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(Left) The remarkable Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora, hand-carved out of a granite mountain by thousands of workers over a period of just 18 years (page 48); (above) a weaver embroiders an intricate design, see article on fabrics (page 60); Hinduism Today receives award at Thailand Congress, page 30.

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**BANGKOK
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Educating Hindu Youth

Students of the Chinmaya Mission Bala Vihar program at the Houston, Texas center, which is one of their largest centers in the US, participate in a group arati. They are organized in rows by academic grade. Feature story on page 18...



GLOBAL DHARMA

THAILAND

Guards Rooted in Hindu Lore

Excerpts from an article in South China Morning Post

AS VISITORS ENTER Bangkok's Grand Palace, they pass supernatural security guards. Standing inside the

main entrance of the royal complex in the Thai capital are two towering statues, each with sharp fangs protruding from

their mouths, and clubs in their grip. They not only embody the colorful excess which makes the site so photogenic, but also depict a key figure from Thai mythology, the Yaksha, whose role is to protect palaces, temples and other sacred sites.

While coping with human threats are the responsibility of the white-helmeted, rifle-toting King's Guard soldiers who march through the palace, the Yaksha

here and at other sites in Thailand monitor other-worldly enemies, ready to tackle any demons that try to lay siege or lay curses on them. It is not clear exactly when Yakshas first entered the country's traditions, but they are depicted in Thai art that is more than 800 years old. A 12th-century bronze sculpture—Yaksha Supporting a Naga—is part of the Asian Art collection at New York's Metropolitan Museum.

The first known appearance of Yaksha is in the *Ramayana*, the 24,000-verse Sanskrit epic that was written over several centuries and is one of the two most important epics of Hinduism. It may not be readily apparent to tourists, but modern Thailand has been shaped more by Hindu culture than any other. More than 700 years ago, for instance, the Sukhothai Kingdom adapted the *Ramayana* to create the *Ramakien*, an epic which is also well represented at the Grand Palace.

.....
Protector: Statues and murals of Yaksha, shape-shifting creatures that protect Thailand's most sacred sites, including the Grand Palace (above), are found from Bangkok to Chiang Mai



USA

Texas Youth Get New Campsite

AFTER NEARLY FOUR DECADES of renting spaces, a summer camp for Hindu children has a permanent home. *Religion News* reports that in November, 2023, the long-running Hindu Heritage Youth Camp (HHYC), based in Houston, officially began construction of the Texas Hindu Campsite on 52 acres.

Set to open this summer, "It will unite the Hindu community," said Vijay Pallod, a longtime volunteer of HHYC. "This is where the future Hindu leaders are going to come from." Hundreds flock to the HHYC every year. It

is a space for American Hindus, run entirely by the second generation, many of whom are past campers themselves.

From daily yoga and sports to mini festivals like Holi, the camp makes Hinduism approachable, with life lessons that are spiritual just as much as they are fun. Discussions on Hindu values always reference pop culture, says Bharat Pallod, Vijay's 34-year-old son. "When you're learning from your peers, people who have grown up with the same life experiences as you, you're way more engaged in the whole process," said Bharat, who started attending the camp as a second grader. "The kids understand better how we want to see Hinduism."

When the camp started, it was difficult to get 90 campers to commit to a weeklong event. Now, HHYC no longer has to

advertise or recruit children. The coveted 200 slots fill up almost immediately, leaving 400 more kids on the waitlist.



Groundbreaking: Subhash Gupta gives a presentation about the Texas Hindu Campsite during the Bhumi Puja near Houston in November 2023

AUSTRALIA

Chaplaincy Course Official

THE HINDU COUNCIL OF Australia announced in December 2023 that their chaplaincy course is now recognized by the Chaplaincy Body of NSW, College of Clinical Pastoral Education, as equivalent to the course offered by them. This means Hindus no longer need any extra courses to get recognized or employed by government and

private bodies like Defence, Corrective Services, hospitals, etc. Now Hindu chaplains can help the community with spiritual care, end-of-life care or last rites and have conversations that give them hope and courage. This is especially important in the era of nuclear families. Those interested in the course can email cht@hinducouncil.com.au.



Course launch: Sai Paravastu, Karthik Subramanian and Surinder Jain, along with local chaplains, celebrate two years of effort

SINGAPORE

Diwali Lights Up the City

THE CITY-STATE OF SINGAPORE is aglow with festive spirit and stunning illuminations each year during Diwali. Reported by *News Mobile*, the tiny island nation has a substantial Indian diaspora of approximately 372,000. About 213,000 are Hindus, according to the 2020 census. All have deep cultural and historical ties to the Indian subcontinent. During Diwali, the city's Indian

community, along with other ethnic groups, comes together to celebrate the triumph of light over darkness by turning parts of the city into a multicultural extravaganza. The streets are decked out with colorful lights and decorations, with the scent of Indian cuisine wafting through the air. Along Serangoon Road, the "Deepavali Light-up" showcases a magnificent display of lights and cultural performances.

Though spirits are high, traffic congestion has become a growing concern as more residents and tourists flock to the heart of the festivities.



Diwali in Lion Country: Little India's festive Serangoon Road



CAMBODIA

Angkor Wat Residents Evicted

UNESCO IS BEING CRITICIZED after Cambodia evicted an estimated 10,000 families around the Angkor Wat temple complex. *Religion News* says that in a report released in November, 2023, Amnesty International accused UNESCO of disregarding UN guidelines and failing in its

obligation to intervene and promote the human right to housing. Angkor Wat's designation as a World Heritage Site needing protection from damage was purportedly used as an excuse for moving people away from it.

Angkor Wat was granted that status in 1992, in part because of

fears that the growth of human settlements on the site posed a possible threat to its preservation. However, the designation was not clear regarding existing settlements, which until last year were left basically undisturbed, said the report. Cambodia is now keen to develop the area for tourism, which lapsed during the lockdowns. Most of the families being evicted were engaged in tourism-related businesses.

(left) Tourists line up to visit one of the Angkor Wat temples; (above) one of the sites to which residents have been relocated

.....
Amnesty says the evicted people have received little or no compensation and the government's two main resettlement sites have inadequate facilities in terms of roads, water, sanitation and electricity supplies.





FRANCE

Tamil Saint Blesses Europe

A STATUE OF TAMIL POET-SAINT Tiruvalluvar was unveiled in December, 2023, in France, in a commune called Cergy, located about 17 miles from central Paris. *New India Abroad* reports that Jawed Ashraf, Indian envoy to France and Monaco and Cergy mayor Jean-Paul Jeandon were present at the event.

Tiruvalluvar is known for authoring the ethics masterpiece *Tirukural* ("Holy Couplets"), compared by many to the Christian *Bible* and the works of the Greek philosopher Plato. The poet is a revered figure, especially in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which observes Tiruvalluvar Day annually in mid-January as a part of Pongal celebrations.

The Cergy mayor shared

photos from the unveiling on X (formerly Twitter), encouraging a response from Indian PM Narendra Modi. Modi responded, "Tiruvalluvar statue in Cergy, France, is a beautiful testament to our shared cultural bonds. Tiruvalluvar stands tall as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge. His writings motivate millions across the world."

India's Minister of External Affairs, Dr S. Jaishankar, wrote in a post on X, "The inauguration of Tiruvalluvar statue in Cergy, France, implements PM Modi's assurance given during his visit for Bastille Day. The statue will be a guide to many to follow Tiruvalluvar's noble thoughts and is yet another symbol of our long-standing cultural links, a key pillar of friendship."



Blending old and new: One of several apps; a yoga class in Surat, India, run by the operators of a pregnancy app called DreamChild

INDIA

Apps Built for Motherhood

A NEW KIND OF BUSINESS IS taking off, largely from the state of Gujarat. *The New York Times* reports that startups big and small are offering apps

that combine traditional Hindu prenatal and postnatal guidance with scientific research, weaving in dietary plans and wellness practices, as well as daily

developmental activities like yoga, meditation, art, story reading and lullabies. The free and paid offerings are for a generation that answers more readily to reminders from smartphones than from mothers-in-law. Often blamed for luring young Indians away from tradition and

increasing loneliness, in this case the smartphone is put to the service of retaining the best of values. The apps help women cope with a time of intense anxiety and stress. They also improve couples' bonding by bringing wisdom and structure to the pregnancy whirlwind.

BRIEFLY...

PARISADA HINDU DHARMA INDONESIA (PHDI) Bali began working with Kerobokan Women's Prison in July, 2023, to provide succor for the inmates. *Berita Bali* says they will offer meditation, prana healing, healing massage, face acupressure, toddler massage, reflection, herbal preparations and more.

Inmates can choose their interests, with the hope that after release from prison, they will have useful skills that might become a source of income.

THE POPULATIONS OF CAMBODIA, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Thailand each have large religious majorities, with at least

seven in ten adults being Buddhist or Muslim. Some of these countries have experienced significant tensions with minority religious groups in recent years. Yet a 2022 Pew Research Center survey finds that, on balance, adults in these five South and Southeast Asian countries are generally supportive of religious diversity. The survey asked respondents whether the major religions in South and Southeast Asia—Buddhism, Islam, Christi-

anity and Hinduism—are compatible with their country's way of life. These findings are similar to those in Singapore, a country that lacks a religious majority.

THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAS widened tracks leading to Amarnath Cave to facilitate pedestrian traffic, alleviate congestion, enhance critical stretches and incorporate safety measures such as railings and retaining walls.



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.



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IN MY OPINION

Can We Do Last Rites Right?

The Karumakiriyai rituals should be done in a manner that safeguards the environment

BY RAVINDRAN RAMAN KUTTY

HUMANS HAVE ALWAYS depended on the environment for survival, obtaining resources such as fruits, grains, water, fire, minerals and wood from nature. In Hinduism, is believed that the five elements of nature (water, fire, earth, air and space) are of utmost importance and must be used in the most effective ways. The human body is also often compared to these elements.

Hinduism employs these five elements of nature in various rituals such as prayers, marriages, births and deaths. However, some practices like discarding ash and ritual waste in open waters can be harmful. It is crucial to reconsider these actions and adopt environmentally friendly practices. The Hindu population in Malaysia should take cognizance and responsibility and make changes to protect the environment.

Historically, waste such as flowers and garlands were thrown into bodies of water because they were seen as sacred and could benefit aquatic life. However, modern society has introduced non-biodegradable items such as glass, ceramic and plastic, such as plastic strings used in garlands, which take longer to decompose, and if consumed, are dangerous for aquatic inhabitants.

As we develop new inventions and products to make our lives more comfortable and safer, it's important to consider their impact on the environment. For example, during a housewarming ceremony in London, the use of traditional incense was limited due to smoke detectors, and the disposal of fruits and garlands posed a challenge as they needed to be discarded in a river. However, in Malaysia, funeral rituals are still being carried out in ways that can be harmful to people and the environment, such as walking barefoot on paths scattered with broken earthenware.

The experience of walking into the sea during a Hindu ritual can be dangerous due to the presence of broken earthen pots with sharp edges. A visit to Morib (70 km from



Kuala Lumpur) revealed that many avoid the ritual site due to the distance from the shoreline, and the litter from previous rituals that was left behind. I suggest that there should be large recycle bins at all ritual sites serviced regularly to manage waste in a sustainable way.

The traditional practice of throwing the pot into the water

during *karumakiriyai* rituals done on the 16th day after cremation needs revision, and new clay pots should be developed that dissolve in water after three days. Proper signage should be put up at ritual sites explaining the appropriate use of perishable and non-perishable items, with garlands made using banana leaf string instead of plastics. All non-perishable items like plastics, bottles and clothes must be disposed of properly.

This issue of proper waste disposal during Hindu rituals needs to be addressed urgently, and an education and awareness program should be established to tackle the problem. The Malaysia Hindu Sangam, Hindu Youth Organization and Indian NGOs working on environmental issues can work together with waste management companies and local authorities to address the matter. Crematoriums can also play a role in ensuring proper waste disposal. Accepting and embracing positive changes for the well-being of the community and country is essential, and education and awareness programs can help achieve this goal.

For over 5,000 years, our religion has stood the test of time, demonstrating our ability to adapt and evolve in order to uphold our ancient religious customs. It is imperative that we implement comprehensive and sustainable measures to ensure that our practices align with modern times while being mindful of the environment. We must strive for excellence by adopting eco-friendly practices to preserve our traditions, beliefs and identity.

RAVINDRAN RAMAN KUTTY is a columnist with the *New Straits Times* and social worker.

God and Love: the Hindu View

From loving God (as separate) to the unitive experience of one's self with God, is well-mapped in Indian theology

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IN WESTERN TELEVISION SHOWS, REFERENCES to God are rare. However, when the Divine is mentioned, the prevailing sentiment often revolves around the assertion that "God loves you." This mirrors contemporary perspectives on the Divine. Indeed, amid life's challenges, it is reassuring to be reminded of the comforting principle that God cares for you.

In Hindu philosophy, the idea that "God loves you" is present but enriched by profound subtlety. There is a strong emphasis on "You love God" and "God is love." This slightly different focus provokes the devotee's sincere effort to cultivate and intensify love of the Divine.

Before looking in more detail into deepening one's love of God, let's look first at a second Hindu concept, that of faith.

In our modern world, an increasing number of individuals state that they don't believe in God and see no need to affiliate with a religion. A popular poster on the web expresses this sentiment, depicting a teenage girl boldly declaring, "I'm too old to believe in fairy tales." Western thought often, though not always, defines religious faith as an unquestioning belief in God and religious tenets, a perspective aligned with Webster's dictionary. In contrast, the Hindu expression of faith transcends doctrinal allegiance. In Hinduism, faith is not a consensus of belief; nor is it a static condition. Rather, it undergoes constant deepening through personal experience and spiritual growth. The spiritual truths of Sanatana Dharma, initially embraced without tangible proof, find ultimate validation through individual experiences. Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, succinctly encapsulated this notion, stating, "Faith is to believe what you do not see. The reward of faith is to see what you believed."

The Hindu goal of intensifying one's love of God finds lucid expression in the tradition of bhakti yoga, which portrays the evolving stages of love for God through differing relationships. These stages are found in many traditions, while varying somewhat. For example, the Vaishnava tradition recognizes five primary devotional attitudes, or bhavas:

Peacefulness (Shanta Bhava): The soul experiences contentment in the presence of God. **Servitude (Dasya Bhava):** The soul engages with God in the role of a servant to master. **Friendship (Sakhya Bhava):** The soul establishes a relationship with God as a friend. **Parental Affection (Vatsalya Bhava):** The soul relates to God with the affection of a parent to a child. **Belovedness (Madhurya Bhava):** The soul experiences a deep connection with God, perceiving the Divine as one's dearest beloved.

The pivotal inquiry revolves around how to enhance one's devotion to God, gradually transitioning from shanta bhava to madhurya bhava. The

four primary stages or methods are the yogas of bhakti, karma, raja and jnana. Let's delve into each, keeping in mind their relevance to the desired bhava progression.

When seeking to deepen one's love for God, it is natural to think of bhakti yoga first. It encompasses numerous devotional practices which are typically, but not exclusively, performed at a temple. The temple is an especially sacred place where the Deity comes and hovers over and within the murti in His subtle body. Swami Bhaskarananda comments on this idea: "The murti is not an idol but a consecrated image of God's chosen aspect. The worshiper believes that God is actually present in the image, and thus

the image becomes a way of communicating with the Supreme" (*The Essentials of Hinduism*).

Bhakti yoga practices include: *shravana*: listening to the stories of God; *kirtana*: singing devotional hymns and songs; *smarana*: remembering the presence and name of the Divine; *pada-sevana*: service to the holy feet, which includes serving humanity; *archana*: attending ritual worship in the temple as well as attending or conducting worship in one's home shrine; *vandana*: prostrating to the Deity; *atma-nivedana*: complete self-surrender.

Through bhakti yoga we develop love for God as well as selflessness and purity, leading to self-effacement and total surrender to God.

Karma yoga, or seva, is selfless service. Seva generally is first performed at a temple where the devotee does simple tasks such as cleaning the floors, polishing the lamps, making garlands, and cooking and serving food to other devotees. All such actions are to be done without thought of recognition or reward. Seva can be extended to other situations, such as work or school, where we strive to be helpful to others and go beyond what the situation formally requires of us. This can be conceived of as worshiping God by serving all beings as His living manifestations. Pramukh Swami Maharaj of BAPS counseled his followers in the aftermath of the 2001 Gujarat earthquake: "When people are facing difficulties and sorrows, our Indian tradition is to offer them solace. We feel that by serving the human beings we serve the Lord Himself."

In a still deeper approach, great teachers ask us to perform all work with the aim of reaching God. Performing our work with the aim of reaching God naturally leads to the perspective that each task is



Seeking God's Love: Chennai artist Manian Selven captures a bhaktar offering lotus flowers during his forest puja. Narada and four saints bless from the inner worlds.

gives the perspective of not merely renouncing the fruit of action but also surrendering the sense of being the doer. Every act of service is an offering to the Lord, and every task, from the grandest to the lowliest, becomes a sacred rite. Through the practices of karma yoga the devotee's love of God is naturally deepened.

In both bhakti yoga and karma yoga, the devotee is focused on the personal aspect of God, known as Ishvara in Sanskrit. In contrast, the next two yogas, raja yoga and jnana yoga, emphasize the impersonal aspects of God, which are omnipresent consciousness and its transcendent source. In Sanskrit, these aspects are referred to as Satchidananda and Parabrahman respectively.

The practices of bhakti and karma yoga, when perfected, naturally lead the seeker into Hinduism's meditative practices. These start with the raja yoga steps of breath control, energy withdrawal and concentration that deepens into meditation and contemplation. The deepest experience of contemplation is being one with pure consciousness or Satchidananda. Deeper still—beyond contemplation—is the experience of transcendent reality (Parabrahman).

Jnana yoga describes the esoteric spiritual practices of the fully enlightened being, or jnani. An alternative meaning, popularized by Swami Vivekananda, is the quest for cognition through intellectual religious study, as one of four alternate paths to truth, the other three being bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga.

These meditative approaches are striving for a form of God's love that is not found in the karma and bhakti yoga approaches. They are focused on God's omnipresent consciousness of love. In experiencing that state, God is love, and you are also God's love. Paramaguru Yogaswami taught this concept—that God Siva, you and love are an inseparable unity—in a letter to a young man named Yogendra Duraisamy: "I am with you and you are with me. There is no distance between us. I am you. You are I. What is there to fear? Look! I exist as you. Then what must you do? You must love. Whom? Everyone. To speak more clearly, your very nature is love. Not only you, but all are pervaded by love. But there is no 'all,' for you alone exist. All are you!"

In the fifth bhava, belovedness, God is your dearly beloved. Mystically, it also has the deeper meaning that there is a oneness between you and God, an inseparable unity of the essence of your soul and God's omnipresence, the transcendent source which can be experienced through raja or jnana yoga. In the highest attainment, God, "I" and love are one.

an offering to the Lord. Every act, from the grandest to the lowliest, becomes a sacred rite. "Work is worship." Even simple, menial tasks should be done in this spirit. My Paramaguru Yogaswami once spoke to a laborer who was cleaning the lavatory outside his hut: "O Ramaswamy! Are you doing Sivapuja (divine worship) out there?"

In this way the whole of life is sanctified and the conflict between secular and spiritual ceases to exist. Karma yoga can ultimately lead to the realization that the universe is all the action of God. This insight



LETTERS

Kudos to Hinduism Today!

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of watching the World Hindu Congress 2023 event online, which took place in Bangkok. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to hear Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswamiji's speech. He provided valuable insights into the remarkable history and extraordinary contributions of HINDUISM TODAY since its establishment in 1979. I also want to extend my congratulations to your entire HINDUISM TODAY magazine team for receiving the award at the event. Your tireless dedication to nurturing the spiritual and social movement is highly commendable.

BALAKUMAR MUTHU
BALAKUMAR.MUTHU@GMAIL.COM

Kauai Hindu Monastery, in my view, is one of the most important organizations based in the US that is committed to preserving and communicating Hinduism around the globe. Whatever I say is indeed a very small part of the tremendous work they do. Both Paramacharyaji and Acharyaji also participated in a conference that I organized on soft power in Delhi in 2018. Since then, they have encouraged me to contribute articles of relevance to HINDUISM TODAY, the latest one being on Sri Aurobindo. The magazine is a one-stop shop for inspiring content on Hinduism. And I am also confident to say that the magazine has content on Hinduism that has never before been seen or read; a cursory look at it will enable you to understand the import of my statement. In many ways, they are doing just what Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji envisioned: awakening Hindus to Hinduism.

SUDARSHAN RAMABADRAN
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I am thrilled to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Bodhinatha and the entire team for being honored with the World Hindu Congress special Honorary Award for HINDUISM TODAY! This prestigious recognition is a testament to the dedicated efforts and hard work invested by each team member. HINDUISM TODAY has indeed enriched the world with a wealth of knowledge. It is a world-class contribution.

VANITA SUTHERMAN
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You Know You Are in Rishikesh...

I spent five years of my life in India. I love Rishikesh and consider it to be my Indian home. Here is a humble poem I wish to share with your readers:

You know you're in Rishikesh when

Kashmir: The junior pontiff of Sringeri Mutt, Sri Vidhushekhara Swami, bathes the Deity during the grand opening of the Mata Sharda Temple in Kashmir.

instead of discussing the weather, you tell your taxi driver all about your guru, and he tells you about his.

You know you're in Rishikesh when instead of rock music blaring out of speakers, you hear melodic chants to God.

You know you're in Rishikesh when the main thoroughfare is the shining Ganges gently lapping the shores.

You know you're in Rishikesh when the most common pickpockets you have to worry about are not at all interested in your rupees. The main muggers you have to guard against are the free-roaming monkeys, who will snatch any tasty tidbit out of your hands.

You know you're in Rishikesh when the only legal cheeseburger on the menu is just that—a bun with cheese in the middle.

You know you're in Rishikesh when the only wine you can legally buy is incense, which drifts across your room and intoxicates you as you meditate.

AMBUJA ROSEN
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Science in Hinduism

I totally agree with the claims made by Michael Cavalli in his article, "Hinduism's

Enduring Respect for Science" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2023). It has been widely accepted that ancient Hindus made enormous contributions to science in numerous areas, such as astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, metallurgy, medicine (ayurveda) and surgery, to mention a few. However, not many people are aware of the fact that in Hindu scriptures, such as *Puranas*, which are thousands of years old, it is mentioned that plants and trees have consciousness and are living beings.

Ironically, before the advent of the 20th century, science did not acknowledge the vitality of trees and plants. Then, on May 10, 1901, Jagdish Chandra Bose proved through scientific experiments that plants are like any other life form. This scientific discovery could have been made a lot sooner if the scientists had paid attention to our scriptural writings.

I suspect that a similar thing will happen in the field of consciousness. While our scriptures teach, *Sarvam khalvidam Brahman*, "All this is consciousness," scientists firmly refuse to accept the concept of consciousness because it cannot be measured empirically. It's just a matter of time before they will have no option but to accept the proverbial

elephant in the room, namely, consciousness, because it can explain phenomena that are inexplicable from the perspective of science.

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA
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A Peaceful Turn for Kashmir

Excellent articulation of history, struggles and restoration activity with wonderful pictures ("New Temple Signals a Peaceful Turn for Kashmir," Jan/Feb/Mar 2024). Thank you, Choodie, for sharing your experiences also.

CHANDRASHEKAR
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This article provides information quite illuminative for people in the rest of India, who have been kept in the dark by Indian historians about the spiritual past of the Indian subcontinent. Thanks.

ANIL KESHARWANI
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Choodie Shivaram's article describing the rebuilding the Mata Sharada temple and its pratishtapana in 2023 at Teetwal in LOC Kashmir instills pride in the heart of every follower of Sanatana Dharma. It is elaborately and eloquently written, with geographical context, photos and history, giving the reader

a clear view of the situation prevailing in Kashmir over the centuries and describing the ideal of harmony between all communities, too good to be true. The work of Save Sharada Peeth committee is truly commendable, kindling the hope and possibility of Sharada Peetha Yatra as a reality in the near future.

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More on Rudraksha Beads

Dear Nikki: It was great reading about the sacred beads (Jun/Jul/Aug 2023). Excellent! I was hoping to see in the article information about the sacred beads from the forest supported at the Kadavul Temple in Kauai, Hawaii, which we have visited. We have a bead garland of twenty-one beads for worship at home. In the article, I was also hoping to see a reference to the Indo-Nepal Rudraksha Organization—and book on this subject by Panduranga Rao, PhD., *Human Relation of Rudraksha, Genesis & Manifestation*. A key point to make is that these rudraksha are not unique to any one area of Indo-Nepal.

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Women as Priests

As far as I know, most Hindu ceremonies/rites are done with both man and woman together. See: "The Value of Hindu Home Worship" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2024). Additionally, there are many Hindu women priests, who are in great demand. And of course we have female forms of every Deity, often considered more powerful!

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Where's the Ram Temple Report?

The April issue you are reading went to press February 1, too soon after the opening of the Ram Temple to create a proper article. Be assured coverage will be in the July issue, including interviews with pilgrims and views of Hindu leaders on this historic event.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:
Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Bangkok Congress Reflects A Historic Hindu Awakening
HINDUISM TODAY's perennial vision becomes manifest

AN ARTICLE ON PAGES 30 TO 35 OF THIS issue covers the remarkable World Hindu Congress 2023, held in Bangkok in November. HINDUISM TODAY's publisher, Bodhinatha Veylanswami, and managing editor, Acharya Arumuganathaswami, attended to receive a most meaningful award on behalf of the magazine.

To the 2000+ Hindu dignitaries from 61 countries in attendance, the Organizing Committee explained with much praise and appreciation what the award was for. It was "... [for] the remarkable contributions made by HINDUISM TODAY... [for] nurturing Hindu solidarity and unity, dispelling misconceptions, [for being] a guiding light of knowledge, inspiration and awakening for Hindus across the globe, [for] nurturing the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance and providing a valuable resource for Indian leaders and educators, [for] preserving and promoting the rich heritage of Hindu Dharma... and sharing its wisdom with the world." These rare and precious words were especially full of meaning for us: the very accomplishments they listed were all part of Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's vision which inspired him to



Heartfelt gratitude: Dr. Mohanrao Bhagwat, president of RSS (left) and Shri Parande, secretary general of VHP (right)

launch the magazine 45 years ago.

