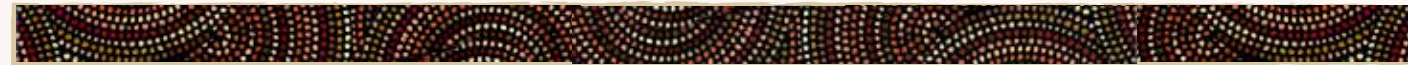
The inscriptions encompass every facet of Chola administration. They record the main divisions, subdivisions and villages in Chola territory, and the extent of Thanjavur city, with the names of its big streets, quarters and bazaars. Information can be gleaned on land survey operations. An extent of land as small as a tiny fraction of a veli (unit of land, about 85 acres) was assessed. Such minute fractions etched in the Thanjavur temple show the ingenuity of Chola-period accountants. Vincent Smith commented, "The lands under cultivation were carefully surveyed and holdings registered at least a century before the famous *Great Survey* of King William I." Dry and wet lands were assessed at different rates. Land revenue was payable in paddy



VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM



TIMES OF INDIA



or gold. We learn the standard weights and measures used, the prices of commodities, and the exchange value of articles of daily consumption, even food requirements and items consumed by the common man. Detailed tables of wages for different occupations give insight into the job opportunities in those times. The unit of account was gold *kasu*. Rate of interest was 12.5%.

Chilies seem to be unknown in the Chola country. Botanists believe the plant is not of indigenous origin. More curious is the absence of coconut both in temple worship and ordinary diet. We learn that various kinds of cloth were manufactured. Inscriptions of the great temple at Thanjavur reveal that gold was abundant and silver rare! The art of making jewels and bronze murtis was perfected. People were sufficiently wealthy, and

private property was safe.

Engraved on the walls of the central shrine are the fabulous gifts given by King Rajaraja and his venerable sister Kundavi. Grants were made by Queen Lokamahadevi and Rajaraja's other wives. Inscriptions on the pillars and niches describe copper images of Gods and of canonized Saiva saints installed in the temple by Rajaraja, his many queens, army general, the priest and the manager of the temple. The amount of gold ornaments and gold utensils gifted is incredible; the name, weight and value of each is spelled out. A great variety of rubies, nine gems, their quality and luster are listed. The gifts proclaim the wealth of the Chola dominion of his day.

Ancient Record Keeping

Temple inscriptions served the purpose of

registered documentation. Rajaraja's organizational genius is demonstrated in the systematic manner in which the various endowments were made and the principles laid down for their proper administration. He ordered that every grant made to the Rajarajesvara temple by the royalty, officers, priests and other philanthropists be engraved on stone. Thus we learn the object of each grant, with names of donors, donees, and their ancestry. Land grants have their boundaries mentioned.

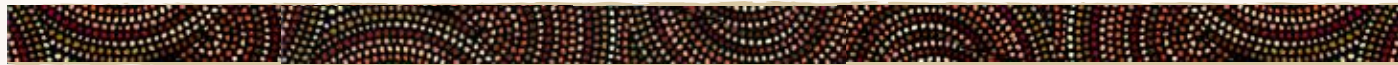
The temple employed people to conduct worship as well as for its maintenance, from Vedic priests down to the sweepers. Their duties, qualifications for recruitment, tenure of office and remuneration are all inscribed. Oduvars and Vedic teachers were paid. Students were given stipends. Sanskrit and Tamil learning was encouraged. Nambiyandar Nambi of Thiruvaisaipa was a contemporary of Rajaraja. Saivite literature was patronized, as were music and the arts. The temple maintained dancers, musicians, tailors, cooks, cleaners, torch and flag bearers, as well as fly-whisk and parasol holders. Employees were paid in paddy from temple lands. The temple also functioned as a bank. Money donated to the temple was loaned to village assemblies and corporate guilds; the interest flow was used to procure temple requirements.

During Rajaraja's reign, we hear for the first time of officers and commissions appointed to enquire into the misappropriation of endowments made to charitable institutions—overhauling accounts, calling for witnesses, taking evidence and punishing offenders. Rajaraja was emulated by his successors, as shown by an inscription in the Siva temple at Kutralam: for misappropriation of temple gold, the priests guilty of the embezzlement were disallowed to enter the premises and lost their means of livelihood.

Rajaraja's inscriptions also record his political conquests. His dominions comprised the whole of the Madras Presidency, a considerable portion of Mysore State and the island of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The entire war bounty went into temple construction. We understand he granted several villages in Ceylon to the Thanjavur temple, and they had to remit their assessment in paddy or money. Rajaraja honored his army for his conquests, mentioning 31 regiments and officers in the inscriptions.

Virtually every village had a temple. Village assemblies managed their internal

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Ancient history: (left) a Chola era temple inscription on a copper plate; an AI generated image of a village marketplace in Tamil Nadu during Chola times; (right) Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple, built by Rajendra Chola I



administration and temples. Local and overseas trade prospered. The temple in turn was gifted land and cattle, thereby ensuring a regular supply of paddy, flowers and dairy products for preparation of naivedyam (prasadam) and puja. Culinary enthusiasts will relish the types of prasadam cooked daily and on festival occasions. They were incised in stone with their recipes! Ghee was used to light perpetual lamps. The responsibility for providing every ingredient was pinned to the families of the beneficiaries. Not a single want of the temple was left unattended.

The inscriptions were intended, and respected, as a historical chronicle. An inscription at the Vaidyanatha Temple at Tirumalavadi in Trichinopoly recorded that when its central shrine must be rebuilt, that before pulling down the walls, the inscriptions engraved on them should be copied and re-engraved on the new walls. The king's successors similarly left complete records of their military achievements and temple renovation work. A record of Kulottunga Chola III (1178–1218 ce) from Sivayam, Karur district, states the inscriptions on the walls of the Vinayaka Pillayar shrine in Sivapurisvarar temple were re-engraved after the walls were repaired.

The Thiruvallangadu plates of Rajendra also recorded Rajendra's military campaigns, including his conquests of Kidaram in lower Burma, and Srivijaya in modern Sumatra. They describe his expedition to procure Ganga water to consecrate the marvelous second Brihadishvara Temple he built at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, his new capital.

In the process, the rulers of Kanuj and Chola kingdoms must have come to an accord. This is established by a damaged inscription of the Gahadavala dynasty of Kanuj found far south of Gangaikonda Cholapuram. The inscription is part of a record in the reign of Kulottunga Chola I, corresponding to the year 1110–11 ce. It is inferred that the Gahadavala family might have proposed to make a grant to the new temple there. For some reason the engraving is incomplete. Rulers of Kanuj worshiped Lord Surya as their tutelary deity. Kulottunga was influenced and inspired by them to build the Suryanar Koil in Thanjavur district.

Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple built by Rajendra Chola I is a close imitation of the Thanjavur temple, but the surviving epigraphic records are fragmentary. Wars between English-supported Nawab and the local Poligars in the early 18th century left much of the temple in ruins, and fallen stones were taken for building the lower Kollidam Anicut in 1836, a dam on the Narmada River.

We therefore fall back upon Tiruvallangadu copper-plate inscriptions issued by the emperor. These plates record the grant of village Palaiyanur to the Siva temple at the place. The same design of the royal seal found on the



ring that binds the copper-plates were in the coins minted by the Chola Emperor. These numismatics are also brought within the fold of epigraphy.

Caring for the People

The Chola kings demonstrated exemplary concern for people's health and well-being. Inscriptions by Rajendra Chola's son Veera Rajendra Deva (1063–1069 ce), found in Appan Venkatesa Perumal Temple at Thirumukkuda, reveal that the temple ran a hospital which provided ayurvedic treatment and herbal medicines following the ayurvedic text *Charaka Samhita*. Castor oil is mentioned to reduce excess bile in one's body. The hospital consisted of 15 beds that functioned in the Jananatha Mandapam there. It was named Veera Cholesvara Hospital. The staff comprised a doctor, a surgeon and two male nurses who brought herbs and firewood to prepare medicines. Two female nurses administered medicines, cooked food and fed the patients. A barber, a washerman, a potter and a gatekeeper were also employed. A lamp was kept burning all night.

Medicines were prepared in the form of medicated ghee, medicated oils and medicated water, made by mixing cardamom and lemon. Nasaiyam for nasal and kalikan for ocular treatments were used. Oil application was for reducing body heat; fumigation to correct vatta (air) and pitta (fire/bile) imbalances.

Inscriptions by Rajaraja Chola III (1216–1256 ce) show he established an asylum to treat mental disorders in the

Vedaranyesvara Temple at Nagapattinam.

The most important of all South Indian institutions has been the temple. Each is an oasis of peace and calm in the rush of today's society, yet despite their devotional and historical value, they are often neglected. Temple renovations must be carried out with great care to protect their inscriptions, which preserve our roots, our identity. Many a missing link in history may be supplied by these records.

The dedicated epigraphists of earlier times worked passionately to preserve our cultural heritage by deciphering temple inscriptions. There was no technology, GPS, not even electricity; transport and accommodation (if any) were primitive. Risking their health, they ventured into wilderness and deciphered the inscriptions from derelict temples for posterity. They were great explorers and karma yogis.

The temple is the elixir of our cultural and spiritual life. All mankind has a right to its blessing. It is our duty to see that our temples are maintained in both quality and quantity. Even the smallest act done toward this end will not go in vain, but will yield its results in due time.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sunitha Madhavan is the great grand daughter of Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya, India's first modern epigraphist. Sunitha currently lives in the United States after her 2002 retirement as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics at Meenakshi College following a long college teaching career. She authored the book *Life and Works of Rai Bahadur V. Venkayya*, published by the Tamil Arts Academy in 2020.

Celebrating Navaratri, Tamil Style

Complex displays of dolls, Golu Bommai, depict everything from weddings and rites of passage to stories about our saints and Gods

By KRATHU SANKARANARAYANAN, TEXAS

NOT MANY HINDU FESTIVALS CAN match the excitement that Navaratri brings to the families of India, where each state has its own way of celebrating. From parties to pujas over nine nights, Navaratri has it all! When most people think of the festival, they may think of fasting and of Garba and Dandiya, the dancing of Gujarat. That's one way of celebrating, but not how everybody observes this grand festival. In South India, we observe it in a very significant way by making a *Golu Bommai*, literally "display of dolls."

Before I dive into that tradition, I need to talk about the Navaratri festival as a whole. Observed in September/October, Navaratri spans nine nights and ten days, following the autumn equinox. The first three days are dedicated to the Goddess Durga, the next three to Lakshmi and the final three days to Saraswati. The origin of Navaratri begins with a demon named Mahisha terrorizing the worlds. He was misusing a boon that he could not be slain by a man. Mahisha was growing stronger and stronger, and somebody needed to stop him. Because of this, all of the Gods and Goddesses came together to form a power by giving their individual shakti (power) simultaneously to create a new Goddess, Devi. Devi then adopts the warrior form—Durga. Durga and Mahisha battle over a period of ten days, ending with Durga's victory. It was a battle of good over evil, in which good eventually won, which is the whole idea of Navaratri. This origin story is why Navaratri is celebrated for ten days and is also why it is devoted to Durga and the Nava (nine) Shaktis.

Golu dolls are an integral part of the festival for many South Indians, for whom Navaratri wouldn't be the same without them. According to one source, the word *golu* comes from the Tamil word *kolu*, meaning to show off. People display golus in their house to invite divine female energy into their homes. Because Navaratri is observed for the Nava Shaktis, families will invite young girls and married women to their house to offer them prasadam food and betel leaf. The families will show them the home's golu. These girls and women are seen as embodiments of the Nava Shaktis and Durga, who bring divine female energy and prosperity into the household.



My family's 2019 Navaratri display: (Left) Level 11: nine forms of Goddess Shakti; level 10 (left to right): Vishnu's abode in the milky ocean, Siva's abode in Kailasa, Markandeya being protected by Lord Siva from Yama, God of Death; level 9: Lord Muruga's forms in His six temples; level 8: Siva and Parvati's wedding; level 7: story of Andal, the Vaishnava woman saint; level 6: the ten avatars of Vishnu and His rescue of Gajendra the elephant; level 5: two sets depicting

devotees worshipping during pradosham, 14th day of the lunar calendar, and Narasimhar; level 4: story of Garba Rakshambigai temple where those expecting a child pray, story of Murugan's birth; level 3: story of Manu Needhi Cholan (205–161 bce), famed king who saved a cow's calf being killed by the Chola prince; level 2: samskaras, (left to right) first solid food, lamp ceremony, ear piercing; level 1: wedding, marapachi bommai dolls, see-mantham blessing for a pregnant woman

Golu structures share a lot of things in common with Dravidian temple gopurams. Gopurams and golus both have an odd number of tiers/steps, and both narrate scenes from Hinduism using figurines. The dolls in a golu can be displayed on the steps either as a singular doll or as part of a set. Singular figurines are usually larger and depict Gods and Goddesses. The dolls that are part of sets are smaller and depict stories from Hinduism and Indian culture as well as parts of our life.

These golu dolls are often kept and passed down for generations, like heirlooms. An example of this is *marapachi bommai*, figurines depicting a man and a woman made from wood instead of the usual clay or papier-mache. They are special because of the tradition of mothers giving such figurines to their daughters on their weddings. Most families who put up a golu usually have one such set, which stands out from the rest of the colorful clay dolls.

In Houston, Navaratri is a big deal, and people celebrate by throwing parties with their friends and family. Traditionally these gatherings would be female only, but today the whole family is welcome. During Navaratri, we attend many of our friends' and relatives' golus, as well as hosting our own. Golu gatherings are such a big deal nowadays that the term "golu hopping" has become popular. Because so many people celebrate golu over the nine nights, friends will visit multiple houses per day. The Houston scene is so big that, on some days, my family must visit over ten houses!