Gurudeva urged his staff and all Hindus to promote, preserve and protect our religion, to become aware of each other all over the world and work together as a one family to bolster a budding Hindu renaissance. Thus, this most valuable body of sacred knowledge would stand strong as a beacon of hope and serenity for all of humanity. Yes: for all of humanity. Gurudeva taught, "Hinduism does not draw a square to keep others out; it

draws a circle to include everyone."

The Bangkok Congress was the fulfillment of that vision. Here was the Hindu global family coming together to work out in peace, harmony and clarity of mind the issues and questions of our time. Our article on the Congress describes several topics the delegates approached to best promote, preserve and protect Hinduism, and the ways that Hinduism's soft power can uplift all of humanity. Some participants pointed out that Hindus also promote and protect other ancient and noble cultures of the world. How proud we are of Hinduism, Hindu people and Hindu sentiments!

This award thus also honored and celebrated all of the delegates, all those involved in the creation of this magnificent event, and even all Hindus of the world. For it was all of them—all of us—who, working together, generated the vision, disseminated it, and then worked hard to make it manifest.

But there's a lot more to be done, and HINDUISM TODAY has much more to do. For that, we ask your help. It is not easy now, in the digital age, to finance a quality magazine and ship it all over the world.

QUOTES & QUIPS

“God waits to win back his own flowers as gifts from man’s hands”

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), *Bengali poet and philosopher*

All that is required to realize the Self is to be still. What can be easier than that?—**Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

Thoughts are giant powers. They are more powerful than electricity. They control your life, mold your character and shape your destiny. **Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963)

The fire that warms us can also consume us; it is not the fault of the fire. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

When your mind becomes vacant, endeavor to fill it with the awareness of God and His contemplation. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *yogini and Bengali saint*

If two wise men always agree, then there is no need for one of them. *Zambian proverb*

In order to make an apple pie from scratch,

you must first create the universe. **Carl Sagan** (1934–1996), *famed astrophysicist*

My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that, and I intend to end up there. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

The key to growth is the introduction of higher dimensions of consciousness into our awareness. **Lao Tzu** (4th century bce), *author of the Tao Te Ching*

It moves and It moves not; It is far and It is near; It is within all this and It is also outside all this. *Isa Upanishad 1.15*

Hate, it has caused a lot of problems in the world, but has not solved one yet. **Maya Angelou** (1928–2014), *American poet*

Wrinkles should merely indicate where the smiles have been. **Mark Twain**

(1835–1910), *American author*

The universe works like an echo: Whatever thoughts you think, will rebound on you. Therefore, be careful of the thoughts you think. **Dada J.P. Vaswani** (1918–2018), *spiritual head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

A wise man can learn more from a foolish question than a fool can learn from a wise answer. **Bruce Lee** (1940–1973), *martial arts expert*

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities. **Voltaire** (1694–1778), *French writer*

The fitness of the pupil is shown in his love for the acquisition of knowledge, his willingness to receive instruction, his reverence for learned and virtuous men, his attendance upon the teacher,

and his execution of orders. **Dayananda Saraswati** (1824–1883), *Indian philosopher*

Freedom of will is the ability to do gladly that which I must do. **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875–1961), *Swiss psychiatrist*

Beyond the senses is the mind; above the mind is its essence, intelligence; beyond the intelligence is the great Self; beyond the great Self is the Unmanifest. *Katha Upanishad 2.3.7*

Be like the honeybee who gathers only nectar wherever it goes. Seek the goodness that is found in everyone. **Mata Amritanandamayi**, *Kerala-based hugging saint*

It should not be hard for you to stop sometimes and look into the stains of walls, or ashes of a fire, or clouds, or mud or like places in which ... you may find really marvelous ideas. **Leonardo Da Vinci** (1452–1519), *Italian polymath*

Even as a mirror stained by dust shines brightly when it has been cleaned, so the embodied one when he has seen the (real) nature of the Self becomes integrated, of

fulfilled purpose and freed from sorrow. *Svetasvatara Upanishad 2.14*

The knowledge of God cannot be contained within the limits of any book. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), *Sri Lankan sage*

Silence is the language of the soul. In stillness, you can hear the whispers of your true self. **Swami Avdheshanand Giri**, *Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of the Juna Akhara*

We have a physical body, a mental body, an emotional body, and we are the soul. So, we can think of ourselves like the person in space, in a big cumbersome suit. We want to identify as the being that’s residing inside these bodies, and look at the outside just like a space suit that eventually we will throw off. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

Sacred is secret in all religions because if you talk about your inner experiences, you make them outer experiences and you stop the process. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*



DID YOU KNOW?

A Plant-Powered Nation

ACCORDING TO A RECENTLY PUBLISHED report by *World Atlas*, India is the global leader in vegetarianism, with a remarkable 38 percent of its population adhering to a meat-free diet. And vegetarianism is today widely recognized worldwide for its health and environmental benefits.

The report highlights India not only for its significant vegetarian population but also its notably low meat consumption rates. Vegetarianism in India and other countries is driven by myriad factors. Health and environmental benefits are great motivators, but the influence of religion, ethical considerations, economic factors, cultural norms, and a distaste for meat also play significant roles.

Following India, Israel, Taiwan and Italy claim the second, third and fourth spots, demonstrating the widespread

acceptance of vegetarianism across diverse cultures. Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom, each with a 9 percent vegetarian population, occupy the fifth to seventh positions, indicating a significant shift in dietary preferences in these countries. Brazil, with 8 percent, Ireland at 6 percent, and Australia, at 5 percent, showcase the global reach of the vegetarian movement.

In a broader context, the United States stands at 36th place with 4.2 percent of its population following a vegetarian diet, while Russia is at the lower end of the spectrum with only 1% vegetarians. Globally, vegetarians make up around 10% of Earth’s population. The data collected reflects the growing consciousness towards health and sustainability and also underscores the diverse range of reasons behind the adoption of vegetarianism.



Results of ahimsa: a decorated cow enjoys a fearless life in India

BASICS

Hindu Monism & Dualism

HINDUS BELIEVE IN ONE SUPREME BEING, an all-pervasive Divinity that sustains all there is. But how does one reconcile an imperfect world with the temporal perfection of God?

Philosophers and saints have long debated the exact relationship of God, the soul and world, in exchanges that shaped our religion and set the path for millions of followers. Out of their speculations have blossomed hundreds of schools of thought.

At one end of Hinduism’s rich spectrum is monism, or *advaita*, which perceives a unity of God, soul and world. Generally, monists believe God is immanent. If creation were a pot, God Himself would be the clay from which creation is made of. There is nothing that is not Him—any differences are but illusions that need to be removed, veils over the discernment of the soul. This is the view proposed by Adi Shankara and others.

At the other end there are the schools that teach dualism, *dvaita*—exemplified by Madhva and the early Pashupatas—which speak about a real and eternal differentiation. Dualists believe in God as Lord and Creator, but He remains ever separate from man, regardless of the evolution of an individual soul. In the same analogy, dualists see God as the potter, intimately involved but eternally different from the clay pot He makes.

Other views describe reality as one and yet not one, like the ocean and its waves—*dvaita-advaita*, advocated by sages such as Ramanuja, Srikantha and Nimbarka. Though the specifics of *dvaita-advaita* differ from tradition to tradition, its main creed describes a perfect, beginningless oneness of God and creation.



Theism in practice: a young couple in Bali worship God and Gods together as part of their daily religious life.

In this view, the world and God are one in many, but not all, aspects. In time, the difference resolves itself in perfect identity—that is the path of all souls.

Drawn from the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

I Want to Be a Monk

Life at Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii is profound, spiritually demanding and richly rewarding. If you or someone you know feels called to a life of selfless service and meditation, we welcome the discussion. Candidates must be male, under age 25, single and ready to embrace a strict and traditional Hindu way of life. E-mail: monklife@hindu.org



More details about the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order can be found by scanning the QR code.



FROM THE TIRUMANTIRAM The End of Sound

The meditative experience of flowing from inner sound to perfect silence

The following is a selection of verses from Rishi Tirumular's Tirumantiram, translated by Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar.

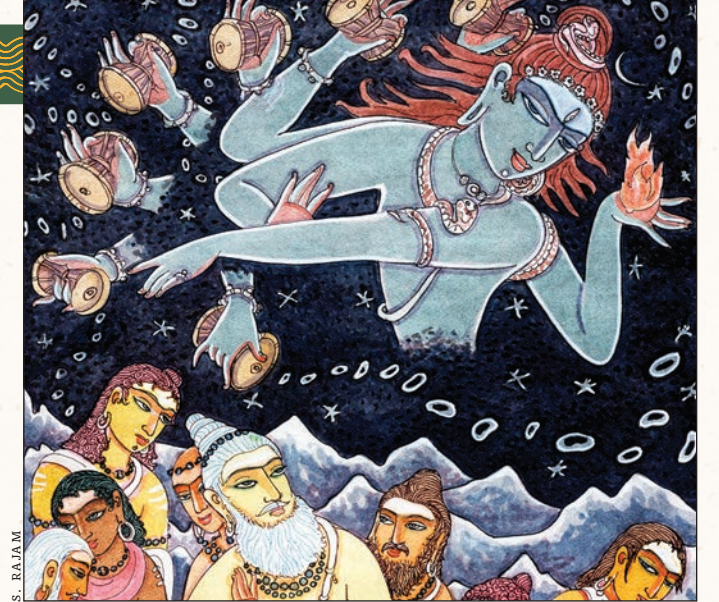
Even if so-called "yogis" remain in yogic practices for eight thousand years, none of them would have a direct vision of Lord Siva, who is like the nectar flowing through all the nerves and channels of the body and whose presence fills the entire universe. But, if they settle their mind within, delink their soul from the *tattvas* (foundational elements of existence) and contemplate their inseparable oneness with the Lord, their soul would attain its own resplendence—thus far obscured. Then Lord Siva would merge in everlasting union with them like a mirror holding a reflected image, inseparable from it. 603

If the sadhaka fixes the concentrated gaze of both his eyes at a distance of 12 digits from the midpoint of his nose, then he would be completely free from the fatigued state caused by his five senses; no decay for his body; all the organs and internal instruments would be regulated; he would be free from bodily consciousness. Being in this deeply absorbed state, he would be free from the consciousness of his own self; apart from the goal of attaining oneness with the Divine, he would not have any other aspiration. He would become Siva Himself. 604

Having fixed the concentrated look of both the eyes, the sadhakas should then regulate their breath's flow which is now stilled, neither rising up nor moving down more than a span of 12 digits. Being completely free from the disturbed state caused by the senses, they should lose themselves in yogic slumber. For those who are capable of raising themselves to such a supreme state, the main purpose of taking this birth becomes fulfilled. They would not be afflicted with the fear of death. 605

Ringling sounds of the bell, roaring sounds of the ocean, trumpeting of the elephant, sweet sounds of a long flute, thundering of the clouds, buzzing of bees and that of a dragonfly, the reverberations of conch and drum, the soothing melody of a stringed musical instrument—these ten kinds of invigorating sounds which arise from the innermost space of the heart without the presence of their respective sources could be heard internally only by those who remain within by extricating themselves from the *tattvas* step by step. It is not possible for others to experience the blissful benefits of such internal melodies. 606

The sounds of the ocean, thundering clouds, trumpeting of the elephant, and the sound of the vina—these arise to subdue the harshness and hardness of the mind. They bring fourth a continuous sound from the luminous bodies, vibrating in distant space where the celestial beings are living. The sweet melody of the flute, the reverberating sound of the conch with beautified curves—these internal sounds could be experienced only by the yogis who have realized the significance of the heart-center through Sivayoga, not by other yogis who limit themselves to the eight steps of yoga. 607



Lord Siva is of the nature of these internal melodious sounds. Within the soul of those who are capable of realizing the presence of Siva in the innermost space of their heart, all the qualities of Siva which were in a dormant state would manifest; their body would be suffused with the resplendent rays of Siva and those beams of light would become one with their soul while residing in their physical body. The inner sounds and their exalted benefits are comparable to the flowers and their fragrance. The body of those who experience such sounds would be with this everlasting fragrance. 608

Sivashakti, who performs deeds for the betterment of souls, is ever present at a transcendental plane which extends from the *nadanta*—the soundless pinnacle of all sound. the most fruitful yoga known as Sivayoga is mainly concerned with elevating the soul to that pure plane. The goal of all Sivayogis is steadily fixed at that plane. Lord Siva is ever existing at this final stage of sound. 609

The five designated Lords, namely Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and Sadasiva, are present in the five fiery planes formed between the six chakras; They, being with much effulgence, are worshiped by devas and sages. Even though they are endowed with authority, they are free from the obscured state caused by the sense of I-ness. If the sadhaka who is in meditation inwardly leaves the *tattvas*, following the root sound, so as to make him settled in the respective five Lords, he would reach the feet of Lord Siva who is adorned with golden konrai flowers. 610

Having followed all the ordained disciplines without leaving out any part and having transmuted his body to be identical with the form of the Lord, the yogi should direct his breath through the *sushumna* channel within the spine and elevate himself to the highest point of *dvasanta* at the top of the head. He should transcend the three luminous regions—fire, sun and moon—step by step, going beyond luminosity. The yogi who practices Sivayoga in this way would continue to exist through many aeons without leaving his transmuted body. 612

For the yogis, there are self-luminous domains in the transcendental plane suitable to their existence. A yogi becomes the Lord of that domain suitable to him. If the powers pertaining to that domain are fully experienced by that yogi, the same domain would be reached by all those who have become his disciples. 613

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras*.



A Magical Book For Children About Yoga and The Mind

Lion Sage, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, is a child's version of the metaphysical masterpiece *Merging with Siva*. It teaches children how to face life's challenges, but most importantly informs them of their true spiritual identity.

In this highly illustrated book, young ones are taught they are not the body which suffers now and then. They are not the emotions that well up in good times and not so good times. They are not the thinking mind. They are light and love; they are an immortal soul on a path of self-discovery. Knowing this one truth can alter a young life forever. As you take your children through the nineteen chapters, you provide a deep comprehension of life and values that few people have. You teach them to live in the now and not dwell on the past or worry about the future. You give them time-honored tools to create a happier, less stressful life.

Free PDF or Epub Version Available at:
himalayanacademy.com/view/lion-sage



Devotional: Bala Vihar children chant and perform prayers to Sivalingams in Houston, Texas, one of the largest Chinmaya Mission centers in North America

EDUCATION

Chinmaya Mission West Invests in its Youth

Over a period of 30 weeks each year, tens of thousands of children in North America, from kindergarten through grade twelve, follow a syllabus based on Advaita Vedanta to prepare them for a spiritual life



Mission Numbers in North America

- * Almost 20,000 children enrolled in Bala Vihars today
- * Bala Vihars with more than 1,000 children are located in San Jose, Los Angeles, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Washington DC and New Jersey areas
- * 300 teachers in Chinmaya Mission San Jose, which has over 2,000 children
- * The region with the largest number of chapters (affiliated to a larger center and administered by the center's board of directors) is Los Angeles area, with nine
- * The oldest Bala Vihar was started in July, 1976, in Long Island, New York
- * The newest center with a Bala Vihar is in Cleveland, Ohio, with 75 children

BY NIMMI RAGHUNATHAN, CALIFORNIA

IT WAS 1965 WHEN PUJYA GURUDEV SWAMI Chinmayananda made his first visit to the US—to the San Francisco of social commotion of experimentation, peace, and New Age ideas. His first three-day lecture series stateside was impactful enough for him to come back every year after that.

This guru was different. He did not think his task was to just pop up, talk to a group of people, jet back to India, and forget about the seekers and the curious. He took them seriously. Decades later, Swami Swaroopananda, Global Head of Chinmaya Mission, smiles and says, “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the whole world is one family. That’s the message of our rishis; and when Gurudev set up Chinmaya Mission West (CMW), he demonstrated commitment right then. It was a signal to the people that we are with you. It was a permanent idea.”

Flashback again. It was 1973, and Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda was in Long Island, New York. Sharada Kumar was accompanying him and chanting the *Bhagavad Gita*, as she had always done at his satsangs. At bhiksha one evening, he instructed her, “Start Bala Vihar.” Sharada Kumar, who had a 3-year-old at the time, was nonplussed. “What is that?” she asked softly. “When you go to Mumbai, meet Nirmala Amma,” came the reply. Some years later, Darshana Nanavaty, who today is the director of the Bala Vihar (BV) program at CM Houston, had a similar experience. “Take care of my children,” Gurudev told her. At the time, she had no idea what to do with that instruction.

The two of them did not know then that the loving directive they had been given would have far-reaching consequences. With several hundred volunteers and dynamic swamins (this term includes both men and women monks), it would balloon to touch the lives of thousands of Indian American children, laying the foundation

Teachers: (clockwise from left) Gaurang and Darshana Nanavaty with teachers at CM Houston; Sejal Shah speaking at satsang; Locations of centers and chapters in North America

blocks of Hindu values and shaping their perspective of life through the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

Sharada Kumar, who is now CM’s National BV Coordinator, says, “I had to start from scratch,” reminiscing how Nirmala Amma, who ran a BV in her apartment in Mumbai, gave her tips on constructing a curriculum. Darshana Nanavaty remembers immersing herself in writing, collating and creating small books of teaching material and taking them with her to show Gurudev at a camp at the ashram in Piercy, California, seeking his guidance and approval. She recalls a fellow devotee, the late Susheel Bibbs, who lived in Piercy and had worked on the *Sesame Street* TV show, pitching in ideas on how to make things appealing for kids.

Students

Of course, having teaching material is one thing—getting an audience for it is another. As every early volunteer in every center across North America reports, the children at home and their young friends become the

first students.

Bala means children and vihar means play. This, even the very first homegrown teachers of CM understood. In pre-Internet days, they scrounged around for craft ideas to supplement their teaching on Diwali and Navaratri. Anyone traveling to India was tasked with bringing back animated books on the Gods. Some translated bhajans into English and had the kids mime Lord Hanuman’s power and Krishna’s playfulness. It was all fun.

Today, for many in North America, Chinmaya Mission is synonymous with Bala Vihar—a far cry from its inconspicuous beginnings, where little groups of children met once a week in Los Angeles, San Jose, Boston and Chicago, in the homes, basements and garages of their parents. The remarkable truth of this expansion is that its success has been purely driven by word of mouth. Communities will be hard-pressed to find glossy printed testimonials and television ads; but an anxious parent of a toddler has to simply utter worried words like, “culture,” or “learning about Hinduism,” at a gathering, and he or she is likely to be informed about CM and the efficacy of its BV program by a parent who has had a child attend.

Initiatives

Along with growth came more initiatives. Children began to get grouped grade-wise

so instruction could be more targeted. Shlokas were incorporated to suit the age level. Sets of prayers were assembled, including those invoking the Gods Ganesha and Saraswati, and chanted at the start of class. Other sacred verses were compiled, with Shanti Path mantra at the end of the class.

Gaurang Nanavaty, the dynamic founder of CM Houston, points out that not only was chanting taught but “emphasis was laid on what the Sanskrit words meant, so children would comprehend, internalize and make it their own.” Growing up primarily with English, students were provided not only translations but transliterations of the material.

North American Bala Vihar children over the years have embraced this fully and become so precise in their pronunciation that they have gone on to shine at Gita chanting competitions in India.

Teaching

As the BV movement began to spread, the CM communities in some cities grew sizeable enough to band together and buy properties to establish centers. Today, while the newer and smaller chapters rent rooms from schools for the weekend to conduct BV, many others have constructed small and large buildings with the help of member donations. These buildings tend to have classrooms equipped with TV monitors to help in

From Student to Teacher



BY SEJAL SHAH, NEW YORK
I am a proud CM Bala Vihar alumnus. My parents joined Chinmaya Mission in 1978 after meeting Gurudev and have stayed active till the present day. We started BV by rotating from basement to basement of uncles and aunties. Our beloved Vilasini Balakrishnan (CM Washington Region) was our first teacher when I was growing up in Michigan.

Going to Bala Vihar every week during the school year was all I knew. Being Hindu was a normal part of my identity. I took chanting and singing bhajans for granted and thought that was what every Indian does. I was surrounded by a community of like-minded peers and adults who created a safe space for learning and expressing this rich Hindu heritage.

Even today I am still in contact with many I grew up with in Bala Vihar, and I consider them as family. No matter how long it’s been since we last met or spoke, the thread that connects us is still strong. When I meet alumni from other centers, there is already

an underlying connection, allowing for another thread to be woven together.

As an adolescent, I started to develop a comfortable, underlying pride in having this Hindu heritage be a part of who I was. One of its expressions came out through my love of Bharatanatyam. I went to a Catholic high school, and through religion, I had an opportunity to confidently connect with my peers of other faiths.

I wanted my daughter to have this confidence and pride. And that is when I came back to CM. My parents, Krishna and Jagdish, led by example, and I want to do the same for my girls.

Of course, it is different now. Growing up, my parents allowed one TV and phone for the entire family. This limited our distractions and made it ideal for my parents to raise us with a Hindu spiritual education. It’s different today. As BV teachers and parents, we must embrace the fact that technology is a constant in most teens’ lives. We will need to learn how to use this evolving technology to build interesting avenues for Hindu spiritual education.



Classes: (clockwise from above) Children perform "Matru Puja" in Los Angeles to honor their mothers; students in Calgary, Alberta, learn about mudras; Swami Siddhananda manages the book distribution center in Pennsylvania; youth practice performing arati



instruction, a satsang hall, an altar and resident quarters for the head monk of the center.

Other BV matters began to formalize, too. Families began to pay an annual BV donation or fee, to have their children attend. No longer homegrown, volunteer teachers are now vetted and handpicked by either the swamins or senior sevaks of a center and then trained. In Los Angeles, for instance, with an eye for quality instruction, all teachers are required to complete the online Foundation Vedanta Course administered in India by scholars and Vedantins. The year-long program is supported with in-person weekly satsangs by Swami Ishwarananda, the learned head of the center. Teachers at the various centers also attend satsangs, study groups and converse over online forums.

CM Los Angeles has also instituted an Education Council comprised of senior teachers and sevaks, whose job is to mentor teachers throughout the year and keep an eye on the prescribed curriculum.

Brahmachari Soham Chaitanya, the young head of CM San Jose, who was a BV student in India and then briefly taught BV in North America before becoming a monk, says there are advantages to a structured syllabus. "Once the teacher gets comfortable with the topic, it allows them to be creative in their

presentation," he says. "They don't need to spend too much time thinking about what they are going to teach in the next class."

This allows an age-appropriate curriculum which is, for example, "effective in engaging high schoolers, since they are entering a phase where they appreciate more discussion and relatable examples." Indeed, teachers are encouraged to pique the interest of students and allow them to question freely. And children are known to demand answers to why Lord Ganesha's head had to be cut off or Rama's father had so many wives!

Trained in Vedanta, teachers of younger children provide answers while those of older ones encourage students to introspect further and understand their role in society, through the prism of dharma and universal values such as tolerance and compassion.

Discipline

In the event that a chapter or center has to deal with, say, a less than committed teacher, the volunteer is gently directed and reassigned to another needed volunteer task. "Whichever center it may be, there is no question they are dedicated to CM but it could be their talent lies elsewhere," explains Swami Ishwarananda, "No one has to leave, and no one is told to leave."

Discipline and handling truancy in the

case of children, too, is sought to be done as gently and firmly as possible. Teachers and senior sevaks first try to talk to the child and after this, the parents are looped in. Again, in infrequent situations, when this action draws a blank, the request may be made to withdraw the child from the program.

Flexibility

Whether it is about incorporating new topics or tweaking teaching methods, both Darshana Nanavaty and Sharada Kumar say it comes from being open to teachers' feedback while also keeping their ear to the ground on the needs of the children themselves.

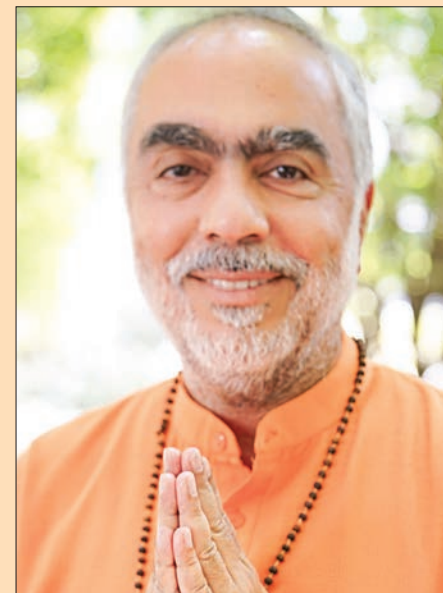
This flexibility, as any teacher will attest, is key to being heard by the student. Brahmachari Soham Chaitanya believes that among the top three reasons the Bala Vihar program has met with success is the "decentralization of operation." So, while CMW provides broad



parameters on education, individual centers are free to study their youth and structure materials and teaching to suit.

To gain a deeper understanding of Hindu beliefs and practices, teachers bring to the class several thoughts and works that are not

The Head of Chinmaya Mission on North American Youth



Swami Swaroopananda, global head of Chinmaya Mission, held a Q&A with HINDUISM TODAY during his visit to CM Los Angeles, summer 2023.

In your global travels, have you observed differences between Indian American children and others?

Each place has its unique lifestyle, which is always in a state of flux and can be experimented with. This is not to be confused with culture, which is Sanskriti, that which improves you and is practiced for a long period. Going to bars, doing drugs, dating, etc.—even the West doesn't call it "culture," but people loosely do it all the time! Youth everywhere tend to be the

same, but depending on whether there is a background of culture in a home, the approach of children can be different.

In America, what is happening is that there is a huge new immigrant population who have brought their culture with them and want their children rooted in it. So, there is this surge of interest in culture. In other places where there are old settlers, just like with the first generation of immigrants in America, the cultural links with India slowly begin to fade. The children reflect the predominant population of the moment.

Should the BV teacher then cater to the needs of the child?

The beauty of Hinduism and CM is that we are adaptable but remain firm in our base. Language changes and we must adapt. There is so much talk now about attention span, especially after the pandemic, that has to be addressed. Some adaptabilities take time, but we must always patiently make the effort to reach the child. Gurudev did not waver from the foundation of the teachings but was able to present the knowledge in a way that reached people. We only have to follow his example!

To help the teachers stay the course and engage with the children, we make every effort to send those swamins and brahmacharins who are flexible and with the times, to lead the North American centers.