A typical visit starts with a warm welcome by the host. Then we show off our golu display. If someone doesn't catch the theme, we explain it to them and we talk to them about the dolls that are displayed that year, and often spend a few more minutes sharing each story. In my house, I usually jump in to do this because I love telling stories and sharing the cultural significance of the display.

Next, we invite our guests to sing devotional songs to our golu. We all sit down and give them our undivided attention. We not only do this for elders but for our younger guests as well, as it is an opportunity to encourage their talent and bring positive energy. In my house, because my brother and I play the mridangam drum, we accompany them if we know the song.

After we sit for a little bit, we offer the guests *thambulam*, food blessed in our home shrine, thanking them for their visit to our house. Thambulam consists of vethala pakku sweets, kumkum, a fruit and a small gift.



Ramayana: the 2019 side display with many scenes from the story of Lord Rama

that those have grains in them.

The first dolls that go on are the Nava Shaktis. In our 2019 display, they went on the eleventh step, as the festival is to honor them and Durga. The Nava Shakti set is especially important to my family, because these were the first set my parents ever bought after their wedding. On the tenth step we placed the Siva and Vishnu figurines. After the ninth step, we place more dolls and sets that depict demigods and social life themes. Going up the steps thus signifies the evolution from human to God. On the left side display in 2019 we placed sets related to *Ramayana*, and on the right side

we placed sets related to Krishna.

During Navaratri, as already mentioned, we visit friends and relatives. On the ninth day of the festival, we perform puja to Saraswati, Goddess of knowledge and creativity. We bring all our textbooks and musical instruments into the prayer room. We invoke the Goddess into the stack of books and instruments so that we can do well in our education and musical journeys with Her blessings.

On the tenth and last day, known as Vijaya Dashami, we perform Punar Puja to Saraswati. We pray to Her, then open a book and read one page along with playing a little bit on the instruments. One of the traditions of Vijaya Dashami is that children start something new that day—school, music classes, etc. This is because on the tenth day of Durga and Mahisha's battle, Durga was victorious and killed the demon Mahisha. Because of this victory, anything that is initiated on this auspicious day will be successful. Vijaya Dashami marks the end of the Navaratri festival.

Navaratri to me means a lot. It has something for everyone and is unique compared to the other Hindu festivals. Everybody has their own way of celebrating, from fasting and praying, to visiting houses. Navaratri truly has it all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krathu Sankaranarayanan is an 8th grader from Houston, Texas. He loves volunteering in his local community and enjoys writing, swimming, coding and science.



My Super Summer Camp

Getting a better grip on mind and emotions

BY TANESHA KUMARASWAMY
BENGALURU, INDIA

DURING SUMMER HOLIDAYS, I attended the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana's summer camp in Jigani on the outskirts of Bengaluru. At first, I was not interested, as we had to wake up at 5am and there would be no internet access for the kids. I wondered how I would spend my time without email and YouTube. My mother insisted it would be a wonderful time to learn new things. Today, I'm glad I attended the camp, which immensely helped me to be a better student and a good person. It gave me answers as to why we do yoga, pranayama, sing bhajans and follow various practices.

In our camp, we had around 80 kids, including some from neighboring Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra. After waking at 5am, we did yoga postures and meditation from 5:30 to 7:00. I felt so good while doing Surya Namaskar. We were taught new postures every two days. Doing yoga early in the morning was very refreshing and in this serene environment made me feel as if I were thousands of miles away from Bengaluru's rampant traffic and loud noises.

From 7:00 to 8:00, we chanted shlokas and sang bhajans. During breakfast, hot traditional dishes such as idli-sambar and khichdi (rice and lentil with vegetables) were relished by all children. After breakfast, we performed karma yoga, including sweeping the corridors and watering the plants, with bhajans playing in the background. After



that work, a warm shower refreshed me for the day's lecture.

For me, the highlight of the summer camp was listening to these empowering two-hour lectures by trained yoga teachers. Each instructor encouraged us to ask questions at the end of their talk.

I learned about "Mindful Eating," and now I try to follow this every day. Before attending this summer camp, I thought that eating with a spoon was hygienic. I used to watch TV while having my dinner. According to mindful eating, meals should involve all the five senses. This can be done by focusing our mind on food, seeing the food, then imbibing the aroma, using fingers to eat, and listening to the sound of chewing. My heart fills with happiness and gratitude while following these principles.

Another excellent discourse was "Yoga for Memory Development." As a student, I have to remember so many historical names, math formulas and science equations to excel in my studies. From the Yoga for Memory Development discourse, I came to know that keeping free from stress, eating good food and getting enough sleep play an important role in memory. Now, I make sure that I eat well, sleep at 10pm, and do yoga or exercise every day. I have noticed that doing pranayama calms my mind, and now I'm stress-free always.

We would end the discourses by doing pranayama, followed by a wholesome lunch—roti, rice, vegetable side dish, rasam (hot lentil soup), dal (thick lentil gravy) and a sweet (kheer or kesari). Everything was cooked with very little oil, and without onions or garlic. The food was tasty, even though the dishes were simple!

In the evenings, I enjoyed playing cricket with the kids for two hours. Some campers played volleyball and kho-kho (a tag game). After playing, we had snacks and then bhajan session. I learned so many uplifting songs, and now I try to sing these bhajans while helping my mother with household chores.

Our last session for the day was called Happy Assembly when kids got an opportunity to showcase their talents. I really enjoyed seeing the amazing talents, as they sang divine songs, recited shlokas or performed traditional and folk dances. One day I danced Bharatanatyam, and another, I chanted ten *Bhagavad Gita* shlokas.

Wake up	4:30 am
Yogasana	5:30 am - 6:45 am
Gita Chanting	6:45 am - 7:15 am
Breakfast	7:15 am - 8:00 am
Karma Yoga	8:00 am - 8:45 am
Bath & Wash	8:45 am - 10:00 am
Lecture	10:00 am - 11:00 am
Pranayama	11:00 am - 12:00 noon
Lunch	12:00 noon - 1:00 pm
DRT / Cartoon / Library	1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
Creativity	2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
Happy Assembly Preparation	3:30 pm - 4:30 pm
Snacks	4:30 pm - 5:00 pm
Games	5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
Bhajan	6:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Dinner	7:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Happy Assembly	8:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Diary writing	9:00 pm - 9:30 pm
Sleep night	9:30 pm

Our camp: (above) the day's rigorous schedule ran from 4:30 am to 9:30 pm; (below) campers in the tree pose

On the last day, I was part of a drama, Bharata Bhakti, based on the *Ramayana*.