Adaptability comes with a cautionary note. The tendency to please and cater should not be there, it cannot come in the way of learning. If that happens, then the children won't be helped. But by recognizing the needs, the standards can be improved.

Reluctant youth: At a teacher gathering in the USA, Swami Swaroopananda advised them not to worry if a child grumbled and did not want to come to BV voluntarily. "If the child comes only because the parent wants him to, it's okay. Let us just continue to teach with love," he said.

How does CM keep connected with the youth?

So many, many youngsters have gone through the program, and the expectation is that ALL of them should come back. We should not do that. Gurudev gave knowledge freely. Today also there is no psychological or other binding pressures on anyone to be with CM. Those who are here are here because of a sense of gratitude and dedication. We believe the more the people voluntarily dedicate themselves, the more we can grow our services effectively and joyfully.

When kids go away to college, the link weakens, but now with a lot more centers and online programs, we have more effective ways of being in touch. Centers also know that work should start two or three years before children leave for college, so they remain inspired to continue their connection with CM.

One thing is clear: when the whole family is involved, the rate of children coming back rises even more.

What do you wish to see happen with BV in North America?

Hindu culture should reach the maximum number of people, and our children should be ever ready to serve.



Senior guides: (clockwise from above left) Sharada Kumar, who started the first Bala Vihar in North America; Bala Vihar word scramble class puzzle; Jignesh Joshi

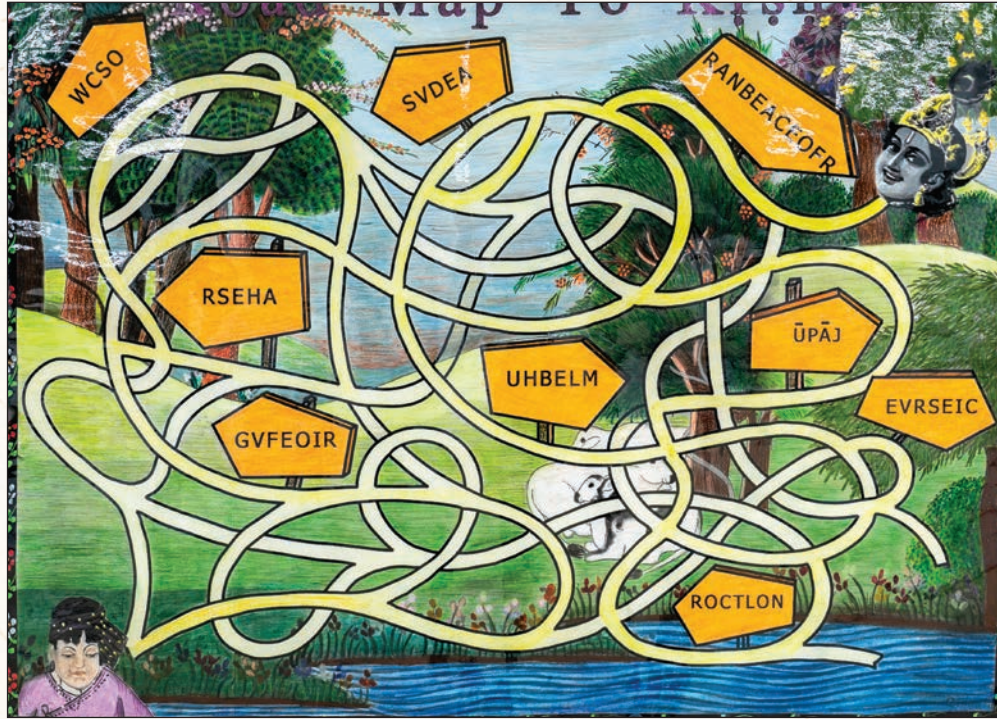
necessarily Chinmaya Mission publications but are within the ambit of Advaita Vedanta. They also plan field trips to observe temple rituals and include visits to other faith centers like Zoroastrian and Buddhist temples, synagogues, mosques and churches.

Some larger centers with deep teacher talent, guided by learned swamins, generate books on subjects geared to specific grades. In Los Angeles, teacher groups under the supervision of Swami Ishwarananda recently concluded a project based on the acclaimed "Upanishad Ganga" Indian TV series that was commissioned some years prior by Gururji Swami Tejomayananda, the previous head of Chinmaya Mission Worldwide. From grades 9–12, students delve into Vedantic concepts with an eye on applicability in their impressionable lives.

Others have worked on character studies of main figures in the epics to teach values, and yet others have researched and collated information on particular Gods, like Lord Shiva. The independent and creative approach tends to be effective and beneficial for all, as the material generated is made accessible to all centers.

Distribution

The clearing house for this is in Pennsylvania, where Chinmaya Publications West goes on overdrive at the start of a new year. Swami



Siddhananda, who heads this, estimates that "in the very busy months of September and October, an average of 500 books are shipped out every day by UPS."

Throughout the year, he says, teachers' needs are met through smaller packages. Storybooks, gift items and audio-visual materials to supplement instruction are often requested and sent out to centers and chapters across the US and Canada.

Parents

Often in tandem, books are ordered for adults—the parents who bring their kids



to Bala Vihar. While the child is busy in class, parents, too, have the opportunity to learn Advaita Vedanta from an Acharya. The *Bhagavad Gita*, *Tattva Bodha*, *Atma Bodha* and other texts are addressed by the teacher.

No doubt exists in the minds of Swamins, teachers and volunteers that parents are key

to a successful teaching experience. A child can come weekly for instruction, but the practicing and internalizing can be nurtured only in the home environment. When adults are steeped in the same knowledge, the dissonance is absent, making them effective guides.

Many immigrant and young parents approach CM fearing that their children, growing up in North America, will alienate themselves from their roots. They tend to believe that just having them chant shlokas and sing bhajans will assuage their concerns. Attending the mandatory adult classes tends to be eye-opening for them, too! They join in learning the simple rationale behind why coconuts are broken at the altar and proceed to understand the need to joust with the ego.

Gaurang Nanavaty echoes a common sentiment while explaining why at least one parent must attend the adult class. "When everyone learns, not only the child but the entire family grows, and then the society, the nation, grows," he says.

Adult members at different centers often recall the bonding that takes place with a simple activity like staging a play. Someone will write a script on the life of Lord Rama, another will go down a rabbit hole looking for props, others get involved in costuming, scheduling rehearsals, recording the music. Not only do parent and child spend several hours together, but participating families bond over a shared goal and philosophy.

Curriculum

"Remember that values are more important than valuables," Pujya Swami Tejomayanada has noted, and Chinmaya Mission empha-



sizes and prides itself on the systematic value-based education it provides for children. It starts in pre-kindergarten, where tiny tots are nurtured in play and Hindu culture, and then moves on to the celebrated Bala Vihar program for children in kindergarten through grade 12. The structured teaching is done with Advaita Vedanta forming the basis of all understanding shared in class.

Jignesh Joshi has been teaching high schoolers at BV in San Jose for over 15 years. The goal, he says, is not to have children emerge "as realized masters or little monks, but to instill the preparatory qualifications with applicability in their daily life."

CM teachers say this is different from public education, which is aimed at increasing the standard of living, while their work is to increase the "standard of life." They also rush to point out that this does not negate success at work and business but helps enhance self-growth, creating well-adjusted individuals who become outstanding citizens of society.

And so, spiritual values from Hindu texts are stressed. Joshi gives an example of the Shat Sampati, which is part of the *Sadhana Chatushtaya* as enumerated by Adi Shankara. "We have the students view the qualification of *shama* (tranquility) as learning to manage the mind, and *dama* (training) as managing actions."

At CM San Jose, grades 10–12 study the *Bhagavad Gita*, with the eighteen chapters neatly divided over three years, relying on Swami Chinmayananda's commentary, *The Holy Geeta*. "The Bala Vihar calendar gives us 30 weeks to get across the Vedantic concepts and values," says Joshi, "and this is possible only because the building blocks of learning have happened in the early years. It is like an assembly line in an auto factory, where each part is put in the right place before the car rolls out, but done in a thoughtful, personal, and considered manner."

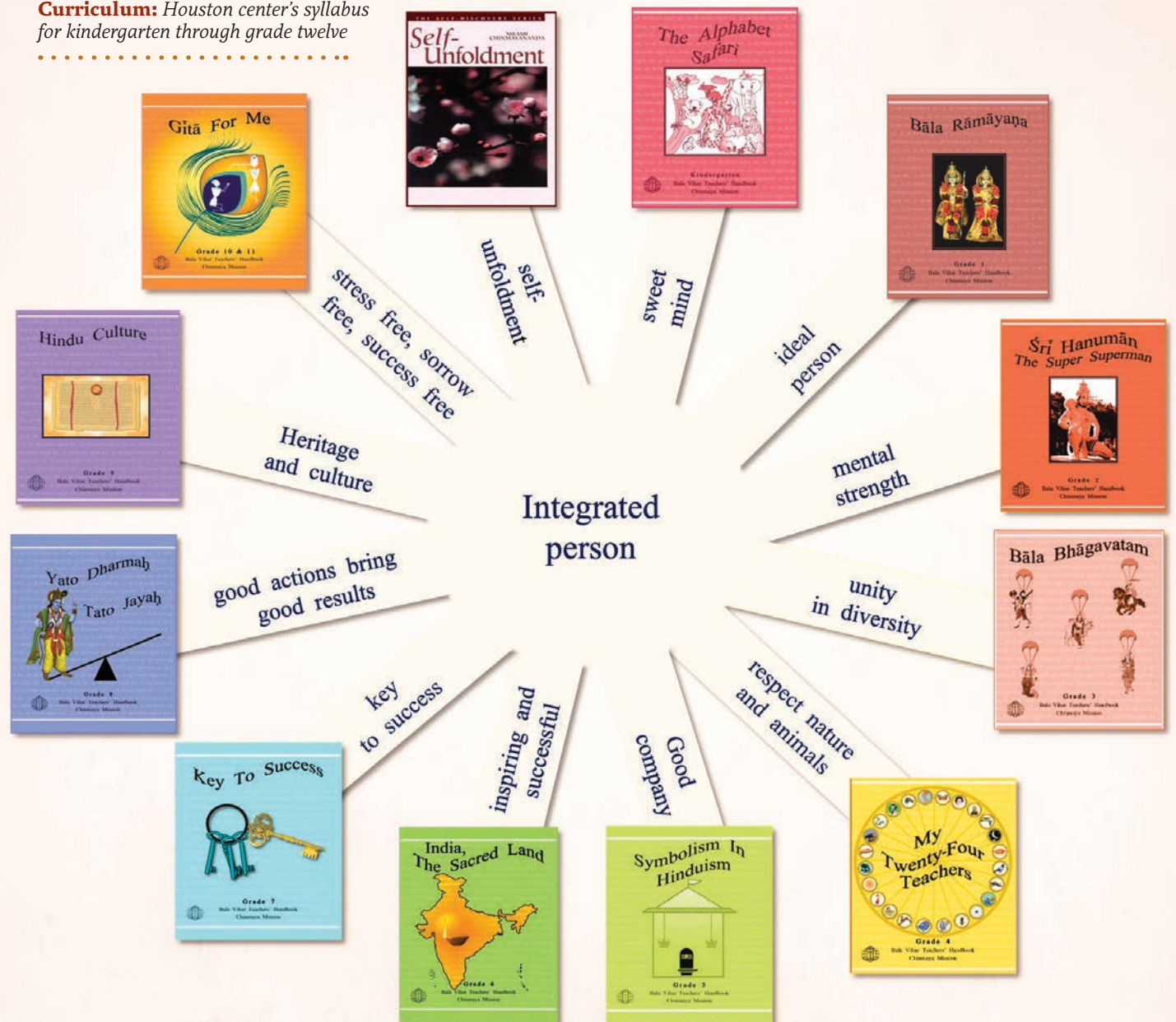
Ameetha Ramesh, who teaches high schoolers at CM Branchburg, New Jersey,

Passing on tradition: (clockwise from above) Students at a New Jersey center bring ancient stories to life; Ameetha Ramesh teaches high schoolers at the same center; walking an intricate path while contemplating life's purpose at a San Diego center camp

says, "The eighth and ninth grades are especially sensitive. This is the age when they get skeptical and demand to know what is so special about being Hindu." So, she says, the work begins in grade seven, when children study the book by Swami Tejomayananda, *Hindu Culture—An Introduction*, which deals, among other things, with the basis of cultures, fundamentals of scriptures, role of temples, indicators of dharma and understanding the caste system. "By middle school, it's important to have them feel pride in their culture and who they are," she says.

The stepping stones to this moment stretch





back even farther. In kindergarten, kids are familiarized with simple values initiated in an “alphabet” curriculum. While the instinct of every child is to say, “A is for Apple and B is for Ball,” the Vedantic alphabet at CM goes, “A is for Aspiration, B is for Brotherhood and C is for Cleanliness.” Truth, Devotion, Victory, Work, Kindness, Love, Yagna, Zeal.... The kindergarten tots at the end of the year can rattle them off with glee at their annual graduation presentation.

Importantly, teachers don’t teach each letter of the alphabet in isolation. Victory, for example, is explained not only by narrating the Aesop story of the hare and tortoise. Instead, the difference between competition, winning and competing is gently explained and then tied back to the first letter, A, in the context of Aspiration.

Several teaching elements accompany each letter of the alphabet. In I for Intelligence, for

instance, teachers try to prod an early understanding of the mind, asking the children to think about what is different about their mind from their pet’s at home. Children also hear the story of Lord Ganesha circling His parents, and do art projects based on what the teacher judges the class can handle. With the ground set for storytelling and desirable values recognized, the elementary grades dive into learning about the *Ramayana*, *Bhagavatam* and *Mahabharata*. They are introduced to heroic characters and villains in each; a sort of Bollywood-like stark good and bad!

From here individual centers diverge and do what they think the student body requires. Some will have their children, by the time they are in grades four and five, studying the characters from the epics in a more nuanced manner where teachers find themselves answering questions about a “poor Sita” and an “unfair Rama” or leading animated

discussions on women’s freedom as Gandhari blindfolds herself as the wife of a blind man.

Some centers move to give their students exposure to other material in Hindu literature. A year will go by delving into the lives of the saints of India, stories from the *Upanishads*, or studying a commentary on the *Vibhishana Gita*, where children essentially learn that being equipped with inner values alone brings lasting success and happiness.

At CM Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, high schoolers are now learning from *Drop—A Novel*. This book, initiated and seen to fruition by Chinmaya youth, has as its protagonist an Indian American character traveling to India after a painful experience. “That we are learning through an Indian American experience makes a difference,” says Raj Daswani who has been teaching here for about a decade.

He recounts how, when talking about

By Brahmacharini Shubhani Chaitanya, New York

Om...Om...Om...The sound of three Oms resounded in my ears. As we sat on the floor with our legs criss-crossed, we began to chant together, in a natural harmony that made it so much more vibrant and alive. This felt comfortable; I felt at home. This was Bala Vihar. *Bala*—child; *vihar*—a place where children enjoy.

I was only a child then, living in Manila, Philippines, staying in a country where almost 80% of the population were Roman Catholic. I went to a Catholic school where I was exposed to Christian values. I attended Mass at school and learned all the prayers and hymns by heart. However, deep inside, I also longed to understand my own culture and religion. Every night, I watched my dad clean the images at our mandir and close his eyes in deep prayer. Every morning, I heard my mom chant mantras and hymns in the mandir, but what did that all mean? What did it mean to actually connect to God, and who was God actually? What was this all about?

It is the sheer grace of the Guru and the wisdom of my mother that led me to Bala Vihar. Bala Vihar in Manila was just a five-minute walk from my home. It was not only a place of learning about Hindu culture and religion; it was also a safe and fun place to connect with a community of like-minded people. We had Bala Vihar every Saturday at an aunty’s home. She graciously cleared her entire living room so that we could all sit on the floor, wide-eyed, to listen to the stories of various forms of Bhagavan and Bhagavati. After that, we all went for arati and as we left her home, all of us got a chocolate biscuit sandwich as prasada. Through these weekly sessions, we got more in tune with our culture and also in tune with each other. The best friends that I have ever had were from the formative years of Bala Vihar, because our friendship was rooted in deep spirituality and connection to the Higher and not just mundane day-to-day interests.

As we all grew, we slowly entered CHYK or Chinmaya Yuva Kendra. This time, our teacher was a bit stricter, a bit more serious and she went much deeper. I remember her particularly teaching us the *Hanuman Chalisa*, going through the meaning of each and every verse. She even gave each of us a printed book with the verses and meaning, which I still have treasured on my bookshelf today. Since then, Sri Hanuman entered my heart, never to leave again. Slowly, this environment became everything in one—it became my home, community, family and, most of all, my deep connection to Divinity.

When I was around 16 years old, our family suddenly had to leave Manila and move to America. This was probably one



Life's Calling: Brahmacharini Shubhani Chaitanya studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, where she graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in International Trade and Marketing. After working in the fashion industry for around seven years, she decided to take a sabbatical to find her true calling.

of the toughest things I had to go through. The toughest thing was to leave all of these connections. Would I really ever get them back? I was going to move to a new place, a new country with a whole new set of people. What was it going to be like?

It was challenging. For years, I was not connecting deeply with any community of sorts because I was just trying to adjust to a whole new education system and find a job so I could be financially stable and secure. I was away from Bala Vihar and Chinmaya Yuva Kendra, and I just focused on getting myself established in the material world. But when I did, I noticed that I was spiritually starving. I was materially full and yet spiritually starved. And when I thought about it more deeply, I realized I missed what I had in my childhood days. I missed Bala Vihar. I needed to reconnect somehow. So, I took a sabbatical to fill my spirit. This led me to pursue the YEP (Youth Empowerment Program) and eventually led me to the portals of Sandeepany Sadhanalaya for the

two-year Vedanta course. After this, I was initiated into the path of brahmacharya.

It was the seeds sown in Bala Vihar that led me to this life of brahmacharya. For that, I am forever grateful to Pujya Gurudev, Swami Chinmayananda for creating such an opportunity for people like me, who lived far away from Bharat and yet had access to our culture and religion from a very young, formative age.

As a brahmacharini in Chinmaya Mission New York, I now have the opportunity to share those very same teachings that I learned as a child with many children, youth, and even adults through our weekly satsangas. I feel truly blessed to share the joy that I have received. Bala Vihar connected me to my culture, religion, family and community. But the deepest connection it has led me to, is the connection to the Divine Self—one that can never be lost, one that cannot be gained, because it was always there all along. I just didn’t know it.

India, its history and some geography, children would ask why that was important. "They would say, 'I am American' and we would have to navigate that and explain how each of us is a combination of both, American and Indian." Bringing a more contemporary book into class along with the *Gita* has stemmed dropouts, he says. "They are interested. They identify with what's going on. Some of the language sounds like them now, it isn't esoteric anymore," he says.

Ameetha Ramesh says they are piloting a



program dubbed "BV 3.0," which incorporates seva. Younger-grade children this year made New Year greeting cards for veterans and residents of senior homes after learning the teachings of Sanatkumaras and understanding the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. "Practical understanding and relatability," reiterates Raj Daswani, are important.

The importance of relatability is also recognized in CM Seattle, Washington. Co-teachers—past graduates who are either working or are still in college—have been assigned to grades 5–12. The aim is to identify even more of them so the younger grades can also have a Chinmaya youth in class. "Age cannot be a criterion when developing the culture of giving back. It should start now. It should start today," says the center's coordinator, Sujatha Aswath, pointing out another advantage.

"Honestly, this is great," says Archish Sridhar, a BV graduate, a current senior at the University of Washington and an assigned co-teacher. "If there was anything I felt was needed when I was a student," he says, "it

was more overlap between younger and older students." In his estimation, "The older ones learn responsibility as role models, and the younger ones will have someone to look up to." In his ideal world, "Older kids should know the names of the younger ones and call out to them by name as they pass by in the corridors." As part of his responsibilities as a teacher, he says he makes it a point to talk to the students about what is transpiring in their lives and to serve as a mentor of sorts.

His brother Sidh Sridhar, in 10th grade, in his youthful, experienced wisdom says that there has to be push from parents, too, for students to remain interested. "I remember not liking pujas when I was younger. But I don't see it that way anymore, and I think I have gained," he says. At home, there was no question of not going to BV, even if you pleaded boredom.

Ameetha Ramesh says in their pilot program they have looked into the parent angle, too, and have incorporated a "parent talk series" where the adult goes in to narrate a story or engage the kids, supervised by the teacher. "Children take pride in seeing their parents teach, and the adult gets invested more," she says.

Reflecting on his experience, Jignesh Joshi surmises that the material that teachers bring into class is great, but what changes are the methods of teaching in keeping with student needs and the proclivity of the teachers themselves. Someone may be happy getting things across through music, someone else through slides, and yet another through games, for example.

Getting the students on board can often be accomplished only through discussions. Joshi readily acknowledges, as any good teacher, that sometimes the students can pleasantly flummox a teacher by thinking outside the box: a student once wanted to know why God couldn't be more discerning and only remember her good karmas and ignore the bad?!

Teachers are sensitive that their classes are pan-Indian and address subjects accordingly. Ameetha Ramesh says vegetarianism "can be a sticky topic," and emphasis is laid on not hurting anyone's sentiments. "The point," Jignesh Joshi sums up, "is that what we have is a living curriculum." And the teachings live through the lives led by students.

Shobha Ravishankar of CM Houston, who has taught children for over 20 years, says, "Bala Vihar is education for life. Once the child goes through this value-based education, you won't see the change immediately because it is abstract." She explains, "The child will personalize it, and then we can see the inner success that makes them happy and fulfilled."

E-Balavihar

At the height of the lockdowns, in 2020, when children were confined at home and occasionally shepherded to outdoor open spaces for



a break, Chinmaya Mission West thought an online Bala Vihar program would be a practical response to continue serving families and maintaining educational programs during this time of physical isolation and uncertainty across the globe. The swamins and brahmacharins in the US and Canada inspired sevaks and members, and together they swiftly drew up a syllabus. The response was equally immediate: 5,000 children across North America registered and made the shift to online education that summer.

Of course, there were hiccups between conceiving and implementing the digital Bala Vihar: Teachers of younger children had to figure out how to engage without craft projects, and how to prod older children, already tired of sitting in front of computers for school, to blink their bleary eyes. Swamins, brahmacharins and youth class volunteers again showed initiative, embracing and deftly adapting to teaching the *Mahabharata* through song, puppetry, interactive discourses, and even virtual escape rooms and treasure hunts!

Classes were conducted daily Monday through Friday, for eight weeks, and teachers were happy to build on spiritual ideas day after day, without losing momentum. The children, even through this new form of engagement, made friends and bonded with their teachers over Hindu culture. As the e-Bala Vihar experience continued in 2021 with the teaching of the *Tulsi Ramayan*, some key data emerged: many enrolled students were from areas in the US that did not have a physical Bala Vihar

presence.

Later, when things began to limp back to normalcy and students at the various centers made it back to in-person classes, Chinmaya Mission pondered the information gained. Could the successful digital program be geared to help children who live in smaller, more isolated communities? Guided by the CMW board, headed by Swami Shantananda in New Jersey, and without much advertising or fanfare, the decision was made to continue the e-Bala Vihar program.

Starting as a five-month pilot in 2022, it is now a year-long 2023–2024 program and is geared specifically for families who live at least 50 miles from a physical CM center or chapter. The enrollment has been from small Hindu communities in states like New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Idaho, Mississippi and Alabama, among others. Geographically distant places in states with strong CM presence like Texas, Illinois and California joined as well, says Brahmacharini Akalka of CM Trinidad, who now guides the program with a teaching team that consists of trained Chinmaya Yuva Kendra (youth group).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nimmi Raghunathan is an editor and published author living in the US. She is interested in comparative religion, exploring historical, traditional and philosophical links to Hindu thought and culture while traveling. nimmicmla@gmail.com

Accomplished: (clockwise from above) The oldest students in Houston graduate from Bala Vihar; Sujatha Aswath with sons Archish and Sidh; Raj Daswani with his wife Jaya and sons Chetan and Sameer; students display their arts and crafts during an e-Bala Vihar

And just as with in-class Bala Vihars, always recognizing that parents learning alongside their children enhances the spiritual foundation and education of the young at home, the e-Bala Vihar program also runs concurrent classes for adults led by sevaks.

Looking Forward

One who can look back with clarity on this is Sejal Shah, a proud second-generation CM teacher who teaches at CM New York, including her daughter, the third generation of the Shah family! "I didn't realize how blessed I was until I had my own children. I was blessed to have parents who saw the value of spiritual education just like many did with other extracurricular activities such as sports, music, chess, etc., and made it a priority." (See earlier sidebar, page 21, for more.)

Alumni like Shubani Chaitanya, Soham Chaitanya and Sejal Shah—and there is a growing, visible trend—who plunge themselves back into BV in new roles as monks, parents, teachers and volunteers, are the kind of testimonial that CM celebrates. For it seems very clear, now, that the future of the third-generation Hindu American and Hindu Canadian is rooted and stable.



THAILAND

World Hindu Congress Bangkok

This three-day meeting of over two thousand delegates from 61 countries in Thailand reflected a remarkable awakening of Hindus worldwide

THE THIRD WORLD HINDU CONGRESS, held from November 24 to 26, 2023 in Thailand, was a clear sign of an unfolding Hindu renaissance. Speaker after speaker detailed how Hindus spiritually, economically and politically are regaining their traditional place in the world order. This is the third congress organized by the international World Hindu Foundation. The first was held in Delhi in 2014, the second in Chicago in 2018 and now the Covid-delayed third in Bangkok's enormous Impact Centre convention facility.

With 2,100 participants from 61 countries, the event was opened by Swami Vigyananda, the joint general secretary of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bharat, and founder of the World Hindu Foundation. Its aim, he said, "is to make the Hindu identity visible, respectable and acceptable worldwide, to make the words *Hindu* and *Hindu Dharma* popular and fashionable in modern society."

Dr. Mohanrao Bhagwat, Sarsanghchalak (president) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, one of the main organizers of the

event, spoke on the Congress' slogan, *Jayasya Ayatnam Dharma*, "Dharma—The Abode of Victory." He distinguished between three kinds of victory: that of the asuras or demons, in which there is only destruction; that of kings, where the only goal is to increase material benefits through fighting and dominating others; and that which stands on dharma—a "process that is carried out by Dharma's rules and its result is also Dharma. The world is looking at us with hope," he said, "and we have to fulfil our role. India can show the path of happiness and satisfaction, and this is being accepted by global leaders."