I learned the amazing Deep Relaxation Technique—DRT. On some busy days, when I don't have time for 30 minutes of yoga, I just do pranayama and padmasana for 8 minutes, and I feel so calm. When I do DRT before going to sleep, I feel so refreshed and enthusiastic when waking in the morning.

During my stay in summer camp, my parents got videos and photos of the activities almost every day. Some of my friends were sad as they were not allowed to call their parents. I also missed checking my email. I feel that kids should be allowed to call their parents and access the internet for half an hour a day.

Attending this summer camp has transformed me into a strong and confident girl. I now know it is possible to be productive and learn new things without the internet! I have learned to adapt to new places and new friends. I told my school friends about this summer camp, and they are inspired to attend in the future! Today, I'm so grateful to God, my parents and teachers for giving me this opportunity to learn everything—from meditation to yoga.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tanesha Kumaraswamy, 14, is in ninth grade. She enjoys singing devotional songs, yoga and reading about ancient Indian culture.

BOOK REVIEW

Change Your Schedule, Change Your Life

Ancient Ayurvedic wisdom for modern man's malaise

CHANGE YOUR SCHEDULE, CHANGE YOUR LIFE CONTAINS what might just be the last missing puzzle piece to fine physiological functioning many just can't seem to find. What is it you ask? Alright, we'll tell you: it's a clear understanding of the laws governing harmony between your mind, body and the universe applied through a consistent practice of mindfulness. Just as one ignorant of the laws of physics might fire an arrow into the sky for fun, one naive of ayurveda, the laws of life, might gorge on ice cream as a midnight snack, blissfully unaware of the pain that will inevitably ensue. This book is your manual of the biological justice system to heed so the citizens of your great bodily empire do not suffer the dictates of an ignorant king.

Perhaps none is more fitting to share this knowledge with the modern mind than ayurvedic physician Dr. Suhas Kshiragar. Being the director of a wellness clinic in Northern California with an MD in ayurvedic internal medicine from Pune University in India, Dr. Suhas understands the East and West, bringing together the best of both. His experience shining through each page as anecdotes from those he has personally worked with keeps the book from ever feeling out of touch.

Skeptics of generic self-help books might be frightened by the cover's mundane design and cookie-cutter blurb, but fear not, as upon further reading it becomes clear that assessment is premature. This understated masking appears to be a tactical choice to entice the uninitiated into grabbing the book off the shelf before realizing it's all about an Indian health science they may have never heard of before.

Those who make it past the cover are immediately rewarded by an enticing exposition on the modern discoveries backing ayurvedic insights. At the core of this science is a small bundle of neurons right above the optical nerves called the suprachiasmatic nucleus, or SCN. All your cells have a tiny biological clock modifying their function with the time of day. When you see light, the SCN tells your cells to reset their clock and begin their daily routine just like us. Thankfully, they don't take holidays! This discovery is revolutionary, as it proves that your biological functions change depending on the time of day. Ayurveda advice has always taken into account the daily cycles of the body, but only now are we understanding exactly why. As reason functions more slowly, yet does not conflict with intuition, modern scientific discovery fully supports what ancient Indian sages proved to themselves thousands of years ago.

A great strength of Dr. Suhas is his ability to explain complex concepts with compelling metaphors. He explains the role of the SCN as "the brain's master conductor, and all of your body's cells are trying to dance to its beat." From this realization Dr. Suhas builds the rest of the book as a master course in performing our daily dance of routine in harmony with our biological dance.

For example, chapter six, titled "You Are when You Eat," outlines the hidden-in-plain-sight key to weight management. It begins like a typical chapter, with compelling anecdotal observations from Dr. Suhas's work in the field. He recounts his patients trying to lose weight by fasting throughout the day until finally breaking down and bingeing on a buffet at night. To one familiar with the Western conception of managing weight by consuming a set number of calories this might not seem too bad. It would, however, be contraindicated under ayurvedic wisdom, which states that food is best eaten when the body's digestive fire, or agni, is at its strongest. Naturally this is when the ball of fusion fire in the sky is at its highest, around noon, known as pitta time.

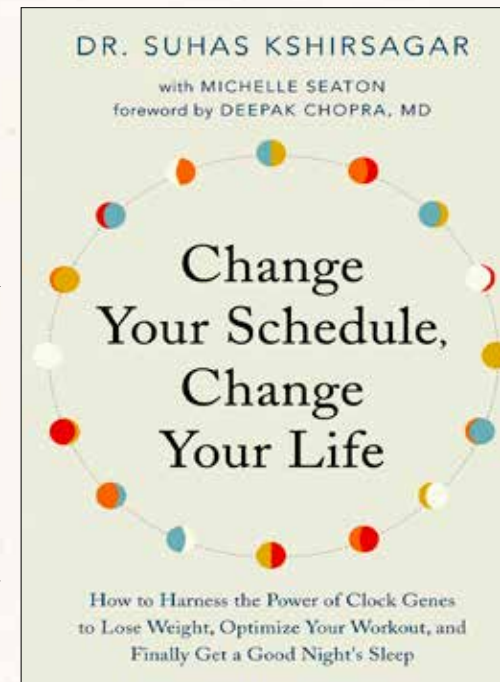
Knowing such intuition might not be compelling enough for his audience, Dr. Suhas brings in the latest science, citing how SCN activation modifies gene regulation throughout the body, generating cyclical changes in glucose tolerance, metabolism and even insulin sensitivity. In the evening, when SCN activation is at a minimum, all of these important digestive factors are waning. A 2014 study of 1,245 people, following their eating habits for six years, found those who ate over half their daily calories in the evening were twice as

likely to have developed obesity or other metabolic issues. Not to fear though, as Dr. Suhas does a remarkable job at clearly outlining immediate changes you can make in your life. Exercise and sleep are subsequently shown to be surprisingly connected and by altering the cells' clocks they affect the entire body system in powerful ways.

Dr. Suhas' effective, no-nonsense approach is best highlighted in the second chapter, where he states, "In the coming chapters, you will learn.... However, if you only do three things, they should be..." then proceeds to list out the entire book's distilled wisdom in three bullet points. However, stopping here would be a mistake as Dr. Suhas has yet to reveal the rocket fuel for your transformative journey. As he so wisely states, "The greatest battle is not with our bodies but with our minds." Even if you memorized every word of the book, it would do no good without application. Dr. Suhas observed simple mindfulness to be the most effective tool for his patients in changing unhealthy

habits. Once you experience for yourself the body's painful reactions to actions, the correction happens almost automatically. The citizens of your body know what you need and are constantly trying to let you know. A lot of the time, however, we simply aren't listening. As the *Tirukural* so wisely states, "An inaccessible ruler who listens and adjudicates inattentively will inevitably plummet from power and perish."

So if you struggle with fatigue, weight gain, or just general malaise and are looking for a change, drink from this wellspring of ayurvedic wisdom, and, as this review previously admonished, stop shooting arrows into the sky.