HINDUISM TODAY itself was honored in the first plenary session, along with the Bharat Sevashram Sangha and the Mata Amritanandamayi Math. In presenting the plaque of recognition to Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, this magazine's publisher, Shri Milind Shrikant Parande, secretary general of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, said the publication "is regarded as the single most [effective] advocate of Hindu Dharma outside of Bharat." (See text of the award at right.)

Swami Purnatmananda, acting president of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, said after receiving their award, "Hindus will have to unite to protect dharma. For the victory of Sanatan Dharma, we all have to work together for society." Mata Amritanandamayi, popularly known as Ammachi or the Hugging Saint, accepted the award on behalf of the Math. She said, "A very powerful vibration pervades every particle of sand, every atom and the very atmosphere of our country, Bharat. It is the vibrations of Vedic chants and spiritual austerity performed by countless ancient rishis, it is the pulsation of spiritual power. This is the invaluable specialty of Sanatan Dharma.... We Hindus are the children of Supreme Consciousness and Supreme Knowledge. Bharat is the land that taught the world the ultimate truth. May the entire world become one family."

The Prime Minister of Thailand, Srettha Thavisin, sent a message welcoming the Congress to the country. It said, in part, "The world struggling with turmoil should take inspiration from Hindu values of nonviolence,

The audience: 2000+ delegates and speakers assembled for a plenary session

truth, tolerance and harmony. Only then would peace be established in the world. The *Vedas* visualize the key principles of synthesis and balance for a peaceful coexistence. The concept of shanti [peace] is established on these principles."

Two evening plenary events were held, the first titled, "Strengthening Hindu Organizations for Hindu Resurgence" and the second "Accelerating Bharat's World Standing, The Power of Education, Economy and Technology." In general the presentations focused on the need for Hindu unity to successfully counter the historically negative treatment of Hindus and Hinduism that unfortunately seems on the increase lately.

At one of these sessions, a resolution was adopted to advocate that the terms *Hindutva* and *Hindu Dharma* be used instead of *Hinduism*, on the basis that "ism" always carries a negative connotation. However, it is not correct that "ism" always carries a negative connotation. Many terms ending in "ism," like *Buddhism*, *Judaism* and *activism*, are used neutrally or positively. Prior to the entire Congress, all speakers had been asked to use *Hindu Dharma* instead of *Hinduism* or *Hindu religion* and *Bharat* instead of *India*. With this resolution, *Hindutva* was proposed as the preferred term, even though it is largely associated with the RSS as an organization and not as a general appellation for the



HINDUISM TODAY's award being jointly presented by Shri Parande, secretary general of VHP (right), and Dr. Mohanrao Bhagwat, president of RSS (left)

An Award for Hinduism Today

"The Organizing Committee of the World Hindu Congress, 2023 Bangkok, wishes to express profound appreciation for the remarkable contributions made by HINDUISM TODAY since its establishment under the guidance of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, a devoted disciple of Jnanaguru Yoga Swami from Jaffna, Sri Lanka. HINDUISM TODAY's commitment to nurturing Hindu solidarity, fostering unity and dispelling misconceptions about Hindu Dharma is truly praiseworthy. It has served as a guiding light of knowledge, inspiration and awakening for Hindus across the globe. The unwavering dedication to nurturing the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance and providing a valuable resource for Indian leaders and educators is immeasurable. HINDUISM TODAY's pivotal role in preserving and promoting the rich heritage of Hindu Dharma is deeply appreciated. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your tireless efforts in upholding the essence of Hindu Dharma and sharing its wisdom with the world."



Opening Ceremonies: (left) Swami Vigyanananda; (right) Ammachi and RSS head Dr. Mohanrao Bhagwat light a lamp to formally commence the Congress; (below) Swami Mitrananda, Chinmaya Mission, Chennai, addresses a plenary session

religion. No consensus was arrived at on the proposal. The recommended use of *Bharat*, being one of the country's official names (along with *India*) in its constitution, was well received. [See sidebar page 33 for more discussion on the terms *Hinduism*, *Hindu religion*, *Hindu Dharma* and *Hindutva*.]

Seven Conferences in One Event

To say the Congress was a complex event would be an understatement. There were 200-plus speakers among the seven conferences, each of which split into five or more sessions. It was impossible to be personally present for more than a small section of the event.

The speakers were an extremely diverse group—academicians, swamis, religious leaders, business people, scientists, diplomats, medical professionals, investors, artists, writers, dancers, educationalists, reporters and film makers. While most were from India, a large contingent came from Thailand itself and smaller ones from the US, UK, New Zealand and Australia. One or more speakers came from Mauritius, Norway, Germany, Suriname, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Qatar, Zambia, Indonesia, Switzerland, Russia, Netherlands and Pakistan.

Fortunately, the closing plenary session included a summary by the leaders of each of the individual conferences, starting with the **World Hindu Economic Forum**. Dr. Manoj Motwani, its chair, is a successful businessman based out of Hong Kong. He described a wide variety of ways the economic interest of Hindus could be advanced, ranging from adopting the latest in agricul-

tural techniques to manufacturing partnerships with ASEAN countries, investments in health, and encouraging startups in Bharat. The last session took this one step further by actually evaluating submitted business startup proposals and seeking to pair them with potential investors on the spot.

Prof. Nachiketa Tiwari of IIT Kanpur, who has instituted over 25 postgraduate-degree programs in Hindu studies in Bharat universities, chaired the **Hindu Education Board**. Their topics included the politics and ideology surrounding Hindu art forms today; how to improve Bharat's education system—in particular to better fit with the



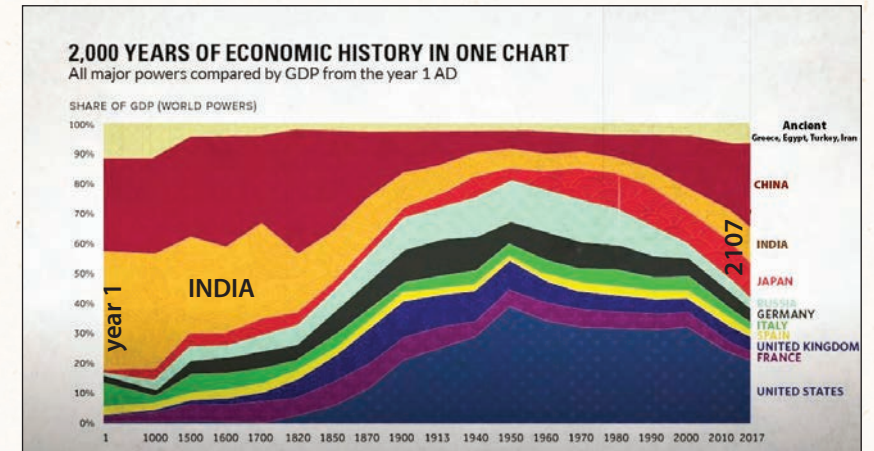
world's changing economic needs; strengthening the understanding of Hindu knowledge systems in the modern academic world; and the problems of Western academic theories dominating the narratives of Bharat's history, specifically the impact of Marxist principles in historical analysis.

Their final topic was the consistently negative portrayal of Hindu dharma and traditional societal structure in the media and

academia. The speakers on this topic pointed out that not only is Hindu culture portrayed this way, but all traditional societies—Japanese Shinto, Korean, Sri Lankan, etc. Professor Nitin Tripathi of the Asian Institute of Technology recommended Hindus seek alliances with people of other traditional societies to counter this entrenched pattern of anti-Hindu teaching.

The media conference was chaired by Vikram Sharma, editor of *HinduPost.in* and head of the **Hindu Media Forum**, which was formed in 2013 to advocate for Hindus and Hindu Dharma. Sharma said the forum seeks to "ensure that the correct perspective on issues impacting Hindus is provided." Overall, the sessions addressed what is called the "narrative," which in this context is a somewhat technical term with this dictionary definition: "a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values." For most of India's media, that overarching set of aims or values consists of left-over attitudes and interpretations from the British era, in which Hindu Dharma is not treated with historical accuracy.

By far the most popular speaker at this conference was Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, producer of *The Kashmir Files*, a bold, dramatic film portraying the forced exodus of the Kashmir Pandits from the Kashmir Valley in 1990. The commercially successful and highly controversial movie was an attempt to correct the all-to-common narrative pushed by parts of the Indian and world media that the Pandits left voluntarily, or at least not fearing some sort of "genocide,"



Presentations: (above left to right) the Vrindavan-based Jiva Institute of Vedic Science's exhibit on ayurveda; chart shows ambitious goal: increase India's percent of the world's gross domestic product from its present 7.2% to the 32% it was in the year 1 (on the left side of the chart); (below) Swami Purnatmananda, acting president of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha

when the reality of the situation—a systematic reign of terror aimed at driving them out—was much different.

HINDUISM TODAY was invited to speak at this conference as an example of a publication which was making progress in revising the narrative of Hindu Dharma within the English-speaking world. Our managing editor, Acharya Arumuganathaswami, described the wide network of sources, talented reporters and decades of experience which goes into the magazine's production.

He also addressed the "ownership of the narrative of the history of Bharat," pointing out that nearly all historical analysis in today's academic world is based on the approach of three recent philosophers: Friedrich Nietzsche, who famously said, "God is dead;" Karl Marx, who called religion "the opium of the people" and regarded all of history as that of class struggle; and Sigmund Freud, who judged religion a form of insanity. It is from this set of foregone conclusions—that we live in a Godless world where righteousness is rare and the main motivation behind any happening is selfish gain—that the narratives of not only the history of Bharat but of all indigenous peoples has been shaped. The same analysis and observations—especially on Marxist historical interpretations—came up in one session of the Hindu Education Conference. Many other issues brought up at the Congress trace back to this false narrative in which dharma does not exist.

The **World Hindu Democratic Forum** conference focused on Hindu involvement in politics on a global scale and included Hindu

politicians from multiple countries. Rashmi Samant, first Hindu president-elect at the University of Oxford Students Union, said the Forum was founded to create an ecosystem of support for Hindu candidates to ensure "that generation after generation there are Hindu politicians in positions of power" in the countries with a significant Hindu population.

Next was the **Hindu Women Conference**, chaired by Pritika Sharma, the former joint general secretary of the Hindu Council of New Zealand and professionally active in child and family services. She spoke in terms



of the global Hindu renaissance, a phenomenon touched upon by many other speakers. One purpose of the conference, she said, "is to put a woman's perspective and view forward because that is 50 percent of Hindu society," and to "develop leadership qualities within Hindu women so they can assume leadership positions in the Hindu resurgence and renaissance." Speakers dealt with the problem that the current academic sys-

tem raises "apologetic Hindus," and how to change that.

Some focused on the different social, cultural and legal rights of women in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, and how these should be made more clear. A strong point was made that women are disproportionately impacted by human rights violations, such as land grabbing, love jihad and other forms of oppression.

Murali Krishna Magesan, coordinator of the Hindu Students and Youth Network and president of Hindu Youth New Zealand, presided over the **Hindu Youth Conference**, whose theme was "rise, organize, lead, emerge." The Youth Network aims to "serve as a catalyst to initiate synchronized action and effective networking for all Hindu students and youth organizations that are currently active in their countries or states."

Like the Congress itself, the Youth Conference covered six topics: Hindu identity, economy, education, media, politics and human rights. Here, too, the topic of narrative was central: "We discussed the importance of reclaiming our own storytelling, and platforming and legitimizing the Hindu voice in digital media. By active participation in correcting perception, young Hindus can make important strides in reclaiming the Hindu narrative."

The **Hindu Organizations Conference** was led by Prof. Guna Magesan, president of the VHP of New Zealand. Their first session dealt with the government control of Hindu temples and related issues. "The main thing that came out," Magesan reported, "was that



all Hindu temples destroyed by invaders be reclaimed”—specifically naming the Kashi and Mathura temples. One of their prominent speakers was A.G. Ponn Manickavel, a retired inspector general of police, who has retrieved hundreds of stolen murtis of Deities. Vishnu Shankar Jain and Rangarajan Narasimhan both addressed efforts to free temples of government control, particularly in Tamil Nadu.

Other sessions dealt with protecting Hindu youth from love jihad and strengthening family values through better education in dharma. Several dealt in one way or another with Hindu Dharma outside of Bharat—in Asia, Africa and South America. There was much talk about Hindu human rights in countries such as Pakistan. The final session brought together heads of six Thailand-based Hindu organizations of various Bharat languages.

Participants' Feedback

These short summaries do little justice to the rich content of each session and the remarkable qualifications and accomplishments of the 200 speakers who participated. Those attending came away with a distinct appreciation for the advancements Hindus have made on all fronts in recent decades.

Ravi Chand, producer, director and writer of Warrior Tribe Films in Australia, was a fellow speaker with HINDUISM TODAY at the Hindu Media Forum. He wrote, "It was wonderful to connect with the Hindu community from around the world in such a supportive manner. I was so pleasantly surprised by the outpouring of emotion and support for our TV and film projects, and I continue to talk with our Hindu community from around the world."

Kavita Krishna Meegama of brhat.in, which promulgates Indian Knowledge Systems on their blog, was equally pleased: "For

all us what was most satisfying was meeting with Hindus from other countries, other continents—those whom we do not get to meet otherwise or hear from. This combination of Hindu grassroots workers, academics, economists, politicians, spiritual leaders, activists, experts in various fields and civil society members from all over the world congregating in such large numbers bodes well for our future."

Govinda Subedi of the the Global Bhutanese Hindu Organization was overall very pleased with the event. It provided excellent



exposure to the concerns of the Hindus who were forced out of Bhutan starting in the 1990s, first to refugee camps in Nepal, then eventually settling in Europe, Australia and North America. He did feel the Congress focused overmuch on the concerns of Indian Hindus, "potentially marginalizing the experiences of non-Indian Hindu communities."

Concluding Thoughts

Mata Amritanandamayi delivered an inspiring message in her closing talk, one which captures the spirit of the event: "The Hindu faith presents a collection of principles and values that have the potential to bring well-being and prosperity to all. It was the Hindu faith that offered the concepts of dharma

An attentive audience: (above) plenary sessions were well attended; (below) Congress volunteers are gathered on stage and thanked by one and all

and yajna—virtue and self sacrifice—to the world." She emphasized the fact that Sanatana Dharma is the only religion that has accepted the fact that there are diverse paths to the truth. "In these modern days, people seeking peace of mind have made cell phones and intoxicants their peacemakers. They have no interest in seeking or knowing the ultimate peacemaker, God. As a result, we are witnessing the progressive destruction of our world. We are not candles dependent on others to be lit. We are the self-effulgent Sun. We are not helpless kittens; we are all powerful lions. We have infinite potential within us."

Those in attendance were well pleased with the entire event, from the quality of the speakers to the excellent meals offering both Indian and Thai vegetarian dishes. The 36-acre Impact Centre is the second largest convention facility in Asia. While the Congress made use of multiple large and small meeting rooms and halls, it was just a minute portion of the immense facility. The fourth World Hindu Congress is scheduled for Mumbai, December 18 to 20, 2026, with the theme "Shared commitment, collective resolve." Next year, 2025, will mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the RSS.

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami observed that HINDUISM TODAY's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, spoke of a coming Hindu renaissance as far back as the 1980s. Bodhinatha described this conference as the predicted renaissance coming into its fullness.

TERMINOLOGY

What to Call Ourselves?

Hinduism, Hindu religion, Hindu dharma, Hindutva—parsing the terms

BY PROF. ARVIND SHARMA

THE WORLD HINDU CONGRESS RECOMMENDED that Hindus drop the word *Hinduism* to refer to our tradition, and instead use the words *Hindutva* or *Hindu dharma*. These suggestions open the door for a discussion of the proper word for describing what is now known as the Hindu religious tradition.

Several terms have been used over the past two hundred years in relation to the Hindu religious tradition, and it might be worth examining the context in which they arose to enable us to arrive at a reasonable conclusion in this respect.

The word *Hinduism* is widely used to describe the tradition under discussion. This use of the word, however, is not without its problems. The first of these centers on the relationship of the Hindu tradition to the non-Abrahamic religions present in India, such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Sometimes the word *Hindu* is employed in a way which embraces the entire spectrum of what are now being called the "Dharmic traditions"—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. At other times, it is used to refer to the Hindus alone, as distinguished from Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs. This ambiguity in its use has important constitutional and legal implications, particularly in India. The second problem is more subtle. According to the standard notion of a religion, such an entity is distinguished by a set of beliefs and practices which are unique to that religion. For instance, in the case of Judaism, it would be the acceptance of the Shema; in the case of Christianity, it would be the acceptance of Jesus as the Lord and Savior; and in the case of Islam, it would be the acceptance of the Shahadah. All these religions also have a specified set of beliefs and practices, on the basis of which one can distinguish between an insider and an outsider.

Such a Western definition of a religion creates a problem in the case of Hinduism, which does not seem to share a common set of beliefs and practices. It is true that certain doctrines within it are widespread, such as belief in karma, and the same could be said of some of its practices, like the rituals by which Hindus get married or are cremated. But, although widespread, none of them is universal.

The word *Hindutva* was apparently first used by Chandranath Basu (1844–1910) in the late 1800s. Its present understanding, however, has been decisively shaped by its use by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) in his seminal work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, first published in 1923.

The word can be understood at two levels. It carries a Sanskrit suffix (*tva*), which makes a thing what it is in the abstract. Thus, one meaning the word could convey is "the property or quality of being a Hindu." It is, however, its second meaning with which it is now associated in the popular imagination. In this more precise, if narrower, understanding, it refers to the culture which is shared by all religions of Indian origin—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism—as contrasted with other religions present in India which are not of In-



dian origin, such as Christianity and Islam. The word also has an assertive ambience associated with it, and the expressions "Hindu nationalism," and "political Hinduism" have been used to define it. Sister Nivedita (1867–1911) once produced a manifesto of what she described as "aggressive Hinduism," and the term conveys some of the militancy which has come to be associated with the word *Hindutva*.

An interesting aspect of the situation is that the word *dharma* is used by all the four religions of Indian origin—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism—to describe themselves. It is in such a context that the term *Hindu Dharma* is used to distinguish the Hindu religious tradition from the other three aforementioned traditions. Purists like to point out that the word *Hindu* is not a Hindu word, and therefore the best way to describe the tradition we are discussing is the term the tradition uses to describe itself, namely, *Sanatana Dharma*. There is epigraphic evidence to suggest the term was being used by the tradition to describe itself by the sixth century ce.

The word *Sanatana* can convey three levels of meaning. It can mean something *eternal*, *immemorial*, and/or *universal*. When the term *Sanatana Dharma* is understood in the first sense, then it implies a religious tradition which is based on the eternal *Vedas*. In this sense, it is also sometimes called *Vaidika Dharma*. From a historical point of view, it is also possible to

describe the tradition under discussion as *Sanatana* in the sense that it is an immemorial tradition, whose origins are lost in the mist of antiquity. This use of this word also helps distinguish this tradition from Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism which, in the modern academic understanding, are religions which have their origin in history. Thus, all of them can call themselves Dharma, but Hinduism, as Sanatana Dharma, then becomes a tradition from which they depart as offshoots at determinable points in history.

What, then, should we call ourselves? Let us first examine the suggestion made by the resolution of the World Hindu Congress (2023) that Hindus should discard the word *Hinduism* to refer to their religion, and use either *Hindutva* or *Hindu Dharma* in its place. This first alternative is difficult to support because the word *Hindutva* has acquired a special connotation as referring to that dimension of the Hindu religious tradition which focuses on the concept of a Hindu nation or a Hindu state. The word *Hinduism* carries a broader connotation, and therefore the two cannot be used as equivalents.

The case for using *Hindu Dharma* instead of *Hinduism* is a stronger one. However, while *Hindu Dharma* is a viable locution within the Indian subcontinent, it is not as widely used as *Hinduism* outside the subcontinent. Hence the use of this term to denote Hinduism, in an international context, may cause unnecessary confusion. Moreover, the Hindu religion, as a minority religion, enjoys certain rights outside India in the various countries which the Hindus inhabit in the diaspora. In these countries, Hindus are seen as a people who practice a religion called Hinduism. The use of the term *Hindu Dharma*, then, may jeopardize the legal protection Hindus enjoy in these countries. I think it would be wise to be governed by the context under discussion when it comes to choosing the right term.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arvind Sharma is Birks Professor of Comparative Religion, McGill University, Montreal, Canada. His influential writings focus on Hinduism and the philosophy of religion.



Masala Tea

My favorite use of cinnamon is preparing delicious masala tea.

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Serves: 8

Ingredients

- 10 cardamom pods
- 10 cloves
- 1 tbsp ginger, peeled and crushed
- 2 two inches Sri Lankan cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- Required milk, if desired
- Required sugar, if desired
- Required honey, if desired
- 1 lemon

Method

1. Crush ginger, cardamom, cloves and cinnamon using a mortar. Grind nutmeg with a small pestle. Make a bundle of the crushed spices with a cloth. Boil 6 cups of water in a saucepan. Add the prepared spice ingredient bundle to the boiling water. Bring it to boil. Then add tea; cover and turn off the stove. Steep for 10 minutes. Then filter using a tea strainer.
2. For black tea: Dilute 1/2 cup of the spiced brewed tea just prepared to 1 cup of boiling water. Add 1 teaspoon of lemon juice. Add honey if desired. Black tea is ready. You may chill the tea if you want.
3. For tea with milk (yields 8 cups): Boil 4 cups milk in a milk cooker. Add 1/2 cup of boiling milk to 1/2 cup of strained tea per cup. I like strong hot frothing aromatic tea. If you have a sweet tooth, you can add honey or sugar. Aromatic and delicious masala tea is ready.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lakshmi Sridharan is an American scientist of South Indian origin who lives in San Jose, California, with her husband Tim. As a freelance writer, she enjoys sharing with others her knowledge in plant science, culinary science, her experience in gardening and cooking as well as Indian culture and traditions.

One versatile spice: (clockwise from upper left) cinnamon powder and quills; celebrating the cinnamon harvest in Vietnam; removing the bark; hot cup of tea; cinnamon rolls; flowers and leaves; freshly harvested bark

tive cinnamon trade. Around the same time, the French started plantations in Mauritius, Réunion and Guyana.

Cultivation

Cinnamon trees require moist, well-drained soil for good growth. Mature trees reach more than 40 feet in height. Leaves are thick, with smooth margins; red in color when young and maturing to a deep green. Flowers are small, greenish to yellow, bisexual and produced in clusters. The fruit is a dark drupe color.

In certain regions, cultivators cut trees to a stump when they are two years old and cover them with soil. As a result the tree grows more like a bush, with new shoots sprouting from the sides by the following year. In other areas, trees are allowed to grow tall and unpruned.

Cinnamon sticks, or quills, are made from the inner bark of cinnamon trees. The process involves scraping off the outer bark, then beating the branch gently to loosen the inner bark, which is then peeled off in thin strips. Whereas stripping off the bark would kill most trees, cinnamon has the ability to survive and regenerate its bark. Hence, the same tree can be harvested multiple times over the years. Set out to dry in the sun, the strips curl into quills, or "sticks."

Ceylon cinnamon, typically sold in quill form, possesses a sweet aroma and a light brown color. It's relatively soft, allowing for easy grinding, even with a coffee grinder. In contrast, Cassia cinnamon, which comes in various forms, is distinguished by its stronger, more pungent aroma and darker,

reddish-brown color. Due to its harder texture, Cassia cinnamon is often available in pre-ground form, as it requires more effort to grind than Ceylon cinnamon.

Uses and Health Benefits

Cinnamon's culinary values are paramount. I, the author, use it in quite a few recipes—korma, puddings, ice cream, cinnamon rolls, etc. At cookpad.com/in/users/19872338, you'll find my recipes for these that make good use of cinnamon as well as for hundreds of other dishes.

In addition to its culinary values, cinnamon has been hailed as an appetite stimulator, a digestive, an aphrodisiac and a treatment for cough and sore throat. Compounds in cinnamon called trans-cinnamaldehyde and p-cymene produce anti-inflammatory effects by blocking the production of inflammatory molecules. Inflammation is the root cause of many diseases including cancer, high blood pressure, insulin resistance, diabetes and obesity. Studies have shown cinnamon may be a safe natural treatment for all of these conditions, and may even help prevent diseases such as Alzheimer's. More studies are needed.

How much cinnamon should one consume to benefit from all these health-beneficial properties when no reliable data is available regarding the dosage? Normal consumption of cinnamon in food may not work as an immune booster, but high amounts could be harmful. Used in small quantities in food, it is unlikely to have any deleterious effect, but for higher doses, it is always best to consult a knowledgeable physician. Moderation is the key to success.

SPICES

Cinnamon for Your Well-Being

This pungent ingredient brings a full and savory flavor to a wide variety of Indian curries, condiments, teas and pickles

BY LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, SAN JOSE
CINNAMON IS ONE OF THE MOST HIGHLY valued spices, widely used all over the world for centuries. It is used in cooking, baking and as a flavoring agent for many foods and drinks. Traditional medicine systems around the world, including ayurveda, use extracts from the bark, leaves, flowers, fruits and roots of the cinnamon tree for ailments such as hypertension, diabetes, weight control and more. The Egyptians employed as an ingredient in their embalming practices, the Hebrews used it in religious ceremonies. In the Roman Empire, cinnamon was primarily used in perfumes and fragrances, and to flavor wines, rather than as a cooking spice.