Please help us fulfill Swami Vivekananda's vision



Artist's rendering of Advaita Ashrama's new publications building currently under construction in Kolkata, India.

To revitalize Hinduism, and share Advaita Vedanta's sublime literatures with the world, Swamiji established **Advaita Ashrama** in 1899, a branch of the Ramakrishna Math, in Mayavati, Himalayas. Then, in 1920, the publication arm of the ashrama was shifted from Mayavati to Kolkata. And so, for more than a century, our Advaita Ashrama, here in Kolkata, has been striving to realize Swamiji's vision by publishing such gems as *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, exquisite translations of the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Brahma Sutras*, among innumerable others. We have now come to the point where we have run out of space to store or show all those marvellous scriptures. And there are many more to come!

In response, we have designed and begun erecting a seven-story building (including the ground floor) that will house not only a spacious library, but also a sales section, a 400-seat auditorium for regular classes, a meditation hall for devotees, a monks' quarters, and other amenities needed to continue fulfilling our holy mission—the realization of our beloved Swami Vivekananda's vision.

The estimated cost of the project is USD 5.3 million (Rs. 42 crores). Thanks to generous donors, we have been able to collect so far some USD 2.15 million (Rs. 17 crores).

Swami Vivekananda on India & Hindu Dharma

"Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be."

Swami Vivekananda on revitalizing Hindu Dharma

"My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books and in the possession of a few only, hidden, as it were, in monasteries and in forests—to bring them out."

We therefore appeal to all the souls who treasure Sanatana Dharma, to kindly donate to this noble work.

Donations by Indian citizens are eligible for income tax exemption u/s 80G (5) (vi) of IT Act, 1961. They may donate online at our website: donations.advaitaashrama.org Citizens from countries other than India may write to us at mail@advaitaashrama.org or Whatsapp us on +91 74393 50571 for wire transfer details and any tax-deductible donation options.

Yours in OM,
Swami Shuddhidananda
(Adhyaksha)



Advaita Ashrama

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Hindu Heritage Endowment

The Importance of Leaving a Legacy

By Akhila Satish

The Native Americans had a powerful way of considering the future: "In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations." While it may be challenging to live up to this adage, we have abundant opportunities to focus our energies on creating a world that will benefit and enrich our descendents. Such deliberations may begin with taking a thoughtful approach to estate planning. There are many options for crafting estate planning that ensure positive long-term effects.



A legacy can include financial giving, writings, objects and even memories

First, you may consider a bequest to family and loved ones—a fund you set aside for a specific purpose in the future, such as the next generation's education. This is a dynamic way to impact the future, supporting the welfare of others even after your passing.

Second, you may think of ways to help a charitable cause you care deeply about, whether the cause is a museum, a foundation for art, a spiritual enterprise, or an academic institution, etc. Supporting such causes can have multiple benefits beyond the financial impact. Focusing on giving can transform the heavy feelings that often surround estate planning into lighter, uplifted emotions as you visualize helping enterprises that inspire you.

Keep in mind that your ability to assist through estate planning may be greater than your ability to help in your lifetime. According to the IRS, a typical bequest may be almost three times larger than the total amount a person has donated in their lifetime. Additionally, as a donor, you may have the opportunity to engage more closely with your chosen charity, allowing you to meet like-minded individuals and thus infusing your life with greater meaning.

Many charities, including Hindu Heritage Endowment, offer targeted ways to give. At HHE, you can choose the exact cause you are donating to. Causes range from the Orphanage Endowment, to funds supporting the temple gardens, to feeding the monks and more. This kind of focused, planned giving allows you to choose precisely how you want your legacy to unfold.

Even as we plan for legacies after our life, we should take the time to live our legacies here on earth, to live by the values we hold most dear, and share those values with our families and communities. We can choose to live with passion, enthusiasm and gratitude. We can share and pass down our stories through journaling. We can share of our time generously with the people we love and the causes we care about. A life well-lived, a life of purpose, integrity and love, is in itself an incalculably precious legacy that will guide and inspire future generations. To be remembered kindly beyond our life is an aspiration many of us have. Through careful planning and introspection, this wish becomes a reality within our grasp.

For more tips on leaving a legacy for your family check out this web page at:

<https://www.nationwide.com/lc/resources/investing-and-retirement/articles/leaving-your-legacy>

The article at this URL talks about leaving a legacy through a combination of money, objects and memories that matter to those around you.

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	US\$50.00
Ishani Chowdhury	108.00
Justice Collier	3,000.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.20
Karthik Gopalratnam	1,008.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.58
Gowri Nadason	117.01
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00
Anonymous	94.45
Total	4,914.99

Iraivan Temple Endowment	
Fidelity Brokerage Services LLC	501.00
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	101.00
Frank Burkhardt	30.00
Nagendra Channarasappa	251.00
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	151.00
Luke Labella	216.00
Naga Bhushan & Leela Mandava	251.00
Janaka Param	2,000.00
Anjali & K.V. Rao	216.00
Thomas J. Rowe	1,000.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
Riorita Tkatchenko	100.00
Anonymous	1,449.40
Total	6,366.40

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund	
Malvi Gandhi	75.00
Roudhranee Jugurnauth	99.96
Ram Kumar	108.00
Guru Saasta Madan Ganesh Sumathi	50.00
Oviaa Madan Ganesh Sumathi	50.00
Rani Natarajan	201.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Pathmini Saravanapavan	200.00
Maran Thondaya	108.74
Anonymous	248.10
Total	1,190.78

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund	
Elan Cohen	299.00
Michael Doyle	216.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	13.28
Rajinee Marcon	133.24
Ashwini Maureemootoo	6.11
Ronak Mehta	249.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.66
Udeyadeva Moorghen	2.22
Jamilah Myal	249.00
Arobinda Nath	249.00
Dheeraj Reddy	249.00
Anurag Relan	249.00
Kodiswara Selvanathan	449.00
Sharad Shandilya	249.00
Sankarasubramanian Srinivasan	249.00
Sinnappu Sriskanthan	249.00
Thiru & Debbie Thirupuvanam	500.00
Paresh Trivedi	249.00
Pankaj Vij	299.00
Anonymous	548.00
Total	4,713.51

Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment	
Kalyana Kavuri	501.00
Vel Mahalingum	132.72
Umasankaran Mohambourame	109.56
Gowri Nadason	117.01
Janaka Param	1,000.00
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00
Anonymous	186.00
Total	2,139.29

Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund	
Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00
Hitesvara Saravan	54.00
Total	555.00

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam	
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	2,000.00
Rani Natarajan	108.00
Aran Sendan	108.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	201.00
Anonymous	354.00
Total	2,771.00

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund	
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	3,000.00
Aran Sendan	108.00
Anonymous	6,375.00
Total	9,483.00

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment	
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00
Aran Sendan	108.00
Total	183.00

Hinduism Today Production Fund	
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	450.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.20
Ian Johnson	60.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00
Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,001.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.31
Nori Muster	200.00
Janaka Param	3,000.00
Anand & Sri Parvathaneni	5,000.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.36
Nancy Walder	150.00
Anonymous	63.00
Total	10,078.88

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund	
Benevity	539.00
Charities Aid Foundation America	48.51
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	75.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.20
Tamnash J. Gupta	648.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Hitesvara Saravan	36.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Jeeva Velusaami	42.00
Michael Zimmermann	5.00
Anonymous	33.00
Total	1,917.46

Hindu Education Endowment	
Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00

Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund	
Charities Aid Foundation America	48.51
Schwab Charitable Fund	500.00
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.36
Anonymous	100.00
Total	692.87

Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund	
Atul Thakkar	500.00

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Ambika Alagere	22.12
Dinanatha Borzunov	81.00
Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00
Yongliang Chen	300.00
Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	277.83
Lutcheemee Curpen	1,308.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	108.00
Elena Dmitrichenko	81.00
Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Shivaram & Kiran Kalugotla	251.00

Murugesu Kandasamy	32.50
Amravadee Kownden	99.93
Inna Linnyk	108.00
Vel Mahalingum	66.62
Tatsiana Mezhenmaya	50.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	88.83
Seedha Lutchmee Moonesawmy	22.21
Souria Koomaren Moorghen	500.00
Dayavati Murugan	100.00
Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	22.06
Premalatha & N.B. Nandkumar	250.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Nikolay Ogloblin	81.00
Cassan Pancham	2,000.00
Janaka Param	3,000.00
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.36
Jugurnauth Roudhranee	22.21
Hitesvara Saravan	216.00
Aran Sendan	108.00
Sai Singh	501.00
Nandi Sivam	27.00
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	32.91
Kevina Soobramanien	22.21
Adi Srikantha	108.00
Soma Sundaram	100.00
Anba Dayananden Valayten	8.67
Mangaleswary Vimalanathan	50.00
John Wahlen	36.69
Anonymous	7,663.94
Total	18,691.09

Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Venkatasubba & Ushadevi Chenna	5,000.00
Anonymous	108.36
Total	5,108.36

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Anil Ananda Badhwar	20.00
Rick Harter	108.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	20.00
Total	148.00

Taos Hanuman Fund	
Anonymous	108.36

Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Phui Chan	50.00
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	75.00
Emily Xin Rui Lim	20.00
Rajiv Verma	150.00
Total	295.00

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund	
Ashok & Sudha Chandrasekhar	151.00
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00
Venkatasubba & Ushadevi Chenna	5,000.00
Steven Lee	30.00
Pritesh Patel	200.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00
Anonymous	51.00
Total	5,492.00

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment	
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	2,000.00
Anonymous	51.00
Total	2,051.00

Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund	
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00
Gunap Sriganesh	1,008.00
Anonymous	251.00
Total	1,279.00

Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment	
Vel Mahalingum	8.86

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Anonymous	104.00
Total	367.86

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	
Valliammah Kandasamy	32.50
Anonymous	333.00
Total	365.50

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	
N. Balasubramanian	10,000.00
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	6,000.00
Thamby Kumaran	100.00
Steven Lee	30.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Aran Sendan	108.00
Vetrie Senthilkumar	500.00
Dharmalingam Siddhan	25.00
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	150.00
Anonymous	1,491.81
Total	18,454.82

Siva Poomi School Trust	
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	2,000.00
Vetrie Senthilkumar	500.00
Sharukaa Uthayasekaran	27.46
Anonymous	101.00
Total	2,628.46

India Hindu Tribals Endowment	
Johnson Chanthabouasy	20.00

Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	
Tirunilayi S. Seshadri	51.00

Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund	
Schwab Charitable Fund	3,201.00

India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund	
Anonymous	45.00

Anantha Ladies Home Endowment	
Moon Jerin	800.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	101.00
Total	901.00

Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
Arun Aarooren	50.00
Partha Ayalasomayajula	251.00
Anil Ananda Badhwar	20.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.20
Luke Labella	100.00
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	375.00
Dasarathi Minjur	11.00
Natraj Narayanswami	37.00
Anila Raj Parikh	108.00
Ashley Raman	11.00
Saraswathi Ranganathan	25.00
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	150.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
Scott Wiberg	108.00
Anonymous	351.36
Total	1,871.56

Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Rick Harter	108.00
Anonymous	216.72
Total	324.72

Hindu Association of West Texas Endowment	
Anonymous	108.00

Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Ashwini Bennett	100.00
Pritesh Patel	200.00
Total	300.00

Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment	
N. Balasubramanian	10,000.00

Digital Dharma Endowment	
Jegadessa Chenganna	22.12
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00
Chellappa Deva	25.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.20
Chandraleela Hoezoo	108.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	23.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.31
Janaka Param	3,000.00

Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	22.12
John & Abha Wiersba	601.00
Anonymous	502.45
Total	4,374.20

Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
The Cleveland Foundation	1,000.00
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	75.00
Rakesh Dixit	25.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.20
Ajita Gupta	30.00
Murugesu Kandasamy	32.50
Velika Lawrence	6.66
Mihir Meghani	5,000.55
Prasidha Mohandas	51.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	7.20
Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	10.44
Robert M. Petersen	50.00
Gayatri Rajan	151.00
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Tarangadeva Sinhaputra	21.00
Jeyakumari Sivakumar	151.00
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	64.68
Ravi Thaker	12.00
Ravi & Kunjal Thaker	13.50
Jeeva Velusaami	21.00
Jagan & Padma Vemulapalli	500.00
Saravan Veylan	324.00
Anonymous	7,691.72
Total	15,407.45

Himalayan Acres Endowment	
Janaka Param	1,000.00
Alka Patel	21,000.00
Total	22,000.00