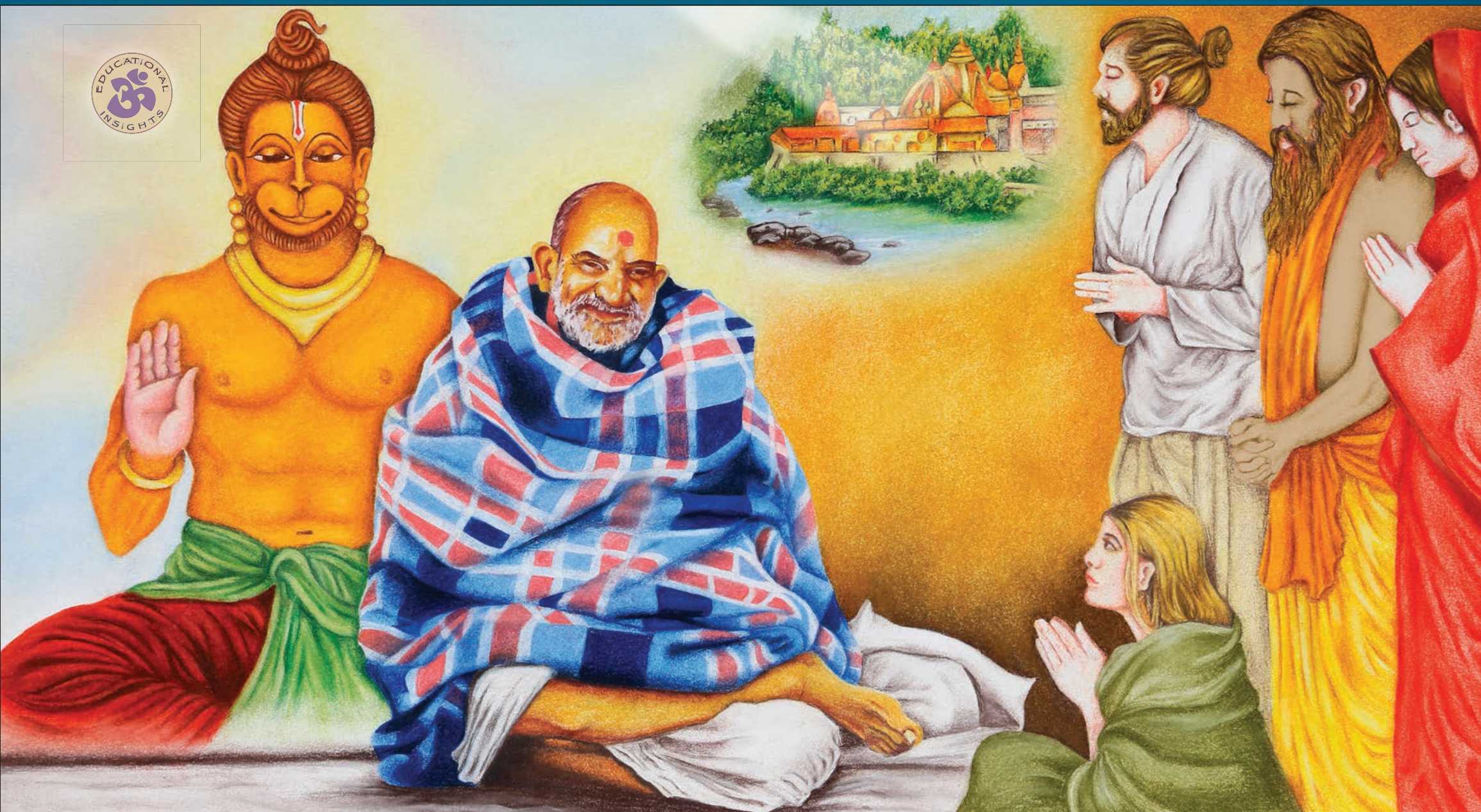
Interestingly, cinnamon, in its stick, powder, or essential oil form, is also highly effective as an ant repellent! The spice's most im-

portant active ingredients is cinnamaldehyde, the essential oil distilled from the bark fragments that gives cinnamon its unique flavor and fragrance.

Several major types of cinnamon are in use today. *Cinnamomum verum* from Sri Lanka is—literally—the "true cinnamon." It is often priced up to 50 percent higher than other types. *Cinnamomum cassia* (or Chinese cinnamon), is the most commonly type sold in North America. Other types are *C. burmanni* (or Indonesian), *C. Loureiroi* (or Vietnamese) and *C. citriodorum* (or Malabar). In 2021, the world produced nearly half a billion pounds of the spice. Accounts of cinnamon date back as early as 2,800 BCE. Centuries ago, it was highly prized, valued similarly to gold in the 13th and 14th centuries. During this time, the cinnamon trade was a significant

factor in the wealth of major trading powers like the Portuguese, Dutch, and British. In ancient Egypt, the cinnamon primarily used was likely cassia, a variety similar to true cinnamon, imported from China, where large groves were cultivated.

Cinnamon dramatically altered the course of history in Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon), where the cinnamon trade was marked by wars, cruelty and massacres. In the early 16th century, the Portuguese gained control over the spice trade, including cinnamon, and later faced fierce competition from the Dutch. By the mid-17th century, the Dutch East India Company had emerged as the dominant force, extending its influence to establish spice plantations, notably for cinnamon, in Indonesia. In 1795, the English seized control of Ceylon, thus taking over the lucra-



At his feet: The artist shows Lord Hanuman blessing the sage, who in turn is blessing devotees who have come to be in his holy presence. They are from India and beyond, having traveled far to meet this storybook character and guru. In the background is his still-active Kainchi Ashram in the Himalayas.

The holy Himalayas have given humanity several such Indians to lead people on the path of spiritual knowledge. Some were born in India's Himalayan region, while others found sanctuary there during arduous spiritual wanderings in search of self-unfoldment.

Miraculous, devoted, loving, inclusive, spontaneous, generous, credible, authentic, full of grace, enigmatic, selfless—how can one person be assigned so many glowing adjectives? Indeed, one Indian is described by all these words. He has become a beacon of hope and progress for seekers across the globe. His transformative story remains fascinating and thought-provoking decades after his great departure.

India's Neem Karoli Baba (1900–1973), known simply as Maharajji, was an enigmatic being who inculcated noble thoughts in all. He embodied Indian spirituality which advocates, "Love everyone, serve everyone." This remains one of his central lessons that resonates with millions globally.

Maharajji shunned publicity, yet he influenced millions of people through thought, word and deed. He inspired people to "love, serve and grow," motivating people to work for causes like smallpox eradication and curing blindness. He awakened people's passions in their chosen field, whether it be management, consulting, emotional intelligence, writing, contemplative science, spirituality or even math. Meeting him filled followers with love, developing an enduring bhakti for him in their search for Self-Realization. In the devotional hymn *Hanuman Chalisa*, the words *Aur Manorath Jo Koi Lave, Soi Amit Jivan Phal Pave* translate to, "O Hanuman, you grant the wishes of those who come to you and give them the eternal nectar, the highest fruit of life." People who follow Maharajji and had the good fortune to meet him remember him as the Hanuman who gave seekers the sweetest fruit of life. A noble ambassador of the Indian Himalayan lineage, Maharajji never received, he only gave. He never set foot outside of India. Yet, millions of people around the globe, many who never met him, are inspired by him even after his passing, believing that he still lives as "infinite energy."

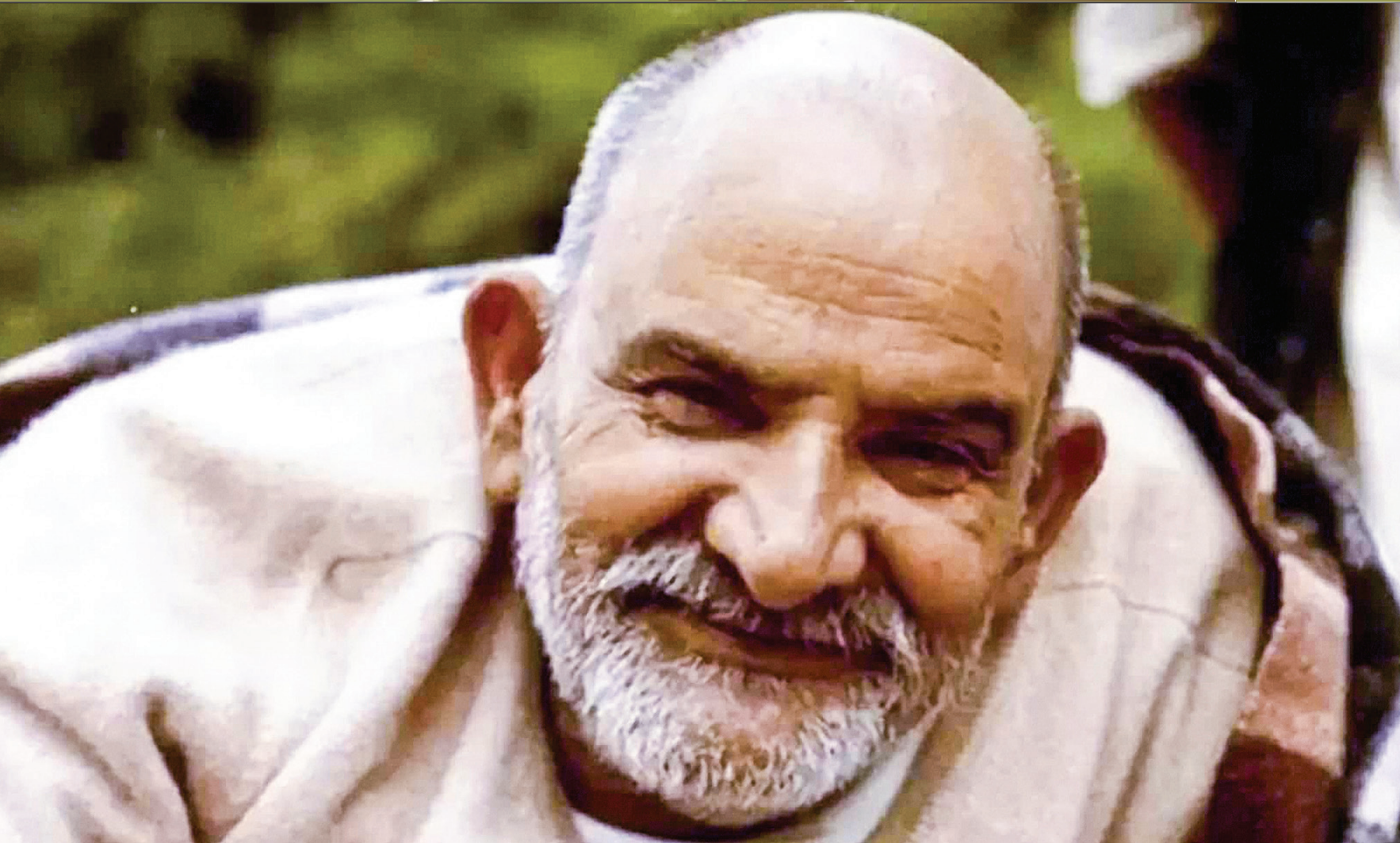
EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

NEEM KAROLI BABA

Exploring the Life and Eccentric Nature Of North India's Mysterious Mystic

Written by Sudarshan Ramabadran • Art by Baani Sekhon

Each Indian state, city, district, town and village has its unique stories and cultures to share with the people of the world. These stories never become obsolete, because they help in creating common ground, driving social change, illustrating complex concepts, providing inspiration and sometimes even leading to the way to enlightenment. My sense is that it's time to broaden out from talking about "incredible India" to learning about "incredible Indians" who have contributed immensely to humanity with their phenomenal visions, focusing on every individual's inner journey and growth.



BHAGWANIMAGE.COM

“Patron Saint of Silicon Valley”

A quick search on Google or YouTube will show that many famous people, including Steve Jobs (co-founder of Apple), Julia Roberts (actor), Mark Zuckerberg (CEO of Meta/Facebook), Virat Kohli (cricketer), Anushka Sharma (actor), and many more, have placed their faith in him, even if they never met him. Several accounts state that Steve Jobs carried with him a picture of Maharajji. And it was Jobs who inspired Zuckerberg to visit Kainchi Dham in 2008. Some of his followers describe him as the patron saint of Silicon Valley. People from several corners of the world and in India remember Maharajji as a great siddha. Just as siddhas believed in passing devotion from one generation to another, Maharajji, an incredible Indian, did this for the benefit of all humanity.

Life story

Maharajji was born as Lakshman Das Sharma around the year 1900 in Akbarpur village in the Firozabad district (then called Agra) of Uttar Pradesh, into the family of Durga Prasad Sharma. He was married early in life (at age 11 by some accounts) and had two sons, Aneg Singh Sharma and Dharma Narayan Sharma, and a daughter Giriya.

Lakshman Das would be seen meditating on the banks of the Ganges near Farurukhabad. Seeing him there, villagers from Akbarpur informed his father, who went there and asked him to come home. Maharajji told his father that he would come back after a few days, and he did so. Ultimately, he left his family and home to pursue his dream of becoming a sadhu.

He was called by various names: Lakshman Das, Handi Wala Baba and Tikonía Wala Baba. He was also known as Blanket Baba. In Gujarat he was known as Tallaiya Baba and in Vrindavan as Chamatkari (miracle) Baba. Today his birthdate is being observed as per the Panchang (Hindu calendar), on the shukla paksha, 8th day of Margshirsha month. This day is marked as praktaya divas (appearance day) in his birth village. In 2023, it fell on December 20.

Parvati further, author, editor and devotee of Maharajji from the US and who met with him in India, notes, “His yogic and spiritual powers were vast but, like the wind, no one could catch him; he was a wanderer who spent no more than a few days in a place, which, to the amazement of Indian devotees, changed when the Westerners arrived in India.”

In an interview with me, she said Maharajji’s presence was sufficient and they felt no need to probe into his personal life: “These

No recluse: *Photos of the sage are almost always of him engaging with seekers, up close and looking into the camera.*

.....

details did not matter to us, nor did we ask him about them. We were home and content; that’s what mattered.”

Fame and Miracles

Drawing closer to his life, his fame and his miracles, I discovered the source of the name Neem Karoli Baba. Here is the account from *Prema Vatar* by P. C. Josi “Mukunda”—Kainchi Dham. “In His fancy, a young yogi carrying a chimta (a pair of musical tongs) and a ‘kamandal’ in his hand boarded a first class compartment of the Tundla-bound train at Farrukhadab station. The train had gone a few miles when an Anglo-Indian TTE (ticket examiner) came to check tickets and was taken aback to see a half-naked sadhu in the first-class compartment. On demanding the ticket and getting a negative reply, he lost his temper and ungraciously compelled the sadhu to get down at the next halt, Neebkarori.

“The sadhu quietly sat under the tree and dug the pair of tongs in the earth. The train got the green light signal to leave. The engine was started, but the train did not move further. The steam was applied with full force, but the wheels turned round and round at their place. The engine was checked thoroughly and everything was found in order.

“Being worried, the European guard came to the driver and asked him what the matter was. The driver could not point out any fault. Nothing was found. Despite all efforts, the engine would not budge. By now it was time for some other trains to pass by on

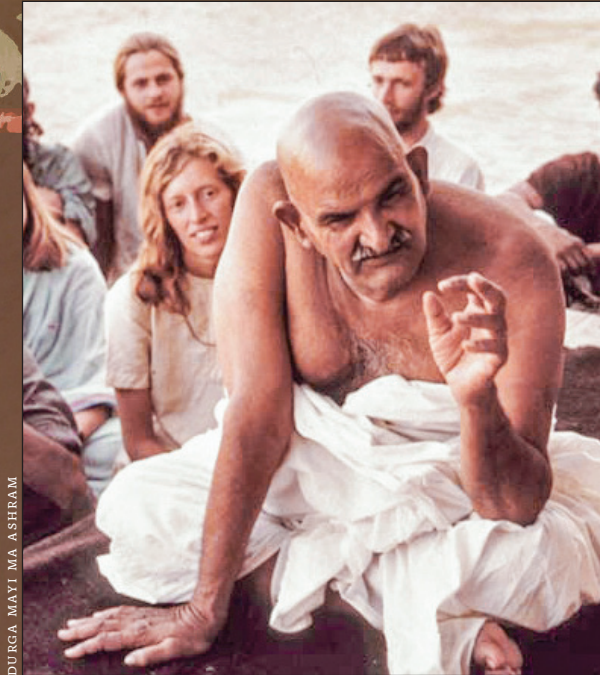
that track.

“Eventually some Indian travelers suggested to those foreign authorities to request the sadhu Maharaj to board the train and then only it would move. They fretted and fumed and at last decided to try allowing the sadhu to travel by train. They went to Babaji, apologized and requested Him to board the train. The jovial Baba said “If you say so, I will oblige you.” As soon as Babaji entered the compartment, the train started moving.

“And on account of that incident, the village of Neebkarori, one of many insignificant villages of India, became famous in no time. After having stayed for a long time in this village,... he bore the name Baba Neebkarori or Baba Neemkaroli.”

My research shows that the name *Neem Karoli Baba* became popular because his Western followers had trouble pronouncing *Karori*. He was a wandering saint with no fixed itinerary or schedule. Nobody knew what he would do next. At times, it is said, he would be simultaneously present at multiple places.

Maharajji taught that it is possible to have the guru’s darshan not just in a physical form but also through a dream, vision or even via deep meditation. He said once you connect with the Divine, you are certain to have darshan of the guru. He had the power of knowing



DURGA MAYI MA ASHEAM

Sayings from the Sage

FROM *MIRACLE OF LOVE*, BY RAM DASS (1979)

Never hurt another’s heart.

People are quick to take a chapati, but slow to take the name of God.

Serve as Hanuman served.

The best form to worship God is every form.

Love is the strongest medicine. It is more powerful than electricity.

When asked how the heart could be purified, Maharajji said, “Always speak the truth.”

With desires, Hatha yoga does not work. Today no one really knows Hatha yoga. It can’t work through books. They used to fast and use herbs.

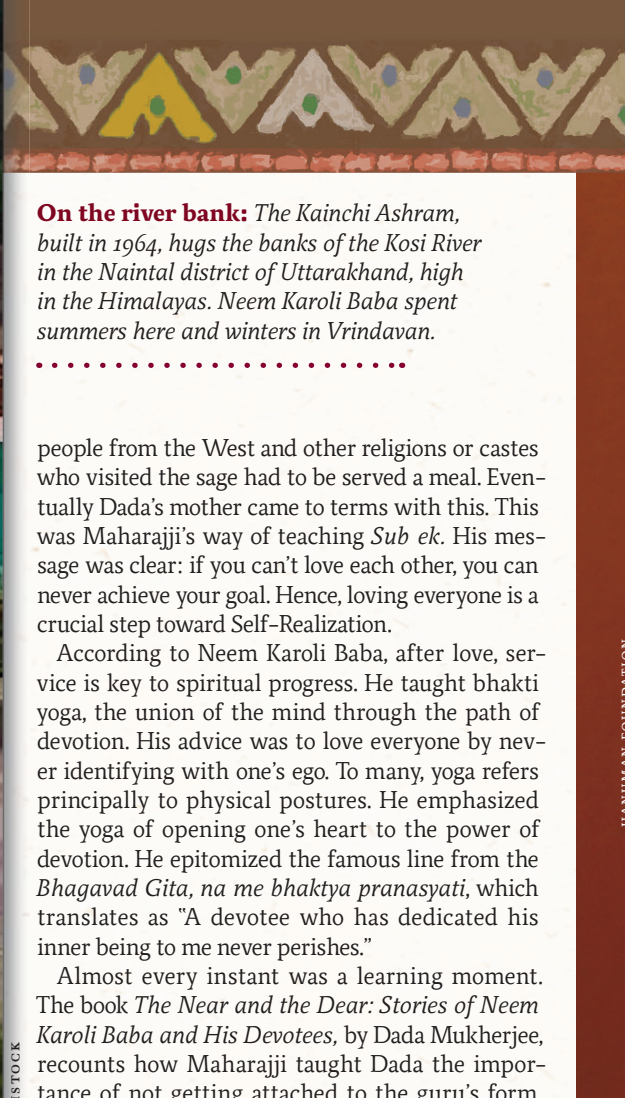
Worldly people go outward, but you must go inward like the tortoise, withdrawing within your shell.

You must honor Shiva through love. Ram and Shiva are the same. Ram worshiped Shiva, Shiva worshiped Ram, they are only one.

You should do your work, be friendly to everyone, and never quarrel with anyone. Do your work like a great hero and all will be well for you.

All is God’s will, but Maya prevents you from knowing it’s all God’s will. He gave us eyes, ears, nose, mouth. But He also gave us wisdom to use them to attain God.

All the money in the world is mine. Even the money in America.



On the river bank: *The Kainchi Ashram, built in 1964, hugs the banks of the Kosi River in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand, high in the Himalayas. Neem Karoli Baba spent summers here and winters in Vrindavan.*

people from the West and other religions or castes who visited the sage had to be served a meal. Eventually Dada's mother came to terms with this. This was Maharajji's way of teaching *Sub ek*. His message was clear: if you can't love each other, you can never achieve your goal. Hence, loving everyone is a crucial step toward Self-Realization.

According to Neem Karoli Baba, after love, service is key to spiritual progress. He taught bhakti yoga, the union of the mind through the path of devotion. His advice was to love everyone by never identifying with one's ego. To many, yoga refers principally to physical postures. He emphasized the yoga of opening one's heart to the power of devotion. He epitomized the famous line from the *Bhagavad Gita*, *na me bhaktiya pranasyati*, which translates as "A devotee who has dedicated his inner being to me never perishes."

Almost every instant was a learning moment. The book *The Near and the Dear: Stories of Neem Karoli Baba and His Devotees*, by Dada Mukherjee, recounts how Maharajji taught Dada the importance of not getting attached to the guru's form. Dada recounts, "At Kainchi in May 1972, we had

just arrived from Allahabad (today Prayagraj). After the preliminaries about our journey and the distribution of prasad, he said to me, 'Dada, next winter I shall not come to Allahabad anymore.' My reply was, 'So, do not come. What is the problem in that?' Some people were not happy with my reply, and when Babaji did not come the next winter, they started saying that I had prevented his visit. On hearing my reply, Babaji kept silent for a while and then said, 'Dada, take leave for six months so that we can move about visiting places. I do not like to sit in one place.' After some time, he got up and held my hand. Before moving, he said in the presence of all, 'Do not be sad. I have been coming here regularly for the last fifteen years, and this is not good for a saint.' The way the whole thing was done was unique and gave us an insight into his way of dealing with us, which we seldom noticed. That he would not come next winter was not given as an announcement from the higher one but was extracted from me as if with my full consent. In our haste to be close to him, we missed this subtle human aspect, a part of him that was all but unknown to us. His reference to attachment was our attachment to him, not his attachment to us. He had no attachment to anyone or anything, so there was no need to save himself. It was only to save us from our attachment to him that he stopped coming to Allahabad. He wanted us to detach ourselves from his form and the belief that his body was there for us."

As recounted in the book *Love Everyone*, when Maharajji was in Delhi during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, senior army generals and Indian ministers came to see him, take his blessings and seek his

all about the people who were coming to meet him. Countless devotees have stated how these interactions with Maharajji were often life-altering and brought them into close spiritual connection with him. In their conversations, the sage was able to accurately recount to them their experiences, in their dreams or waking state. For instance, with Ram Dass, he was able to describe how the day before he met Maharajji the former Harvard professor was thinking of his mother, her death and its cause. With American devotee Parvati, Maharajji shared how she had been inspired by him even before seeing or meeting him, just by glimpsing his picture in the US.

Teachings

A man of intense spiritual discipline (tapasya), he attracted a large following who loved and respected him, including the poorest of the poor. Many houses, especially in North India, have framed photographs of him as their spiritual head. As per Namita Gokhale's book, Swami Chidananda of the Divine Life Mission is known to have called Maharajji a "siddha purusha" (perfect being) and an "apprehender of the past, present and future."

He attracted seekers across all age groups, races, castes, cultures, religions and geographical regions. Says Maharajji's grandson Sandeep Bhatele (son of his daughter Girija), also known as Bobby, "He used to feed the poor always or ensure they were fed and he often solved their problems. For example, on numerous occasions people came to him for help for their daughters' marriage. He always

worked to get it organized. Maharajji cared for the common man and helped innumerable times in every way he could. He was always serving people to satisfy their needs, and unconditional love poured for all always and every time."

Never delivering lectures and leaving no formal teachings that we know of, it makes sense that he had no monastic order. He left it to the seekers to explore and find their own way. His oft-repeated adages are to love everyone, serve everyone and remember God. These words are the crux of his teachings. He advised all to never fail to "utter the truth." When Western followers asked about meditation, he sent them to the famed Burmese teacher of Vipassana meditation, S.N. Goenka. Bobby added, "Did he have a guru? Not much is known, but I would like to highlight that he has built Kainchi and Kakrighat at places where Sri Sombari Maharaj had his dhuni (sacred fire). My opinion is that there is some spiritual connection between the two."

The spiritual practices he encouraged were simple, practical and easy to follow. One of them was japa, repeating the name of God. Another was chanting the 40 verses of the *Hanuman Chalisa*. Maharajji often repeated the two syllables, *Sub ek* (all are one). The centrality of this mantra is documented in various stories of his life. One story revolved around the family of Dada Mukherjee and his mother in the book, *By His Grace: A Devotee's Story*. Whenever he visited Dada's home, he would tell Dada's mother to prepare food for all. Dada recalls how his mother did not like people from other communities entering her family's kitchen, a typical upper-caste attitude. Yet this simple lesson of preparing food for all meant that even

What Was He Like?

FROM *BAREFOOT IN THE HEART*, KESHAV DAS, 2012

Someone recently asked what it was like to be around him. As a child, all I remember is that it was great fun. As I replay those meetings in my mind, I feel differently today—here was a man who did not look like any saint that I had met—his language was often colorful; he did not have the same hangups as most other *sadhus* that I had come across—most have severe restrictions about where they will eat, who will cook it, etc....

His devotees did not fit into any pattern either—they were rich, they were poor; they were Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Sikhs, and even the atheists who did not realize that they had been drawn. There were the VIPs and the dacoits, all in the same room.

He preached nothing and yet his devotees were constantly learning. He met no pattern, he fit no description, and yet from where he sat he was telling the kitchen what he wanted cooked; he was telling an eight-year-old what he would be when he grew up; he was scolding someone about a recent lapse in judgment; addressing someone else about a concern that he/she was yet to express; and probably dealing with creation elsewhere in the Universe, all at the same time. The answer to every question was still "How do I know?" He defies description, and he does so on purpose.



DURGA MAYI MA ASHRAM

counsel. Like the *Bhagavad Gita* in action, he imparted to the generals ways to win the war in a dharmic way and see God in it. This does not mean Maharajji favored war and violence. He taught the lesson of being peaceful in unique ways. Once a devotee from the US asked what he should do in India during wartime, to which Maharajji, in his inimitable style, responded, "Learn to be peaceful."