Total Contributions	\$159,324.56
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Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2022	
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Grand Total	\$19,387,515.62
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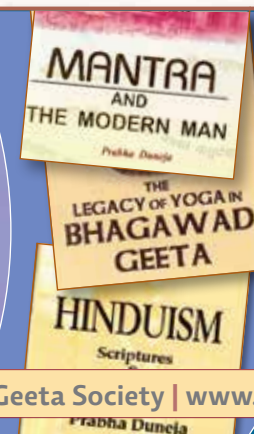
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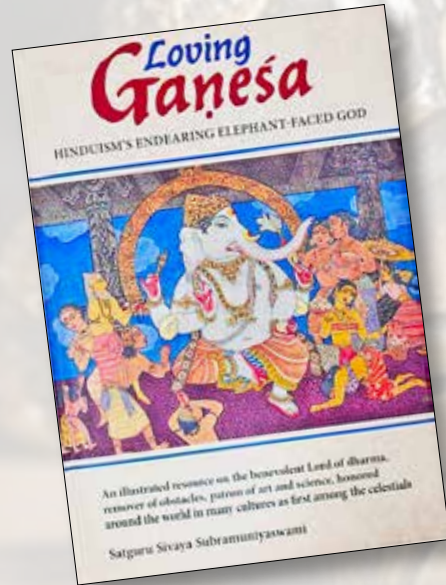
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- Apr 7-9 (Fri-Sun) Easter Week-End Family Vedanta Course**
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- May 13-20 (Sat-Sat) Vedanta Camp with Sri Vijay Kapoor • Aparoksānubhūti**
- May 26-29 (Fri-Mon) Memorial Day Family Vedanta Course • Swami Vidadatmananda**
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- Jul 23-29 (Sun-Sat) Family Vedanta Camp 1**
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- Jul 30-Aug 5 (Sun-Sat) Family Vedanta Course 2**
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- Jul 30-Aug 5 (Sun-Sat) Children's Course 2**
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- Aug 6-12 (Sun-Sat) Family Vedanta Course 3**
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- Aug 13 (Sun) Gurukulam's 37th Anniversary**
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- Sep 9-15 (Sat-Fri) One-Week Vedanta Course 1 for Adults • Swami Tattvaivananda**
Swami Muktatmananda
- Sep 17-23 (Sun-Sat) One-Week Vedanta Course 2 for Adults • Swami Tattvaivananda**
Swami Muktatmananda
- Sep 23 (Sat) Pujya Swamiji's 8th Aradhana, Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji's 3rd Aradhana**
- Sep 26-Oct 29 (Tue-Sun) Fall Vedanta Five-Week Course for Adults • Swamini Tattvaivananda**
Swami Muktatmananda
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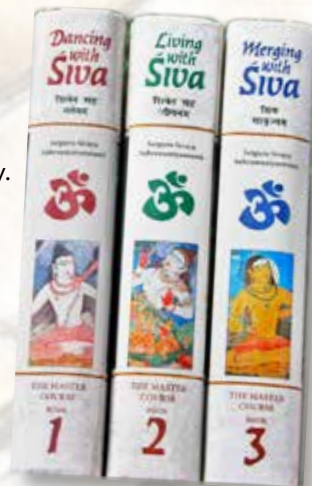
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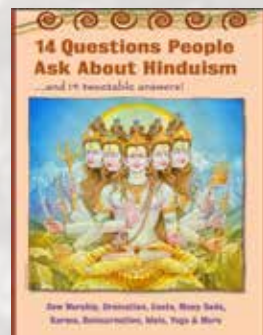
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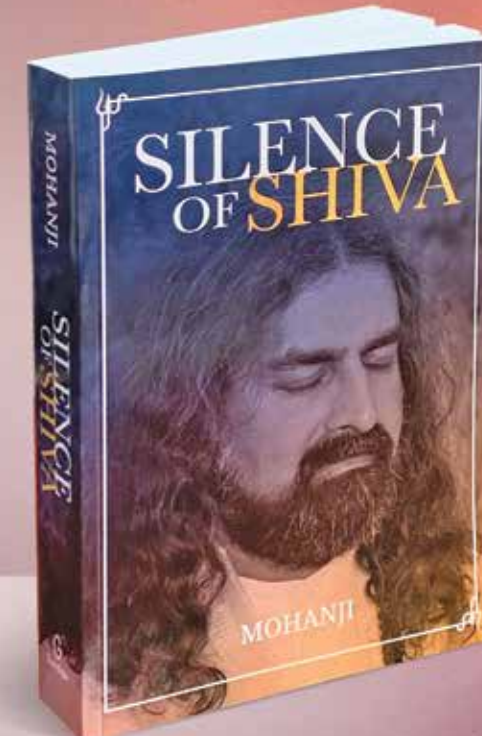
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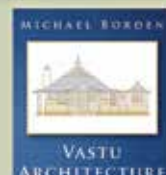
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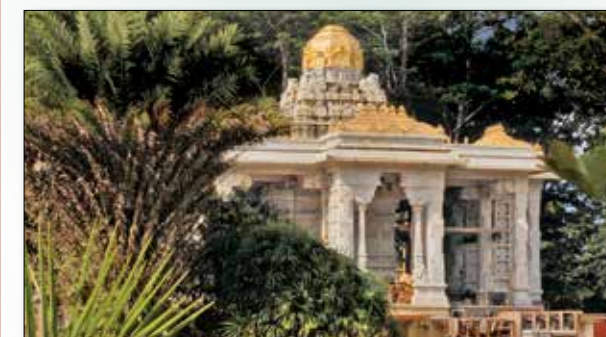