Lord Hanuman and Neem Karoli Baba

One cannot miss the ethereal connection between Lord Hanuman and Maharajji. It is a most fascinating aspect of his life. The devotees I spoke with firmly believe he was an incarnation of Hanuman. Most of the literature, documentaries and visual depictions of Maharajji include Hanuman as a key reference. The rendering of *Hanuman Chalisa* by Krishna Das is my favorite. Vivek Tiwari, grandson-in-law of the sage, told me in an interview, "He is Hanumanji himself. Lord Hanuman is the most powerful energy in the entire Brahmand (creation). He is the most powerful because he doesn't have any ego, so his entity is used by the Supreme energy for maintaining the universal system, which is

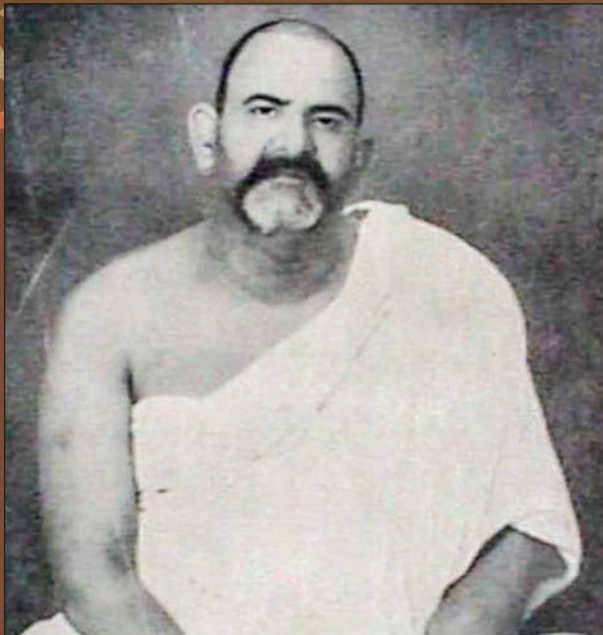
automatic and self-governed. Maharajji is very similar; he is Hanuman in human form. Lord Hanuman is the emperor of the present yuga; he is a true bhakta, a sevadar, extraordinarily educated in medicine, astrology, environment, music, food, literature, in fact all panchatattva, all elements. Like Hanuman, Maharajji served all, loved all, fed all and gave jivandan to many, including humans, butterflies and other jivas, without any expectations or attachments in return." Parvati Markus echoed these sentiments. "Several devotees experienced Maharajji as Hanuman. Like how one flies from one place to another, devotees have experienced standing several feet away from where they were originally standing when they were held by Maharajji and transported to another place." Maharajji epitomized Hanuman by serving Ram and being Ram. He urged people to serve and realize God without any man-made divisions. Ram Dass' story in the Netflix documentary *Ram Dass, Going Home* perhaps best puts this into context: Ram asked Hanuman, "Are you a human or a monkey?" to which Hanuman bows down and replies, "When I do not know who I am, I am serving you, and when I know who I am, I am you." If ever one were to put Maharajji's teaching in story form, this would be it. Hanuman embodies

Western devotees: On a rainy day, Maharajji walks with his biographer, Dada Mukherjee, and young seekers from the West. Though language was a barrier, both enjoyed the encounters.

strength, service, devotion, power, truth, victory and compassion—and throughout Maharajji's life these ideals are clearly discernible. Many devotees have also worshiped Maharajji as Siva, and legends say that Hanuman was an avatar or incarnation of Siva. Bobby told me that once as a fighter jet pilot in the Indian Air Force an emergency forced him to eject from his plane. His mind flew to Maharajji and Hanuman. "I just invoked Hanuman and Maharajji and got out without a scratch." To his devotees, Maharajji is supreme; there is no one above him. Philip Goldberg, author of the book *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, told me: "Even though Ram Dass was instrumental in bringing Neem Karoli Baba's teachings to the West, especially the US, and taking devotees from the US to Neem Karoli Baba's ashram, he would always want Neem Karoli Baba to be the supreme; after all, he was the inspiration and umbrella." From what I've learned, Maharajji doesn't have a *uttaradhihari*, or successor. Instead, those who were inspired by him continue to serve him, his legacy and use his teachings to help people, without expecting anything in return. Devotees like Sri Siddhi Ma and Sri Jeevanti Ma emerged as pivotal figures in Maharajji's spiritual sojourn. Nina Rao, a devotee of Maharajji and Sri Siddhi Ma based in New York said in an interview with me, "Maharajji referred to them as mothers, hence Ma. In fact, Maharajji called them Amma, which means mother, a term of endearment and reverence."

Global Impact

Mutual cultural exchanges have become the order of the day to develop close understanding between peoples from different countries. Between 1968 and 1973, cultural exchanges enabled people of America to gain great insights into India's strength and spirituality, its depth and expanse, all courtesy of Maharajji. Like Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo and Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he never traveled to the US, yet left an indelible impact on that country. One of the first to be profoundly transformed by the sage was Ram Dass. Philip Goldberg ascribes this to the urge of America's youth to find meaning and purpose. This exploration led them to India and eventually to Blanket Baba. "There was a lot of discontent in the US, and there was the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the injustices surrounding it. The youngsters felt rejected, anxious and worried about their future. Hence, the exchange that people like Ram Dass and Krishna Das had with spiritual teachers like Maharajji proved to be a turning point. It helped change lives," explained Goldberg. Many from the US who came seeking drug experiences began a transformative journey after meeting him. Parvati recollects, "Back in the day, I came on an acid trip to India. But when I got the opportunity to meet Maharajji, things changed. Maharajji made us realize that drugs enable you to go up and down, and he showed us a way where we were permanently happy without them. We dropped drugs after he reiterated that there was something deeper to life than drugs." Parvati said that when she met Ram Dass or Krishna Das in the US



Beyond Miracles

FROM LOVE, SERVE, REMEMBER, BY RAM DASS

Each of us knows him in our own unique way. Each thinks that the Maharajji he knows is the true Maharajji. But he is fooling all of us. And seeing his many facets reflected through each other's stories and hearts, we come to know his play; to realize that his identities are infinite. And yet we still thirst to know him; to contain him with our minds. Oh that we could be to him as Hanuman is said to be to Rama: his very breath. He is our way home! He is the beloved! He is wisdom incarnate! He is grace itself! In these precious moments there is a suspension of the doubts or disbeliefs born of mind. There is no judgment, only appreciation. The tones of our voices reflect faith, reverence and wonder, delight in being privy to the cosmic joke, discomfiture at our own stupidity, and love so palpable that it is difficult to catch our breath. There are of course his miracles: his awakening of kundalini in others with a touch, his appearing in two places at the same time, his healing the sick and bringing the dead back to life. But those things are just the beckonings that entice us to the feast. Far dearer for us are the stories of his humanity... his sweetness... delicacy... rascality... tenderness... his childlike delight in our delight... his pain at our pain. For me and other Westerners, these moments of sharing in faith are especially precious because it is so difficult to speak of "Guru" in the West; so hard to express unabashed devotion; so culturally unacceptable to speak of the yearning to surrender to another being.



NEEM KAROLI ASHRAM AND TAOS HANUMAN TEMPLE

after their experiences in India with Maharajji, she felt they were all spiritual peas in one pod. “The connection was deep. The moment I saw them, my immediate reaction was, ‘Why do I know you?’ There was light coming from within.”

Ram Dass traveled to India to advance his academic and personal experiments with LSD. He arrived as Dr. Richard Alpert, but after meeting Maharajji realized there existed a profundity beyond psychedelics. Although he was fired by Harvard University for using LSD, students called him back for lectures upon his return. His book *Be Here Now*, which sold over two million copies, inspired and continues to spiritually uplift countless seekers.

Even today, devotees continue the path he set them on. “We were all sincere spiritual seekers who came to Maharajji. This notion that we were a bunch of drug addicts who came to meet him is untrue. Our meeting with him was destined for us to realize the true meaning of life, which is to love everyone. That was our inner longing. That’s what attracted us to Maharajji. We were home,” said Krishna Das, Grammy-nominated vocalist, kirtan rockstar and devotee of Maharajji. Krishna Das is famously referred to as the “chant master of American yoga” by the *New York Times*. His kirtans are extremely popular and well attended around the globe.

Neem Karoli Baba gave Western followers Indian names that they still maintain. Parvati Markus was earlier Barbara Markus; Mirabai Bush, an expert in contemplative science, was Linda Bush; Krishna Das was Jeff Kagel; and Ram Dass was Richard Alpert. The “das” in the names of Krishna Das and Ram Dass means “servant of God.”

People connected with Maharajji have done truly transformational

work for the benefit of society. Examples include Daniel Goleman, who has written about emotional intelligence in the *New York Times* and continues to work with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Dr. Larry Brilliant, who worked with the World Health Organization to eradicate smallpox and founded the Seva Foundation to help cure blindness.

Language was never a barrier for the sage’s devotees. “We did not feel the need to communicate with Maharajji when we were in his presence. There was also help from translators if required. We could also manage with some Hindi,” says Parvati. Reading about all this now, one feels that Maharajji is truly that universal energy. Today several institutions, ashrams and individual temples are following Maharajji’s practice of love all, feed all and serve all.

Legacy

Neem Karoli Baba attained mukti on September 11, 1973, leaving his physical body in Vrindavan on Anant Chaturdashi day. Krishna Das asserts that Maharajji is still alive and well through us and has not left us. He looks out for all of us everywhere. A samadhi shrine, constructed in his Vrindavan ashram, contains some of his personal belongings. People continue to make pilgrimages to ashrams and temples associated with him. The sage established more than fifteen temples in his lifetime, and more than 100 temples and ashrams around the world were inspired by him, all managed by his followers and family. The Kainchi Ashram in Nainital, Uttarakhand, was built in 1964. Maharajji would spend summers in Nainital and winters in

Guru bhakti: At the Hanuman Temple in Taos, New Mexico, devotees offer arati to Siva during one of the devotional festivals at this remote center dedicated to Neem Karoli Baba.

Vrindavan. An annual function to commemorate the inauguration of the Kainchi Ashram is held on June 15. A small USA ashram and Hanuman temple dedicated to Maharajji is active in New Mexico.

Maharajji himself founded only two ashrams, which are at Vrindavan and Kainchi. He established more than fifteen temples, most of them to Lord Hanuman, and more than 100 temples and ashrams around the world were inspired by him, all managed by his followers and family. The Kainchi Ashram in Nainital, Uttarakhand, was built in 1964. Maharajji would spend summers there and winters in Vrindavan. An annual function to commemorate the inauguration of the Nainital Ashram is held on June 15. A small USA ashram and Hanuman temple dedicated to Maharajji is active in New Mexico.

Countless leaders, celebrities, writers and scientists have followed and continue to follow Neem Karoli Baba. He lives in their work and through them. This is only possible because of the unconditional love and the seva bhava that he imbued in all who came into contact with him. This has been successfully transmitted for years by people in various walks of life. The number of people who follow Maharajji grows every day. They go on pilgrimages to places connected to Maharajji and make sure to meditate while they are there.

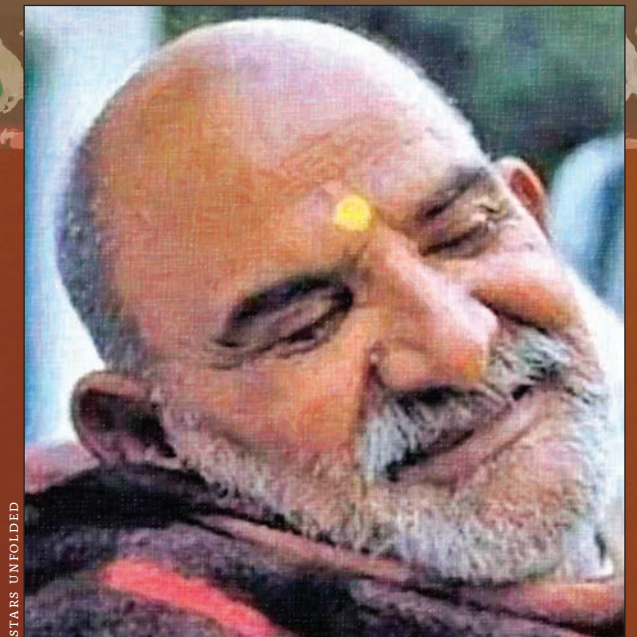
He is an integral part of the rich legion of India’s spiritual might. One line of *Hanuman Chalisa* says, *Tumhare bhajan Ram ko pavai. Janam janam ke dukh bisaravai*, which means, “O Hanuman, through devotion to Ram, one comes to you and is free of sorrow for several lives.” Maharajji, through his simple but effective methods of teaching, communicated this. Maharajji uniquely demonstrated, by his own idiosyncracies, that you don’t have to be pure or holy to love God, the world and yourself unconditionally.

All his life, Neem Karoli Baba remained accessible and authentic. He was the same to the poorest of the poor and the wealthy businessmen. A shopkeeper in a remote Indian village will narrate his experiences with the sage as fervently as a devotee from outside of India. I asked Gayatri Wagle, an India-based devotee and Bach flower therapist who makes regular trips to Kainchi Ashram, to describe Maharajji in one word. She instantly responded, “Grace.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sudarshan Ramabadran, author, policy expert and researcher, is an alumnus of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. In 2017, he completed the Professional Fellow for Governance and Society, South and Central Asia program run by the U.S. State Department. In 2013, he authored the book *Good Governance: People’s Voice* published by the Government of Gujarat. In 2021, he co-authored the book *Makers of Modern Dalit History*, published by Penguin Random House India.



STARS UNFOLDED

Final Days “Let’s Go!”

From *By His Grace, A Devotee’s Story*, Dada Mukherjee, 2001

After 1970 I saw how very restless Babaji had become, that he just wanted to go away. He said, “Dada, I shall not have any more temples. It is very easy to build a temple, but so very difficult to run it.”

Since I had met him he had been talking constantly of building new temples and dharmashalas here and there—at Jagganath Puri, Badrinath, Chitrakut, Benares, Gaya, Allahabad. Suddenly it all changed. Now he began saying, “Dada, what is attachment for a saint? I shall run away.”

This he would repeat many times a day, but I was not to tell anyone. I knew that it was with very great effort that he was staying.

We knew that he had no attachment for the ashram or for anybody. He was there and we were with him, that was all. It was like a rented house: while we are there it is so very dear to us, but when we leave it, we do not look back. Now when he said he would go away, I thought he would just be leaving the ashram as he had left other places. I didn’t suspect that he would leave his body. After he took his samadhi, Rajuda’s mother, who was a very great devotee, accused me of knowing that Maharajji was going to take samadhi. She would not believe that I did not know.

In Kainchi one day he was in his room resting after taking his food when suddenly he came out with just a tee shirt and dhoti on, no blanket. He hurriedly caught hold of my hand, saying, “Let’s go!” We went out of the ashram and down the road. He asked, “Dada, have you been to Badrinath?” I said no. “We shall hire a taxi for six hundred rupees and go to Kedarnath and Badrinath. That is the land of the gods, rishis and the great sages. I shall remain there, but you shall return.”

Ellora Caves & the Siva Temple Carved Out of Solid Rock

The caves of Ellora, culminating in the famed free-standing Kailasanatha Temple, were hand-carved from a mountain during a period of 400 years

BY ANNE PETRY, INDIA

MONOLITHIC ROCK RELIGIOUS CONSTRUCTIONS ARE FOUND in only a few places in the world: the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia, the Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt and the Kailasanatha Temple of Ellora in India. When a building is carved or excavated from solid rock, to which it remains attached at the base, it is termed "monolithic architecture." The Kailasanatha Temple for God Siva is the largest such structure in the world.

The excavation of caves and their elaborate adornment are closely related skills. In India, the first excavations of rock caves date back to around the third century bce. The Lomas Rishi cave in Bihar is an example, and later, in the west of the country, caves at Karle and Bhaja, the famed Ajanta Caves and the Elephanta Caves off Mumbai. Through several distinct periods over time, techniques improved, new concepts emerged and the work was refined. Ellora, and the Kailasanatha Temple in particular, are the apogee of monolithic architecture—the culmination of centuries of evolution in Indian rock temple architecture, successfully synthesizing the long tradition of rock sculpture in Western India, Southern India and the Deccan Plateau.

Although I had already traveled quite a bit in India, having seen the Taj Mahal, Hampi, Mahabalipuram and more, I wondered why many friends were so insistent that I visit Ellora Caves. I like to be surprised by places on my travels, so I decided not to do too much research. I simply followed their advice to go and see—and I discovered Ellora to be one of the iconic archaeological wonders of ancient India.

When I arrived at Ellora Caves, my first impression wasn't "How beautiful!" nor "How old it must be!" but rather, "How could an ancient civilization have built such a majestic place?" I wondered how it was possible that centuries ago they had the physical ability, artistic talent and technology to create a marvel like the one before my eyes. Adorned corridors, breathtaking chambers, gigantic statues, exquisite carvings and precious murals—all created with nothing more than chisels, hammers, willingness and patience.

Consider Kailasanatha. Who conceived and then executed the fantastic idea of tackling a mountain, removing tons of rock bit by bit, starting at the pinnacle and working down to the base, over hundreds of feet? Instead of doing what was already known, like stacking stones and going from bottom to top to create a monument, they decided to do the opposite and go from top to bottom by chipping into the mountain's heart by hand. Just as India's current-day stone carvers approach the carving of a relatively small statue as a process of revealing the already finished form by removing the unnecessary stone around it, these architects set out to reveal a huge temple from a mountainside.

Ellora's caves were sculpted over a period of more than 350 years, from the sixth to the tenth century ce. The scale of work and continuity over time call to mind other astonishing human projects: China's Great Wall, Cologne Cathedral and Egypt's pyramids.

The endeavor required patience and motivation, both for the reigning dynasties to ensure continuity in the realization of this

The massive Kailasanatha Temple supported by huge stone elephants

ANNE PETRY

project, and for the workers, men and women who spent their entire lives on these titanic creations. Know-how was passed down from father to son and grandson with one common goal: the splendor of Ellora. The workforce came from different parts of India; there is an obvious blend of different traditions and a wide range of typologies and construction techniques here. The site traces the evolution and innovations of cave temple ar-

chitecture from the fifth to the tenth century.

Visiting Ellora

Ellora Caves is located in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, 19 miles from Aurangabad and 202 miles from Mumbai. The road to the caves passes through numerous villages offering magnificent scenes of rural life, then crosses a vast plain. Ellora lies in a relatively flat, rocky region of the Western Ghats, where ancient volcanic activity has created multi-layered basalt formations known as the Deccan Traps. Once there, you climb up a rocky spur to discover over a hundred caves on a cliff-side some 320 feet high and 1.2 miles long. The 34 caves open to the public are more or less deep, more or less elaborate. Each stems from one of India's three great religions of the era: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Follow me on a tour of those precious caves to find some explanations, but also some of the enigmas that remain unexplained to this day by archaeologists and historians.

The caves and the temple have a fortunate history. During the time of extensive Muslim invasions and destruction of thousands of temples, the area was no longer on the common trade routes. Apparently, few attacks occurred here, though there is obviously deliberate damage to many statues and carvings. The temples of Khajuraho were similarly out of the way during this time and therefore are today mostly intact. Ellora Caves was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1983 and is protected by the Archeological Survey of India. Unlike many other ancient sites, it has never fallen into oblivion. It attracts thousands of pilgrims every year—to which we can now add the many foreign tourists.

Soon after arriving at the site, I met a German couple, early birds who were leaving just as I was beginning my discoveries. Both were very enthusiastic, saying: "This is one of the most spiritual places we've seen in India." Having just arrived, I had no idea what they

meant, but I was soon to find out.

The entrance to the site is at the Kailasanatha Temple (cave no. 16), but in my opinion, starting the visit with cave no. 1 would make more sense, as the numbering of the caves follows the supposed chronological order of their construction.

The caves are numerous and not all of the same level of interest. In addition to the must-see Kailasanatha Temple, I would recommend visiting caves no. 10 (Vishvakarma—Buddhist), 15 (Dashavatara—Hindu), 29 (Dhumar Lena—Hindu) and 32 (Indra Sabha—Jain).

Those who have a whole day to explore the site will also want to look at the other caves. I recommend finding an authorized guide who will help you understand the symbolism of the enigmatic sculptures and fascinating murals. The guide will also explain in greater detail that the earliest caves were Buddhist (12 caves built between the 5th and 7th centuries), followed by Hindu (17 caves built between the 8th and 10th centuries) and finally Jain (5 caves built between the 9th and 11th centuries). Each cave features statues of Deities and divine figures that prevailed during the first millennium, and many of them were occupied by monastics of each religion mentioned.

The period from 300 to 1000 ce was a golden age for India. It was a time when an estimated one-third of the world's population lived in India, a time when Hindu tradition, culture, scriptures and the Sanskrit language linked people all across this vast and fertile subcontinent. Indeed, the Sanskrit language, with its many treasures of religion, philosophy, law and epics, spread not only throughout India, but also across most of Asia. Four major types of evidence—archaeological studies, official inscriptions on stone and metal, coins and contemporary texts—show that for over 1,000 years, India was the richest region on the planet.

Considering the long history of building in

Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Temples

(left to right) The 98-foot-tall central pillar carved free from solid rock; one of many carvings of Siva Nataraj; sculpture of Buddha in the main prayer hall of the temple of Vishvakarma, cave 10—also known as "Carpenter's Cave" because the rock is finished to look like wooden beams



Ellora, one might wonder why all the dynasties, major and minor, that controlled the region were so keen to build on this particular site. The reason may be simple: Ellora Caves were an integral part of the aforementioned prosperity. In addition to being used as temples and resting places for pilgrims, their strategic location on an ancient South Asian trade route made them an important commercial center in the Deccan region in their day. This was also a time when many Hindu saints of the Bhakti Movement preached the importance of devotion to God, popularized sacred stories, songs and devotional worship, and enabled devotional Hinduism to spread throughout the subcontinent.

As I was resting and enjoying a shady spot, I saw an Indian man apparently filming himself with his phone. Watching him with his stylish cell phone and selfie stick, I couldn't help smiling at the contrast between this ultra-modern young man and the ancient setting. When I later approached him, he explained that he was a YouTuber and a great lover of history, and that the Ellora Caves were on his list of ten sites to discover in India. He considered it a privilege to have access to the caves, which allowed him to immerse himself in the history of his country. He wanted to share this privilege with those who live too far away or simply can't visit Ellora, so he made a short video to post afterwards on social networks.

I must admit I was surprised by his respect for his ancient civilization, and I was reassured to see that despite the changing times, with all it implies, the younger generations continue to be fascinated by the work, strength and skills of their predecessors.

Exploring the Site

The Hindu caves, mainly dedicated to Siva, are typically the most popular with visitors, offering sculpted ensembles of the highest quality. These chambers feature absolutely remarkable workmanship, with ornate facades, stunning naves, superb friezes, magnificent bas-reliefs and thousands of finely chiseled carvings. This composition of niches, galleries, openings and assembly halls of unparalleled richness is like an open book on a bygone era for travelers and pilgrims to discover during their visit.

Ellora is also a journey into Hindu cosmology. From one cave to the next, engraved in stone, you can admire numerous sacred scenes: Siva marrying Parvati, Siva slaying the demon Andhaka, Siva and Parvati playing dice, Brahma and Vishnu taking part in a cosmic dance, Vamana liberating the world and more.

The Amazing Kailasanatha Temple

The jewel of Ellora, for its beauty and size, remains the Kailasanatha Temple. Its construction began in the 8th century, when the Rashtrakuta dynasty controlled Southern India, and religion, trade, science, technology, literature and art were flourishing. It was entirely carved from top to bottom out of a single hard basalt hillside using iron hammers and chisels—not by stacking stones. There is no margin of error when removing stone from the finished product, so precise planning and layout were required for the work to progress successfully.

It is estimated that 400,000 tons of stone were removed to reveal the temple and create the numerous chambers both inside and in the adjacent cliffs. At 108 feet high, the Kai-

lasanatha Temple is the largest monolithic sculpture in the world. Its 98-foot-tall central pillar makes it all the more fantastic. The excavated area measures 276 feet long, 154 feet wide and 108 feet high, totalling 170,000 cubic yards that the founders faced when they started work on the site.

The volume extracted is greater than the monolithic temple that resulted from these extractions. Moreover, it is said to have taken just 18 years to carve—which would have required thousands of workers, if not ten of thousands. For those interested in history and technical information, there are so many figures that could be mentioned about this particular temple, such as the number of chambers or the number of statues, but in the end, I feel that the beauty of the Kailasanatha Temple lies more in the poetry of its delicate construction, and I think it is best to just let yourself be inspired and transported by this out-of-this-world edifice.

The temple's architecture and sculpture clearly show the presence of craftsmen from Chalukya region working alongside men from the Pallava and West Indian regions. The striking contrast between the hillside's raw mass and the finesse of the carvings that adorn the temple demonstrates the knowledge and expertise of these masters.

The temple's name, *Kailasanatha*, "Lord of Mount Kailash," refers to Himalayan Kailash mountain where Siva resides. It is said that Kailash mountain is represented by the central temple, to which the builders wanted to give the shape of a chariot; the missing wheels of this chariot were replaced by enormous elephants ready to pull said chariot.

The two staircases leading to the temple's



Exploring the Amazing Caves of Ellora



(Clockwise from above) Jain cave, #32, with elaborate carving on the pillars and remnants of the original paint on the statues in the background; main hall of cave #16, Kailasanatha Temple; two youth enjoy a restful moment at Ellora; complex bas relief of Siva dancing; the central shrine of the Kailasanatha Temple





SHUTTERSTOCK

Ellora remains a marvel of planning, multi-generational patience and skilled workmanship



ALL PHOTOS: ANNE PETRY



(Clockwise from right) The viewing gallery above the temple; upper story of the temple; a pilgrim stands in awe near ancient pillars; a ledge on cave 6 carved in 700 ce; Kailasanatha Temple showing the mountainous chamber out of which it was carved



main hall are flanked with narrative episodes from the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This temple, dedicated to Siva—which also has a few shrines dedicated to Vishnu—is a rich compilation of Hinduism, since most of the key epic scenes are engraved here.

While the complex sculptures that adorn the temple are in the Dravidian style typical of Southern India, one finds here and there traditional figures from other regions of the world such as the sphinx (evidence of trade with Egypt between 700 and 900 bce) and the dragonfly (Chinese influence, recalling the passage of Silk Road caravans).

I very much enjoyed watching Indian families wander from cave to cave, admiring this great part of their cultural and religious heritage. Here and there, parents would briefly explain to their children the meaning of certain scenes they were looking at. And even if they didn't know the whole story, I thought it was marvelous that the transmission was made through a site where there were intense moments of life, rather than through the inanimate pages of school books. How lucky these children—and I—were to have access to an ancient monument in such good condition!

Final Thoughts

If I had to describe the Kailasanatha Temple in just a few words, I would say that it remains unsurpassed as the largest and most grandiose monolithic stone masterpiece in the world, and that it now constitutes one of my unforgettable memories of India.

The prosperity, stability and religious har-

mony of early India gave rise to remarkable philosophical, literary, artistic, scientific and technological achievements, of which the Ellora Caves are one. And despite the substantial damage to the carved murtis, the disappearance of some of the paintings (largely due to the wood-fired cooking used in those days) and the collapse of the facades of some of the caves, the site remains absolutely magnificent and fascinating.

The ideal times to visit are from October to February and June to September, when the weather is pleasant. The more adventurous can also visit out of season. I visited Ellora Caves in May—when high temperatures demotivate the crowds—and it was fantastic.

In addition to its incredible technical features, this is perhaps where the magic of this archaeological marvel lies: it allows us to travel back in time. I enjoyed going quietly from cave to cave. It was the best way to imagine and somehow visualize what life might have been like back then: a monk reading holy scriptures here, another quietly sitting and meditating there, others chatting while walking to the Kailasanatha Temple. The Ellora Caves site is a gateway to a distant and fascinating era.

Although it's not easy to put into words the energy, or what we might call today the "vibes" of a place, so subtle and personal are they, walking through Ellora, I felt a powerful energy and at the same time a profound serenity. It may seem contradictory, but when you think about it, these caves have received so many monks and pilgrims, so many religious rituals and devotion, all of which has enriched this place in a way that I was able to feel deep inside.

My wish for all those who visit Ellora Caves is to see not only the grand dimensions, the beautiful murals and the stunning sculptures, but to deeply experience the holiness of the site. To me, that is the most precious gift you can receive from this visit: the feeling that your inner sacredness is connected to universal sacredness.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Petry is a French photographer focusing on Indigenous populations. Her nomadic life takes her all over, from the Shamans in Amazonia to the Hindu priests in India. She is passionate about people who keep alive their beliefs and traditions. Contact Instagram: [annepetryphotography](https://www.instagram.com/annepetryphotography)



PARENTING

Hindu Deities for All Generations

A brother and sister's creative journey from India to America and back again, resulting in a toy company to inspire young and old alike

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK CITY
WHEN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES LEAVE India for foreign shores, they often can carry only what fits into a suitcase. Along with the photographs, the sacred texts and the masalas they bring to their new homes, they also bring a lifetime of memories and culture to gift to their children. But the children remember only a little, and forget even more as they acclimatize to a new country and a new world. Avani Sarkar nee Modi, who left Ahmedabad when she was eight, remembered little about Hindu culture and traditions besides the fact that her mother always used cooking as the language of love and cooked for all festivals.

Their family was fortunate: they landed in Somerset, New Jersey, which was already like a thriving Little India. For the Modis, who were a deeply religious family, home life and culture were not starkly different from the world just outside, thanks to the larger Indian community present. Both their new American life and their Indian culture could flourish. It was their immigrant parents who struggled more than the children, as they

worked to establish their roots and create temples and cultural organizations.

"These uncles and aunties were the ones who got us involved in Indian dancing and music with a celebration of all our festivals," recalls Avani. "I really credit New Jersey for allowing me to preserve so much of my cultural learnings. If I had gone grown up elsewhere, I think my upbringing would have looked a little different, because I probably would have had to try harder to assimilate into my surroundings. Here, I felt very safe to embrace the cultural identity that I think now we're so proud that we had when I was growing up. Because of those things, I never felt like I was an outcast in society. I felt very much like I was in a place like home away from home."

So, Avani and her older brother Viral, who was 14 when they arrived in the US, never forgot their cultural roots. But these became merged with their American life and were not always of prime importance—that is until they became parents themselves. It was then that they had the urge to create special cultural toys for the third generation growing

up so far from India.

"There were two main factors behind the inspiration for Modi Toys for me and my brother, and one was absolutely the environment that we grew up in. Our parents are fairly religious people who pray every morning at the home shrine and then also go to the temple—my father has been going to the same temple every Monday for the past 35 years. It doesn't matter if he's been to another temple that day—he still must visit his temple! It's just something that's been so ingrained in him, and we grew up watching him. And you know, our generation retained just a small percentage of it, we understand that our faith is important, and we have to try our best in preserving it and passing it down to our kids."

Passing on faith to children growing up in a different world is always a challenge, for there is the generational divide and so many competing influences. "Are we practicing it in the same manner that our parents did?" asks Avani. "Absolutely not. That's just the nature of how things progress, how people age and how generations change."

Avani and Viral became parents within weeks of each other. Avani recalls, "Suddenly we started asking ourselves questions I think only parents ask themselves. When you are an aunt or an uncle, you don't think about these things, because you're not the one in the driver's seat. As parents, you're now responsible for raising a child. And so now, instead of being children ourselves, we became the parents raising children and started asking ourselves these questions: 'How are we going to raise our kids as first-generation Indian Americans when they are thousands of miles away from India and don't have any connection to it? They have no memories of it. They're not learning the language, because English has become a primary language at home. They're not watching *Doordarshan* on TV every day, because now they have 50 million options to choose from, unlike us, where we only had one channel to watch together as a family."

Even the food they are eating has changed from their mother's daily Gujarati thali to whatever the younger generation can muster in their busy, time-pressed American lifestyle. "Our children are being raised in an environment that is so different from the way that we were raised, that we felt that the onus was really on us to find a starting point to give them our faith and our culture."

It became all about invention and creation, especially when Viral and Avani realized there were no faith-based toys on the market. "When you think about how children learn, it's through play," says Avani. "They learn through play, not just when they're newborns, but throughout their formative childhood years. And so that's where we got the idea that if there's a way to incorporate a culture of play, it doesn't really feel like a tactic, but it's just more like you're playing and you're having fun, and in the process you're learning something meaningful."

While Avani got engrossed in the complex world of being a new mother, her brother Viral kept at the concept of faith-based toys. About four months after they had discussed the idea, he had created a sketch of a prototype. Seven months later, he had a working prototype in hand, made by a local manufacturer in the US. Says Avani, "Viral took the seed of an idea and brought it to life, which was so unexpected, because these were just conversations, and they felt like nothing would come of it. He did it, and now it's been five years since that conversation happened!"

In those five years, their start-up venture has jump-started to huge success, both to the cheers of consumers and critical acclaim from the media. Modi Toys has been featured in *Bloomberg*, *Good Morning America*, *Entrepreneur*, *Parents* and the *Good Housekeeping* Best Toys Award. The recognition on mainstream media outlets has been amazing, showing what an important need Modi Toys is filling in the Indian-American diaspora as well as the wider American life. Through popular media, you learn that celebrities Priyanka Chopra and Mindy Kaling have both bought these toys for their children.

Avani Sarkar herself has been recognized in *Forbes* "Next 1000," *Inc* "Female Founders 100," *Ernst & Young* "Entrepreneur of the Year" NJ finalist, as a Tory Burch Foundation Fellow and a Stevie Award Winner.

Toys That Chant Mantras

It seems there was a crying need for such toys for the Hindu third generation of children growing up in America—and Modi Toys has filled that demand. They have brought the Hindu Gods and Goddesses into the Tech Age with their collection of plush



toys of the Deities, from Ganesha to Durga, Krishna and Saraswati. What's unique about these toys is that when you squeeze their belly, they chant five different mantras respective to each Deity. Sacred mantras right from the crib!

If you're wondering how well babies and toddlers will absorb and repeat Sanskrit chants, you're in for a surprise. It seems many children learn to chant the Gayatri Mantra and other slokas easily. Avani says she speaks from experience here. Before they first brought the product to life, their kids were between one to two years old, and they used them to test the toys. Now they have a two-year-old, three-year-old and a six-year-old, all of whom have used their toys since birth. Avani remarked, "I can attest and say that, yes, they do learn from a really young age. Because for them, it's all sounds, words—they

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Creating memories: (far left) Avani's daughter with Saraswati toy and storybook; (above) Avani and her brother Viral; (below) A lineup of the company's premier products



Growing popularity: (right) Viral and his team as he works to expand operations in India; (below) a sampling of their storybooks which are written for each of the dolls

don't make a distinction between what's Sanskrit, what's sacred, what's English and what's nursery rhymes."

"So, you know, really the key is to make it fun and make it somewhat musical and repetitive. That's how kids learn. So now I see my two-year-old, even before he was two years old, he could say bits and pieces of the Gayatri Mantra. And to me, both as a mom and the co-founder, it makes me very proud because this was a hypothesis, right? Ultimately if we can incorporate alternate education into play, there is a way to actually teach our children and in fact, it turns out they do learn. And we saw this firsthand as our kids were getting older and after hearing countless anecdotal feedback from our customers as well."

Learning by Playing

Each plush toy subtly teaches the child about the Deity's attributes. Durga Ma, for instance, features a trishul, or trident, in Her left hand, while offering blessings with Her right hand. Since Durga is never seen without Her trusted lion, it is included with Her. The Goddess's attributes become playthings and yet a learning experience.

These Deity toys are also eco-friendly, which is so important to today's consumers. With the purchase of each of the plush toys, consumers are saving up to 15 plastic bottles from toxic environmental waste. These bottles, which would have ended up in landfills, are now the stuffing in the belly of these beloved Hindu Deities. Modi toys are lab-tested and certified and have received a 4.5 rating from consumers in 35 countries. Each of these gifts can be personalized to the child it's being gifted to.

Avani and Viral have also built in a concept



of freshness and diverse products into the company—there are books, board games, animated videos and other offerings tapping into the faith-based culture of Hinduism. The Shhhanti Musical Crib Mobile features over an hour of continuous soothing instrumental hymns, mantras and aratis, and is Bluetooth enabled. A baby will be in bliss right from the start.

Modi Toys has also launched books geared towards families who want to celebrate diversity and culture in a less faith-based context. A recent offering is *Desi Devis*, an A-to-Z book highlighting 26 women from the South Asian culture from past and present. Explains Avani, "I wanted to spotlight women that maybe many people already know about, like kids may learn about Kamala Harris in school or Mindy Kaling through pop culture, but also people whose stories I feel are often forgotten, or even untold. So that book is special to me personally."

How can festivals be more fun and integrated into the American way of life? Many puzzles and games on the market are associated with Christmas and Thanksgiving, but few highlight Indian festivals like Diwali.

Modi Toys has introduced an activity book called *Rangoli*, with stickers, to create 12 different Rangoli patterns—through puzzle pieces which children match to corresponding numbers. It results in delightful art by your child which you can frame on your fridge.

Avani and Viral have worked to make the company not one with just a "buy, buy mantra" but one which interacts with the consumer, with lots of free resources to help the consumers get more bang for their buck. There are scores of activities at moditoys.com under "resources," to keep children involved and busy.

"As parents look for resources, we want to be at the forefront to provide these types of resources to families and make it easy for them so that they don't have to think twice about activities and presentations," says Avani. "We have a 'Learning' page on our site which is filled with tons of stuff including story animations. We actually took our books and turned them into animated videos the kids can watch on YouTube. Screen time obviously is a fact of life now, so instead of trying to fight it, we embrace it. All our workbooks are available for free on YouTube, and we also created a Diwali PowerPoint presentation that parents or teachers can show to kids. It is a great way to celebrate and teach Diwali in school, which is now becoming more widely recognized."

For Holi, Modi Toys has organic color powder which is carried seasonally. They also have a charming Krishna online challenge where boys and girls are invited to dress as Krishna and upload their photos on the site. Friends and family vote online for the cutest Baby Krishna, and the winner receives a \$100 gift card to the website.

"As you know, all festivals are rooted in Hinduism and have a backstory. So, we try to weave ourselves into these holidays in a fun way as opposed to a strict religious manner, because when it comes to faith it's a broad spectrum," points out Avani. "Some people



really appreciate the fact that we're trying to make it more accessible, while others may feel we're not doing justice to how they believe it should be presented. But you know, to each their own—we're not here to preach. We're just here to make things accessible for people who would want to take advantage of what we offer."

Avani agrees that while women are the agents of cultural change because of their roles as mothers and mentors, she believes men play a big role, too. "We end up becoming the face of these changes, but absolutely make no mistake that my brother is the CEO of the company. He's the behind-the-scenes guy, but he's the one that really brought this to life and kept the engine running on the backend. But we make a great tag team, because we both individually have a lot of strengths that complement each other."

"The most interesting chapter in our story now is that my brother moved to India with his family in an effort to really expand our business and to be closer to the suppliers' chain as well," says Avani. "So that's a huge step, because our parents moved to America to search for a better life. And now my brother has gone back for the very same reason. So, life is really coming full circle, and it's great. Also, the fact that we will be giving jobs to people over there is a very good thing."

It seems appropriate that these toys about India's religious heritage are actually made in India and the company has offices both in India and in Edison, New Jersey. Asked about expansion plans, Avani says, "So our primary market is the US, but we're trying to grow the market, and India was, as you can imagine, very difficult, because it has a population of a billion people. It's like trying to make—not a drop in the bucket—but a drop in the ocean!"



Made by parents: (above, left to right) Co-founder Avani cradles a handful of their specially designed Hindu toys; children learn together as they play with a Saraswati doll, storybook included

know, you look differently at a toy like this. You don't go to a Disney store and think, 'Oh my God, I need to pick up this toy because someone I love closely was just injured.' These toys, besides being given to newborn babies as a gift and blessing, are also a gift to a sick grandmother to find comfort, for someone who's had a stillborn, or is going through IVF or has just beat cancer."

Indeed, each Hindu God and Goddess symbolizes some strength, some quality which we all try to emulate: Durga is the Goddess of power and protection; Hanuman denotes strength and devotion; Krishna is all about love and loyalty; Saraswati about education and the arts and is the perfect blessing for graduation, back to school, recital or any occasion that celebrates creativity. Ganesha—the beloved God of new beginnings and new ventures—becomes the emblem of good luck for any endeavor, big or small.

"We have people thinking of us during good times and bad, which tells us what we stand for. What we manufacture may be toys, but what people buy from us is a symbol of hope and joy, and I think that is always going to be our legacy. Because of what they symbolize, our toys have really taken on a life of their own. They are no longer viewed as a toy for a child but as a symbol of whatever it is that you know it represents that can be gifted to anyone of any age, based on what it is that they're either celebrating or experiencing in life at that time."

Gifts for Life

Perhaps the larger reason for the success story of Modi Toys is the toys themselves; they are more than mere toys. Avani recalls a woman whose pregnant daughter-in-law was involved in a car accident and was being rushed to hospital. The woman reached out to have the Baby Ganesha shipped overnight to her. Says Avani, "We felt really bad about what had happened; but the fact that she reached out to us and in time of such difficulty, it made us realize right there and then that this is way bigger than a toy brand. You





ARTS & CRAFTS

India's Fabulous Fabrics

Can the handwoven warp and weft survive technological modernity?

BY ANNE PETRY, INDIA

IS THERE ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE world as colorful as India? Indian clothing is a visual explosion of vibrant and bright colors. I am always amazed by the tremendous variety of textiles and huge diversity of traditional outfits. All this is possible thanks to the knowledge of weaving mastered by millions of Indians for centuries. Let's take a historical and geographical journey through India to discover the nation's weaving arts.

Ancient Knowledge

Silk saris are the quintessence of traditional women's clothing in India. The nicest saris often go from generation to generation as a family heritage. In the same way, secrets of weaving and the art of decorating silk and cotton are transmitted from masters to students. This helps explain why weaving became an intrinsic symbol of Indian culture.

In Indian history and Hindu myths, a few points can be highlighted. In ancient *Veda* texts several references are made to *hiranya* (cloth made out of gold), and in sacred lit-

erature it is said that the traditional sari from Madhya Pradesh was brought by Shishupal, Krishna's cousin. The first evidence of weaving in the country dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization, which was active from 3300 to 1300 BCE. The first weaving centers appeared in the 12th and 13th centuries to provide saris for royalty. Thus, the art of weaving is fully part of Indian history and is deeply engraved in Indian life and culture.

In this vast and diverse country, one can find as many clothing habits and traditional weaving techniques as indigenous populations. While shimmering colors remain a common point to all Indian fabrics, each region has its own designs, characteristics, embroidery, patterns, printing techniques and dyeing. Traveling from one state to another means discovering not only new customs but new textiles. Let's explore some of them.

In the tie-dye textile called **bandhani**,¹ originating in the Indus Valley Civilization, the fabric is decorated by tying hundreds of small knots in the cloth, making tiny bindings that form a figurative design. In fact, the word *bandhani* originates from the Sanskrit

word *banda* that means *knot*. It is a colorful textile that is created nowadays by the Khatri community from Gujarat.

The traditional **kalamkari**² pictorial art fabric originated in Andhra Pradesh, where it was used by groups of musicians who moved from village to village recounting some of the most fascinating Hindu myths to local populations. The name *kalamkari* comes from the Persian word *oalam* (pen) and *kari* (craft), but nowadays the kalamkari is known as a manual impression made with stamps or wooden blocks.

The **apatani**³ weaving technique comes from the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. This work can be recognised by its geometrical signs, mostly zigzags and angular shapes.

The **kullu**⁴ shawls of Himachal Pradesh are hand woven with three different types of wool: Angora, Merino and wool from local breeds of sheep. Despite their expensive prices, there is a high demand for kullu shawls in India as well as in foreign countries.

Pochampally ikat⁵ is produced in the town of Bhoodan Pochampally, Telangana region. This weaving is known for its an-



1. Bandhani Style



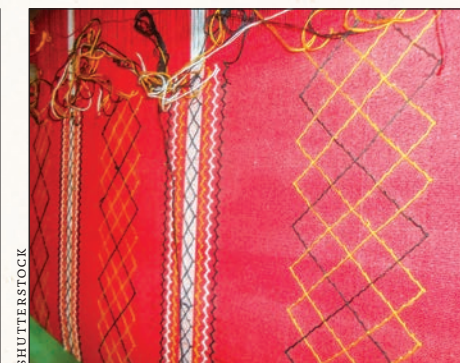
4. Kullu Wool Shawl



2. Kalamkari Block Art



5. Pochampally Ikat Weave



3. Apatani Technique



6. Panja Durrie

gular signs and the intentional overflow of colors. With about 5,000 hand looms in Pochampally, the village has been elected by UNESCO as one of eight "Iconic Saree Weaving Clusters of India."

Weaving is not only about textiles, but also carpets. Famous for its tradition of hand looms, the town of Panipat, in the state of Haryana, produces what is called **panjadurries**.⁶ This technique takes its name from a metallic claw-like tool used to beat and set the threads in the warp. This carpet can be found in almost every house in the state.

In order to produce so many different

types of textiles, India boasts more than 23 varieties of cotton. Silk and wool are also produced in a large part of the country, depending on the altitude and climate. Thanks to its huge variety of weaving techniques, India has always been recognized worldwide, and its dominance in this industry has persisted for centuries.

Still today, this hand work, that can definitely be considered an art, remains extremely important to India's economy, with more than four million people involved. A Ministry of Textiles has been established for the formulation of policy, planning, development,

export promotion and regulation of the textile industry in the nation.

In the Modern Context

When weaving is done the traditional way, it is one of the most eco-friendly industries. Hand looms don't need any external energy. Most looms are located in the textile workers' houses, in small villages, so minimal transportation is necessary. When raw materials must be carried from place to place, weavers usually use bicycles. Typical looms are 20 to 100 years old and are made of local wood or bamboo. Thus, the ecological impact of this traditional manufacturing is unusually low.

Unfortunately, ecology is often outweighed by the interest of profit and money. Mechanical weaving looms go faster, have a higher productivity and therefore allow for lower prices. China in particular has been a tough competitor for India and is a serious threat to its ancient knowhow, especially because of the massive influx of counterfeit goods.

While a sari made quickly on a mechanical loom sells for around US\$100-150, the same

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Hand and loom: (opposite page)
Time required to create the object and reputation of the weaver are two key factors determining the selling price of a finished product; (left) rudimentary working tools, hardly changed over the centuries, provide a quality, easy-to-use thread for the creative steps that follow





Before and after: (counterclockwise from left) To create an exceptional fabric, the wool transformed into yarn must be of the highest quality; scissors, weaving comb and a traditional thread-cutting tool; diversifying production to cater to modern needs; in a Southern Indian shop, the saleswomen fold the just sold fabric which will later be used for various creations by the customer

sari made on a traditional loom activated by human arms and decorated with human creativity can be sold for the tidy sum of \$400. But the hand loom requires many hours of work, and sometimes several days are necessary to create a single sari. The end benefit of a higher sales price doesn't seem worth the extra effort. Today most young weavers would rather work on electric looms, which are less tiring and arduous than ancient ones.

With education now accessible to most Indian children, the mindset is changing fast. After school, teenagers would rather study, read or play than spend hours weaving next to their parents. Moreover, with access to the Internet and TV, the Western way of life is an aspiration now reachable for most middle-class Indian youngsters. Sitting in front of a loom is not part of their dream anymore. The loss of transmission of the craft is increasing, and some weaving techniques are slowly disappearing. The outfit called *puans* worn by generations of people from Mizoram state has nearly vanished.

For the last few decades, because of globalization, mechanization and the capacity of some countries to produce huge quantities for very low prices, the Indian weaving industry has endured rough times. But since this sector plays such a vital role of subsistence for a large swath of the Indian population, and as it literally lifts up the economic state of some regions, strong decisions are made. Indians are using their unique intimacy with fabrics, their artisans' creativity and their ability to adapt traditional designs to modern fashion, to remain on top and to suit various markets in Asia as well as in the rest of the world.

Empowerment for Women

In the past, in many Indian states, children were expected from a young age to help their family by doing all types of work, no matter how hard it was. Their lack of basic education, the impact of the dowry system, and the demands of family life often restricted their opportunities to low-paying, hard physical labor and very difficult lives. This hard labor was especially taxing on girls, while social factors prevented most women from even considering professional training.

Some NGOs are working to change this



situation. By providing special weaving coaching and promoting the knowledge some women already have in this field, they support cultural traditions and help women gain extra income for their family through a less demanding occupation. But how to link weavers located in small remote villages with Western clients who have a renewed interest in craft traditions? NGOs located all around India have become a bridge between those local artisans and the rest of the world.

One such organization is Premalaya Handicrafts Trust. This non-profit organization, located in Tiruvannamalai, a largely rural

and drought-ridden district of Tamil Nadu, was founded in 1987 to provide village women with training and work in traditional handicrafts, allowing them to improve their family's economic status. Many women from surrounding villages are participating in the production of crafts with a touch of art in various sectors like embroidery, handloom weaving, handmade cotton dolls, peepal leaf painting, palm leaf weaving, cane furniture, batik and block printing. What began with a day clinic and the training of women health workers has grown into a comprehensive support network for 40 villages. Today, Pre-

malaya handicrafts are designed and created by over 300 women artisans.

While weaving in the past served to create clothing like saris, shawls or carpets, these days the Premalaya Handicrafts Trust trains women to adapt their work to western demand by producing bags, laptop covers, table mats and cushion covers, following strict international norms of fabrication.

In order to attract more potential clients and western tourists, the NGO has opened a boutique in Tiruvannamalai, selling handmade souvenirs. By supporting an ethical consumerism, this is a win-win deal in every sense: providing work for the local population at a fair salary, giving buyers the opportunity to get original crafts and keeping alive the ancient Indian knowhow of weaving.

Conclusion

Nowadays in just a minute on the Internet we can find all types of objects and clothing, all looking the same and produced by extremely fast and productive machines. However, having a scarf actually made by humans from beginning to end, who took their time to find the best silk possible, who worked hard on handlooms and who used their artistry to create, definitely gives the scarf a special value.

India is betting on the fact that those who value handmade weaving will continue buying traditional crafts. They are not merely buying an object; they are obtaining the artisan's excellency, their creativity and somehow a little piece of their personal story and national history.





PUNYA DHAM ASHRAM



Serving the community: (far left) Ma Kashyap embraces a young couple who are at the ashram for their wedding (bottom left) Ma Krishna Kashyap; (above) young couples prepared for their group wedding; the large Ganesha near one of the ashram's entrances; Ma adds more food to one of her live-in guest's plate

SEVA

Celebrating the Circle of Life

The Punya Dham Ashram provides retirement homes for cows and aging humans as well as mass weddings for the young

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

WHEN A CHILD IS BORN, THERE IS SO much joy and celebration—as if royalty has arrived at the home, with music, dance and sweets. Yet what happens when people get old? There is no celebration of aging bodies, grey hair, fading eyesight and memory loss. There is almost a sense that the elderly are dispensable, just waiting for death. These seniors are often abandoned by their own families and made to feel unwanted and unnecessary.

Meet a woman who is a champion for the forgotten and the disposable. Krishna Kashyap has not only founded a retirement home for elderly people but also a retirement home for old, abandoned cows who can no longer give milk and whom no one wants. Kashyap, lovingly known as Mataji, runs Punya Dham Ashram in Pune. “Service to God through Service to Humanity” is its mission, and it is operated by The Vishwa Jagriti Trust, Pune.

The ashram, which initially consisted

of just the widow’s own modest home and personal assets, has through donations been transformed into a sprawling home for everyone, “retired Gods, humans and cows,” as Ma Kashyap jokingly puts it, and she couldn’t



Krishna Kashyap

LAVINA MELWANI

be happier. Prayers are held in a large satsang hall or in the three temples on the land, and the presence of the Almighty is everywhere.

The daughter of a nurse who immigrated to London for work after partition, Ma was brought up by her uncles in Punjab and became a math teacher. Her parents, on a trip to India, found her an ideal husband, an army man. Kashyap recalls many blissful years of happiness with her new family. Then came tragedy: four members of her family, including her husband, passed away in the same year. Ma faced loneliness and a struggle to rediscover life’s meaning. Through religion and satsang, she found that the answers lay in making others happy and content. She created a retirement home for those forgotten by society, be it needy elderly humans or cows. She has also managed to get scores of indigent couples married in mass weddings, so they don’t have to pay any of the costs and are gifted clothes, jewelry and a grand wedding

reception by Ma and her supporters at Punya Dham. God had found her in her darkest hour of despair and showed her a new way of living, which transformed not only her own life but that of countless others through prayer, compassion and support.