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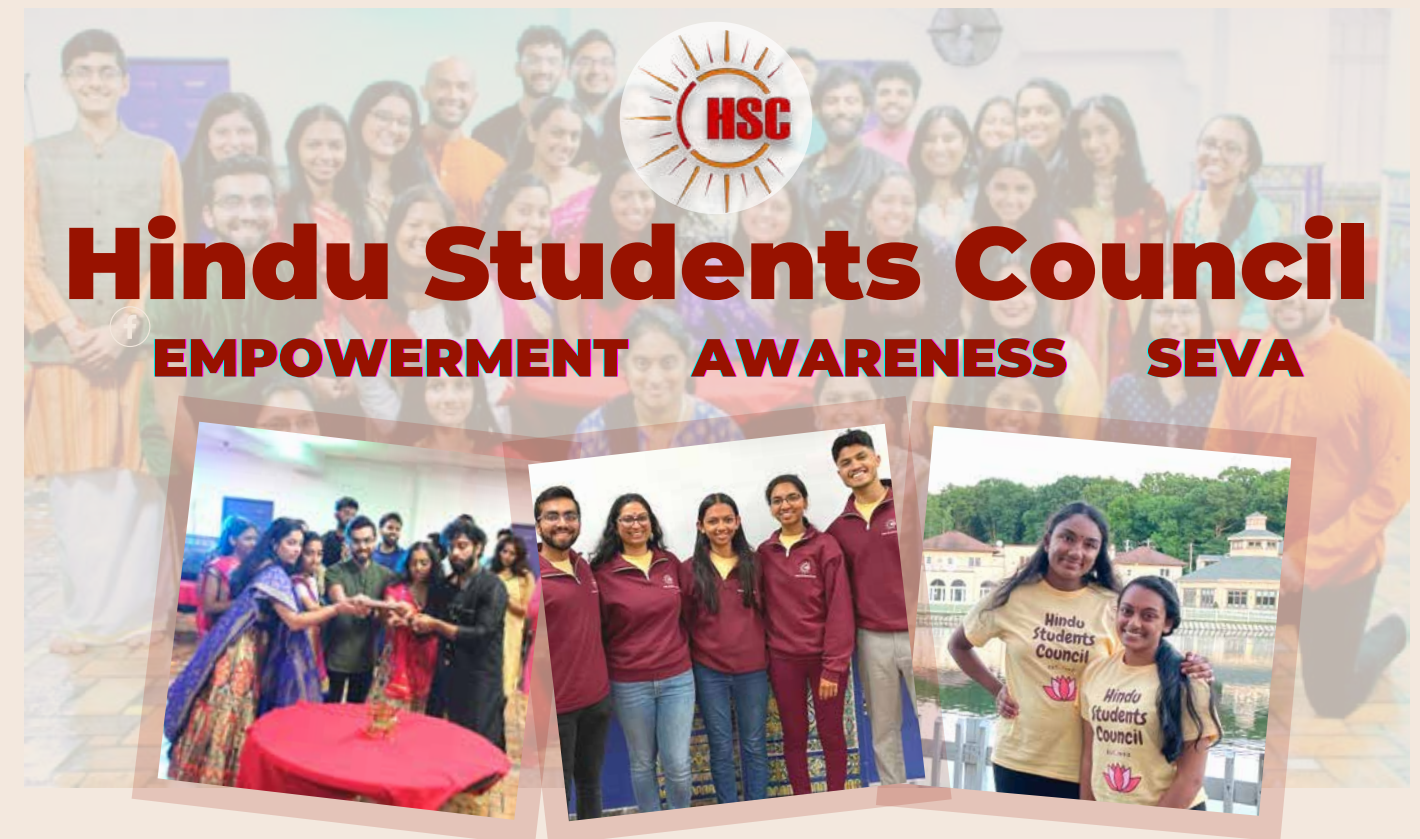
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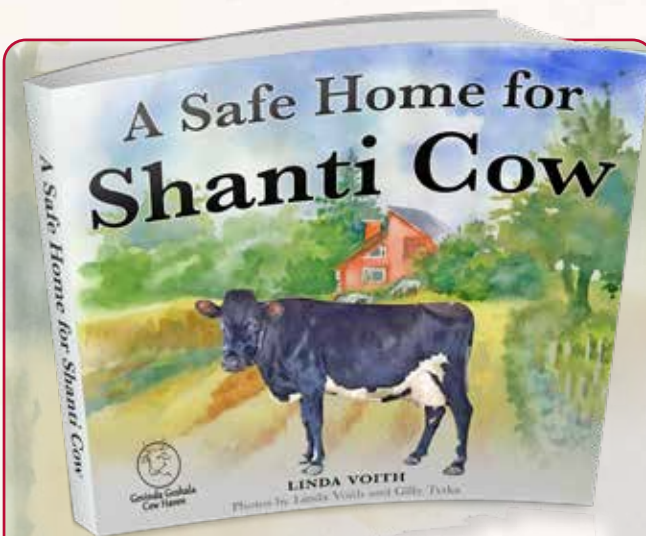
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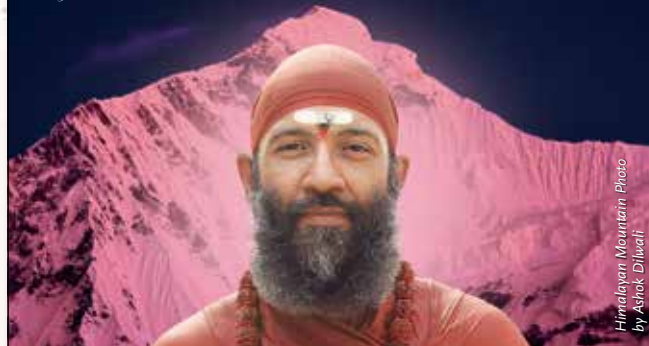
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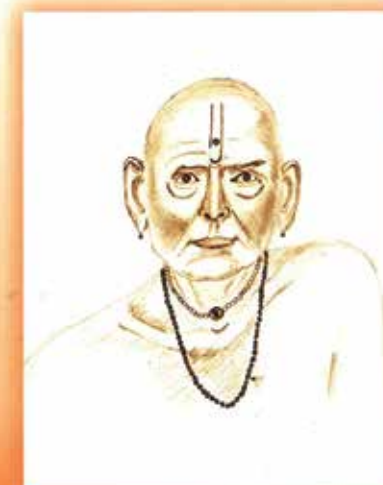
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ETERNAL FRIEND ŚHRĪ SWĀMĪ SAMARTH MAHĀRĀJ OF AKKALKOT



By
MUKUND M. HANUMANTE, Ph.D

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Eternal Friend offers the keys to the Divine that ever resides within—is always there, ready to guide and help you attain that peace and contentment which is your true nature.

"*Eternal Friend* is a doorway to auspiciousness and infinite peace."—Shri Sathya Sai Baba

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HELP SAVE INDIA'S ANCIENT TEMPLES & TRADITIONS



Temple Renovation



Oil Donation
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Annadanam

Practicing Hindus Preserving Our Past

India's ancient temples are dying. In Tamil Nadu alone, more than 12,000 temples do not have any poojas happening or even a single lamp being lit. Thousands of temples across the state are lying in ruins waiting to be renovated. Behind Every Temple is a 501c3 Non-Profit organization dedicated to ensuring these sacred sites are protected and renovated for future generations. In addition to temple renovation, we also provide free oil to ancient temples in poor condition and regularly perform annadanam (feeding) for intellectually disabled people. We are entirely volunteer-run, so 100% of your tax-deductible donation goes directly to these projects.

For Hindus, dana (giving) is an integral part of one's dharma, so we invite everyone to help participate in these noble projects and help keep India's temples and traditions alive



To learn more please visit us at
www.behindeverytemple.org



SCAN ME

*S*it in the night
As an owl hoots in the distance,
As crickets lay claim to the night,
As toads moan their song.

Above, the starry canopy
Reigns in silence
And causes the mind
To wander
And wonder.

Eyes closed,
I dive deep, I roam
And search the halls of creation.

Whichever the mind's direction,
It approaches no conclusion.

Endlessness bewilders.

"Banish the Mind, my child!
And enter the Temple of Silence.
Listen for the heart beat
Of the All.

Vanish into
The Mystical Sound.

Feel the waves and waves of Being
Permeate mind and body."

My Lord of Light,
Light of All Lights,
'In the Temple of Silence,
Thy Radiance glows my Spirit,
And releases it
From the wheel
Of samsara.

My Release from the Wheel of Samsara
by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1st March to 16th March, 2020

Tayumanavar's renowned song on the difficulty of inner stillness.



"It is easy to control an elephant. It is easy to bind the mouth of a bear. It is easy to ride on the back of a lion. It is easy to grab a snake and make it dance. It is easy to command celestial beings in your service and live beyond eternity. It is easy to add mercury to fire and make gold. It is easy to roam about the world, invisible to others. It is easy to enter another's body. It is easy to walk on water or sit on fire. It is easy to attain incomparable powers. It is harder and rarer by far to remain *summa*, to control the mind and sit still."

Canto 12, Song 8

Canada CAD 10
India INR 225
Malaysia MYR 14
Mauritius MRU 115
Singapore SGD 10
UK GBP 5