I had heard about the feisty Ma Kashyap who had acquired so many ready-made daughters and sons-in-law and who fed anyone who crossed her path with an open heart. So, during a recent visit to Pune, I decided to visit her in person with my niece Latika, who had first told me about the ashram.

We first went to Ma’s own small house—her original home, which is the nucleus of all the radiance and activity. She is a small, slight woman with grey hair, but she holds everyone’s attention. Simple and unpretentious, she asked me to sit by her side. Her pet cat sat at her feet and she told me the whole story of how this haven for the forgotten came about. She had basically liquidated her assets and formed a trust. Her in-laws, her brother and her children supported her. She says, “Everybody consented, started this, and miracles happened. I just think of something and the person to do it appears, by God’s grace.” Many like-minded people, even from overseas, came forward to help her. She says, “I have the best workers and volunteers. They don’t look at the clock, they work as long as there is work. I am very fortunate.” Then, as a woman of action rather than words, she



ALL PHOTOS: PUNYA DHAM ASHRAM





PUNYA DHAM ASHRAM

Many Activities: (left, top to bottom) The ashram's elder cows enjoy the sunshine; celebrating International Women's Day; young couples give offering to the sacred fire on their wedding day; (far right) Siva, Parvati and Ganesha sit atop Kailas, overlooking the ashram during the annual Mahasivaratri celebrations; one of the ashram's three main shrines, this one to Sai Baba of Shirdi

asked her volunteers to take me on a tour of Punya Dham.

We explored the sprawling compound with Lata, a devoted volunteer who took us round to the retirement community to check out their small apartments. I met with some of the residents—many older Sindhi women and some aged couples, all of modest means. There is a basic charge of US \$6.00 a day, which covers all rent, meals and house-keeping. These homes offer a refined respite where the residents can keep their dignity and lead a viable life. I met one couple whose children live in Spain, but for them this is the right environment, in the India they are familiar with, and with daily satsang and three temples around them. The woman, skilled in making sweets and chocolates, does this here as a seva or service, with all money from the sales going to the ashram's funds.

It was a hot day in March, and the haze ensured the compound was deserted as people receded to the shade of the interiors of the ashram. The aromas of masalas cooking wafted appetizingly from the lunchroom, and I found a dozen elderly people enjoying a full Indian meal—sabzi, hot rotis and rice all prepared by the resident cook. It was comforting



LAVINA MELWANI



PUNYA DHAM ASHRAM

to sit around a table of the retirees sharing a hot, home-cooked meal and the day's news. The food was delicious, all vegetarian and hot.

Next, we visited the retirement home for cows. The rescued cows have found respite in a vast shady shed with plenty of food every day. There's a sculpture of the blue-skinned God Krishna at the entrance, protecting and blessing all inhabitants. Many Hindu families come and feed the cows, some for ritual purposes. They bring the cows many treats like bananas, grains and fruit.

I then visited the workshops set up in several rooms for teaching the women of the neighborhood independence, by training them in the craft of sewing. Ma gets free remnants of embroidered and printed material from a curtain company, and the women are taught to make table runners and cushions from these discards. These are sold through women's groups in India and abroad and bring in a livelihood for the women. Vocational training is also given to young girls, who are learning to make cushions and table linen for export.

Ma's Punya Dham Ashram has grown to a sprawling enterprise. If you enter from one side, you see a huge Ganesha embedded in the hillside. Closer to the temple is a large sculpture of Siva, Parvati and Ganesha presiding over the entire ashram. It is here that low-income village couples are given a full wedding. Ma says the inspiration was to relieve the pressure on farmers, some of whom were committing suicide due to their inability to meet expenses. A farmer had told her he was still paying just the interest on the loan he had taken from the village moneylender for the expenses of his daughter's marriage last year. This year Ma had got his other daughter married, and he said, "I never thought my second daughter would ever get married." The pressure is always on the girl's family to provide a feast for the entire village—and Ma takes care of that, too.

We visited the three temples where the priests would soon put the Gods to sleep—the Ganesha temple, the Hanuman Mandir and the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple. These have all been funded by devotees and are a sanctuary of peace and comfort for the people of the neighborhood. During high holy days, be it Ganesha Chaturthi, Janmashtami, Dusshera or Diwali, hundreds turn up to celebrate. *Langar prasad* is served on the big festival days and during the mass weddings.

Langar is also fed daily to the people from the surrounding community. The area's workers and their families come here for the free meal for 200 people. This is a place where food is meant to be shared. To look at the cows contentedly chewing their grain, and devotees bringing them bananas

is to realize we all are part of the same family.

Laden with prasad and a fresh coconut from the Ganesha temple, we took a quick tour of the large congregation hall where satsang is held daily and where the macro weddings take place. In these weddings, 20 to 25 couples are assembled and enter the venue in pomp in fancy chariots, with musicians and revelry. For these couples, this is a dream come true, a fantasy wedding they would never have been able to afford on their own. Ma provides them with trousseaus, jewelry and household goods to start their married life



PUNYA DHAM ASHRAM



LAVINA MELWANI

together. Their village community is invited to this wedding, and a feast is cooked for all to enjoy. The couples do not pay anything but enjoy the blessings and joy of the auspicious day.

Ma's latest venture, with the help of donors, is building a state-of-the-art dialysis center in what was formerly a large library on the premises of Punya Dham. With the thousands of diabetes patients in the area and with the treatment being so unaffordable, this is a way of transforming the lives of many of the vulnerable population.

She says, "If we have the capability and the capacity, we shouldn't turn away anyone who comes through our gates." Ma seems to have discovered the secret of living a full and happy life—by ensuring that the poor and the abandoned lead a full and happy life.



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 a co-founder of Children's Hope India. She blogs at www.lavina-withlavina.com. You can follow her @lavinaamelwani.

IDENTITY

A Hindu—Sort of...

Why some people just can't bring themselves to say they're Hindus

BY FRED STELLA

IN THE WEST, IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE TO RUN INTO someone who is not ethnically South Asian yet studies the *Bhagavad Gita*, meditates with a Sanskrit mantra, is a disciple of a guru, chants bhajans and may even have replaced his or her birth name with Ram or Radhika. However, if you were to assume they were Hindu, you just might not be correct. Yes, everything I just mentioned has all the markings of a Hindu; but there is a chance that this person might deny the label of *Hindu* or any other religious category. They might be comfortable with identifying as "Spiritual But Not Religious" or something quasi-Hindu such as *Yogi* or *Vedantist*.

I'll say from the start that I have no desire to criticize anyone for how they identify religiously. My goal here is to analyze the reasons for distancing oneself from Hinduism while embracing some of the most important elements of the tradition. And for our purposes, I will focus specifically on those who are ethnically non-Indian and typically of European or African ancestry. It is true that there are South Asians who also distance themselves from "The H Word," but that is a matter for a different time.

While reasons for this are manifold, I suspect the main one is that the word *Hindu* is so heavily tied to an ethnicity and culture quite foreign to most Westerners. Wikipedia estimates 99% of all Hindus are of South Asian extraction.

The other major religions are much more diverse in their ethnicity. But the reasons for Hinduism's rather limited diversity are quite noble. While some military expansion into Southeast Asia centuries ago did happen, Indian culture did not engage in colonization as we have come to know it. They did not usurp cultures or establish states servile to an emperor. Sure, there were wars between Indian kingdoms, but they more or less kept things "all in the family." The other reason is that there is no "Great Commission" that compels devotees to convert others of a religion outside of their own to avoid perdition.

The first major Hindu thought leader to transmit the Dharma to Americans was Swami Vivekananda. I suspect that if he had described his work as being Hindu it might have established a precedent; but that was not to be. Vivekananda disliked the word for some of the reasons I mentioned above. At the time it was just too broad a brush. He stated: "There may not be any harm in using the word [*Hindu*] but it lost its significance, for you may mark that all the people who live on this side of the Indus in modern times do not follow the same religion as they did in ancient times. The word, therefore, covers not only Hindus proper, but [Muslims], Christians, Jains, and others who live in India. I, therefore, would not use the word *Hindu*. What word should we use then? *Vedantists*—followers of the Vedanta."

And then there are some people who embrace Hindu practice that eschew any religious stamp because they just don't like religion. Many were brought up in homes that practiced a rather severe

expression of Christianity. Some will even refrain from using "God" in conversation, as visions of Chief-Punisher-In-The-Sky might retard spiritual and emotional growth. So, for this group, having an affiliation with a society that teaches from an Eastern-oriented position is all they need. Of course, we cannot minimize the strong anti-Hindu bias that seems to be pervasive today. Many people might want to keep a distance due to fear that they will be labeled fascist or extremist. This meme is certainly making the rounds currently on many college campuses.

And the interfaith movement, as positive as I believe it is, has spawned those who think that since the world's religions are one, why not embrace them all? This is a form of what is called "radical universalism." I've actually heard people say that they are Christian-Hindu-Buddhist-Jewish-Muslim+. It is true that those who practice the more mystical expressions of the Abrahamic religions see an underlying unity among all traditions, but even they tend to focus on the rituals and practices of their own heritage.

Another reason for people to be hesitant about identifying as Hindu is that they have a very narrow understanding of what that means. Often, it is assumed that to be Hindu one must engage in temple Deity worship. While many are attracted to kirtan, the *Gita*, and gurus, only a relative few feel drawn to become temple members. But this assumption is incorrect. Down through the ages there have been plenty of deeply devout cradle-to-cremains Hindus who have found Ishwar/Bhagavan/Brahman beyond temple walls.

Years ago, I was at a stage where I couldn't quite figure out my spiritual identity. I held onto the label of Catholic for cultural reasons way longer than I should have. Later, I settled on referring to myself as "an adherent of the Hindu/Yoga tradition." I was getting close.

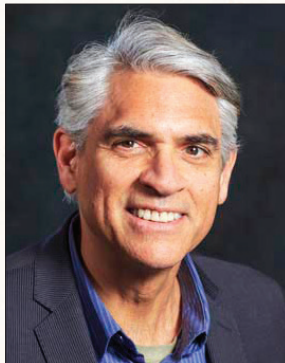
There were a few things that led to my being able to comfortably call myself Hindu outright. The Hindu tradition and community have given me untold joy over these many years. How can I be the recipient of such treasures without giving in return? It was then and there that I decided that I could no longer keep an arm's length away.

I occasionally get asked if Indian Hindus see me as a "legitimate" Hindu. And the answer is a resounding yes. Here in North America, the Caribbean and in India I have been embraced wholly. And I've never heard anything different of my ethnically similar peers. I believe only once I was chided for not changing my name. But my well-meaning antagonist wasn't denying my Hindutva, merely suggesting that I commit in a deeper, more public way.

As I said in the beginning, I do not seek to lay a guilt trip on anyone who chooses to engage with the great wisdom and practices of the Dharma without fully embracing our community. Hinduism is very generous in sharing with the world without requiring any sort of formal membership. But those of us who are practicing Hindus should encourage those whom I've described to know how welcome they are in our fold. And really, we can always use the help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Stella sits on the National Leadership Council of the Hindu American Foundation and the advisory board of the Global Bhutanese Hindu Organization. He is also the Resident Outreach Minister of the West Michigan Hindu Temple since 2009. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with his Dharmi wife Teresa.



Hindu Heritage Endowment

You Can Help Support the Hawaii Monastery Endowments

The formal name of Kauai's Hindu Monastery is Kauai Aadheenam. An aadheenam is a monastery/temple complex in the South Indian Saiva Siddhanta tradition. Saiva Siddhanta is a temple centric tradition, meaning that its disciplines center around devotees regularly participating in Saivite temples through activities such as worshipping, meditating, helping prepare items for the daily pujas and temple cleaning. Hence, aadheenams are typically located near a major Saivite temple and commonly have their own temples on the monastery grounds. Aadheenams, furthermore, are engaged in the administration of other temples, and in overseeing temple endowments. Such endowments provide general support as well as funds for annual events, such as feedings or festivals.



A drone photo of our 312 acres of hardwood trees and noni fruit trees. The Himalayan Acres Endowment is the latest fund supporting the monastery.

In 1994 Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami created a separate organizational structure just for handling the endowments of Kauai Aadheenam. He named it Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE) and set it up as an independent public service trust. He secured from the IRS a special ruling allowing that beneficiaries can be anywhere in the world. This enables Hindus in America to support their village temple in India, for instance, and receive a US tax deduction. He was not planning just for his own institution's future, but the future of Hindu institutions anywhere in the world.

Gurudeva gave this description of the involvement of inner world beings in HHE. "All the guardian devas of all the people in the beneficiary organizations and of all those who set up the endowment are involved in the HHE. It is a devonic creation, not forged by us, but bequeathed upon us from the Devaloka and the Sivaloka to fulfill a need. The guardian devas of each organization have a personal interest in Hindu Heritage Endowment because they are putting all their energy and thought into creating for each Hindu organization a permanent financial abundance so that its leadership can concentrate upon fulfilling its goals rather than on constant fund-raising and basic concerns about money."

Centuries ago the investments of an aadheenam were primarily in agricultural lands and the crops harvested. Modern investments tend to be in marketable securities, such as stocks and bonds. Hindu Heritage Endowment has chosen as its investment counselor Halbert Hargrove in Long Beach, California, to handle investment decisions. Investments are made with the goal of HHE in mind, which is to strengthen Hindu religious traditions throughout the world by providing Hindu institutions with a permanent and growing source of income in order to assure their financial stability and advance their diverse programs.

HHE has steadily grown since its inception in 1994 and in 2024 holds over \$21 million in endowments. Twenty-three endowment funds benefit various aspects of Kauai Aadheenam, including its two temples, monastic expenses, publication projects and other areas. HHE also has endowments for unaffiliated Hindu organizations, mostly in the USA, Sri Lanka and India. Of these, twelve are endowments for orphanages, schools and homes for the elderly, nineteen are for temples and eight are for other Hindu activities.

You can help the monastery's growth by donating to one of the monastic endowments at www.hheonline.org/funds_mon_list.shtml.

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

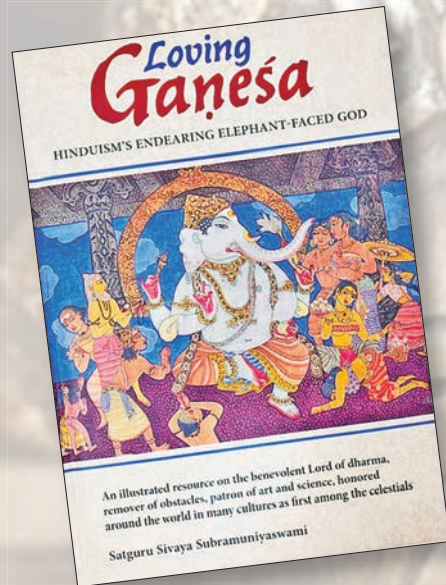
Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment			
Schwab Charitable Fund	US\$2,000.00		
Ambika Alagere	6.56		
Malaygiri Aparnath	500.00		
Roshan Harilela	375.00		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.11		
Gowri Nadason	153.22		
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75		
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00		
Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00		
Anonymous	94.49		
Total	3,296.13		
Iraivan Temple Endowment			
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	303.00		
Frank Burkhardt	30.00		
Umapathi & Geetha Cattamanchi	1,001.00		
Avinash G. Ghanekar	1,800.00		
Ayee Goundan	1,000.00		
Tamnash J. Gupta	216.00		
Shivaram & Kiran Kalugotla	25.00		
Rajagopal Krishnan	324.00		
Sri R. Ram	500.00		
Eswar Raman	40.00		
Mohan & Rajalakshmi Sabapathy	600.00		
Ritesh Saraf	100.00		
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00		
Siva Sivakumaran	108.00		
Srikanta & Leela Swamy	100.00		
Maya & Anand Yadav	108.00		
Other Donations	105,085.44		
Anonymous	1,887.40		
Total	113,278.84		
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			
Malvi Gandhi	75.00		
Tejwantee Meetoo	87.16		
Ramalingum Moodley	50.00		
Jogendra Moorooogen	4.38		
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	4.38		
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98		
Ravikshan Pothukuchy	251.00		
Manishankar Sagum	17.50		
Chidambaram Sendan	62.63		
Nandi Deva Sundaram	300.00		
Anonymous	84.00		
Total	986.03		
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	17.50		
Shreelata Suresh & Suresh Chandrasekaran	249.00		
Rajat Das Gupta	249.00		
Hema & Ravi Iyer	249.00		
Thiru Janakiraman	249.00		
Maitreyi Janarthanan	249.00		
Uday Kale	299.00		
Gautam Kapila	249.00		
Rakesh Kaul	299.00		
Ramesh C Kaul	249.00		
Rajlakshmi Hariharan & Harihar Keernam	299.00		
Amol Khare	249.00		
Juhivaasana Koothan	13.11		
Chander Krishnamoorthy	249.00		
Madhaven Mardemootoo	249.00		
Rohit Menon	249.00		
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.60		
Padmini Murthy	249.00		
Logadhasan Murugesu	63.68		
Apurva B. Pancholy	299.00		
Rathi Parimalan	249.00		
Ravikshan Pothukuchy	499.00		
Rajiv Ramaswamy	249.00		
Dodla Rao	249.00		
Sushmita Saha	249.00		
Sivendiran Sethuram	299.00		
Harini Buch Sheth	249.00		
Kannan Thirunavukkarasu	249.00		
Kaarunya Thuraisingam	249.00		
Gaurang G. Vaishnav	249.00		
Sanjay Varma	249.00		
Vivek Walvekar	249.00		
Anonymous	499.00		
Total	8,071.89		
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			
Moon Jerin	200.00		
Kalyana Kavuri	1,001.00		
Vel Mahalingum	140.40		
Umasankaran Mohambourame	109.65		
Gowri Nadason	153.22		
Nuckiren Pyeneecandee	32.78		
Parimala Selvaraj	124.00		
Kitri Waterman	100.00		
Anonymous	1,437.00		
Total	3,298.05		
Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund			
Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00		
Anonymous	108.36		
Total	609.36		
Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam			
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	3,000.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	300.00		
Anonymous	30.00		
Total	3,438.00		
Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund			
Anonymous	6,000.00		
Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund			
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	13,000.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Anonymous	14,000.00		
Total	27,108.00		
Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment			
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Sivakanthan Sivanathapillai	5,001.00		
Total	5,184.00		
Hinduism Today Production Fund			
Ambika Alagere	6.56		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	6.56		
Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,001.00		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.11		
Nori Muster	100.00		
Visvas Patel	21.00		
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01		
Nuckiren Pyeneecandee	32.78		
Chamundi Sabanathan	501.00		
Nancy Walder	150.00		
Anonymous	6,063.00		
Total	7,945.02		
Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund			
Benevity	196.00		
Schwab Charitable Fund	3,000.00		
Benevity	106.00		
Tamnash J. Gupta	324.00		
Roshan Harilela	375.00		
Moon Jerin	200.00		
Thamby Kumaran	200.00		
Steven Lee	10.00		
Varalakshmi Ramamoorthy	251.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75		
Hitesvara Saravan	36.00		
Jeeva Velusaami	42.00		
Himanshu Vyas	108.00		
Anonymous	3,022.00		
Total	7,948.75		
Hindu Education Endowment			
Fidelity Charitable	100.00		
Schwab Charitable Fund	3,000.00		
Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00		
Total	3,175.00		
Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund			
The Blackbaud Giving Fund--YourCause	17.79		
Cleveland Foundation	2,000.00		
The Blackbaud Giving Fund--YourCause	17.96		
Schwab Charitable Fund	200.00		
The Blackbaud Giving Fund--YourCause	17.54		
Schwab Charitable Fund	100.00		
Lisa M Perry	150.00		
Sastry & Naina Varanasi	250.00		
Total	2,753.29		
Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund			
Malaygiri Aparnath	500.00		
Rao Remla	250.00		
Anonymous	3,705.00		
Total	4,455.00		
Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund			
Pathumini Saravanapavan	300.00		
Thank You Bodhinatha Fund			
Ambika Alagere	21.96		
Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00		
Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	63.20		
Peshanidevi Dandapani	108.00		
Michael Doyle	324.00		
Cameron Fraser	10,000.00		
Debashis Ghosh	200.00		
Roudhranee Jugurnauth	43.92		
Haran Kandadas	108.00		
Inna Linnyk	108.00		
Eric Mackow	65.00		
Vel Mahalingum	2.81		
Gaurav Malhotra	251.00		
Tatsiana Mezhenneya	50.00		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	21.96		
Seedha Lutchmee Moonesawmy	21.96		
Souria Koomaren Moorghen	219.59		
Dhanika Nagalingam	54.00		
Bhavani Nataraj	51.00		
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00		
Cassan Pancham	1,000.00		
Raju Patel	51.00		
Nuckiren Pyeneecandee	32.78		
Suresh Ramamurthi	108.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	1,008.00		
Hitesvara Saravan	609.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Vir Amarjit Singh	51.00		
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	52.91		
Ramesh Sivanathan	10.71		
Poobarlene Soobramanien	21.96		
Adi Srikantha	108.00		
Anba Dayananden Valayten	5.71		
Mangaleswary Vimalanathan	50.00		
John Wahlen	36.69		
Anonymous	6,592.36		
Total	22,160.52		
Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment			
Pritesh Patel	155.00		
Anonymous	108.36		
Total	263.36		
Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund			
Pathumini Saravanapavan	300.00		
Manitha Neyam Trust Fund			
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	20.00		
Taos Hanuman Fund			
Brian P. Cooke	25.00		
Anonymous	108.36		
Total	133.36		
Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund			
Glenn Moussalli	100.00		
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.08		
Rajiv Verma	150.00		
Total	260.08		
Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment			
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	3,000.00		
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund			
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00		
Ashvini Pandit	200.00		
Gunap Sriganesh	1,008.00		
Total	1,268.00		
Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment			
Vel Mahalingum	8.71		
Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00		
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00		
Gayatri Rajan	360.00		
Dharmalingam Siddhan	25.00		
Anonymous	54.00		
Total	972.71		
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund			
Sarojani & Vinen Singh	108.00		
Nalin & Kamal Tolia	1,000.00		
Anonymous	738.00		
Total	1,846.00		

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment			
Nirmala Balasingam	200.00		
N. Balasubramanian	10,000.00		
Steven Lee	10.00		
Gajanan Nataraj	31.00		
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	1,050.00		
Karuppiiah Shanthirakumar	32.91		
Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00		
Poobarlene Soobramanien	21.96		
Anonymous	933.49		
Total	12,449.37		
Siva Poomi School Trust			
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	5,000.00		
Gajanan Nataraj	21.00		
Tharani Rockwood	150.00		
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	750.00		
Kushalakumari Sinnarajah	0.00		
Anonymous	50.00		
Total	5,971.00		
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment			
Anonymous	25.00		
India Hindu Tribals Endowment			
Sunil Chawla	51.00		
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund			
Gopi Krishna Bava Moorthy	1.00		
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00		
Total	301.00		
India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund			
Radheshyam Bang	50.00		
Anonymous	45.00		
Total	95.00		
Anantha Ladies Home Endowment			
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	300.00		
Anonymous	51.00		
Total	351.00		
Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment			
Arun Aarooren	75.00		
Ambika Alagere	4.36		
Partha Ayalasomayajula	250.00		
Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	6.56		
Ashwani Kaul	108.00		351.00
Prasidha Mohandas	51.00		9.99
Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00		108.00
Venkatesh Nagarajan	20.00		15.00
Natraj Narayanswami	45.00		501.00
Yogeswaran & Anitha Pararajasingam	1,001.00		6.56
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00		100.00
Gouri Shanker	301.00		30.00
Jit Sharma	151.00		101.00
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	59.33		25.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00		101.00
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00		151.00
Anonymous	561.28		108.00
Total	3,230.53		162.00
Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment			
Anonymous	108.36		63.00
Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund			
Swati Pratik Nooka	65.00		66.39
Pritesh Patel	153.00		501.00
Total	218.00		100.00
Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment			
N. Balasubramanian	10,000.00		18.00
Digital Dharma Endowment			
Fidelity Charitable	501.00		21.00
Chellappa Deva	25.00		21.00
Haran Kandadas	108.00		500.00
Amravadee Kownden	110.00		108.00
Thamby Kumaran	50.00		108.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	15.31		108.00
Gajanan Nataraj	51.00		108.00
Janaka Param	5,008.00		108.00
Thilaka Sunder	1,000.00		108.00
Shama Vinayaga	363.40		12,391.36
Anonymous	4,319.49		25,099.86
Total	11,551.20		
Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund			
Schwab Charitable Fund	2,000.00		
Benevity	200.00		
Ambika Alagere	6.56		
Yuvaraj Athur	153.00		
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	75.00		
Barathi Balasegaran	11.00		
Pram & Mina Broker	153.00		
Sitara Rupali Contreras	108.00		
Murali & Shanti Denduluri	101.00		
Meena Ganesan	5,500.00		
Karthik Gopalratnam	1,008.00		
Ajita Gupta	30.00		
Anu Iyer			
Velika Lawrence			
Yulia Machalaba			
Archana Mahavadi			
Naga Bhushan & Leela Mandava			
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Shiv Moorthy			
Vanesh Naidu			
Vidhu Shekhar Paliwal			
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Kannan Srikanth			
Rajakumar Sundaravadivel			
Ravi Thaker			
Jeeva Velusaami			
Jaganmohan Vemulappali			
Devasiva Veylan			
Saravan Veylan			
Ravi Vinayak Family			
Anonymous			
Total			
Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund			
Ravi Nadesan			5,001.00
Natraj Narayanswami			15.00
Anonymous			108.36
Total			5,124.36
Himalayan Acres Endowment			
Shivshakti Foundation			21,000.00
Vibha Sundaram			609.00
Total			21,609.00
Antyodoy Anatha Ashram Orphanage Endowment			
Malaygiri Aparnath			1,008.00
Ishani Chowdhury			85.00
Total			1,093.00
Total Contributions			\$325,349.07
Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2023			
Total Endowment Funds			\$22,368,869.65

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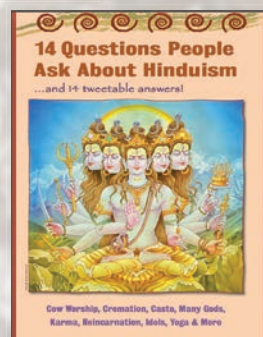


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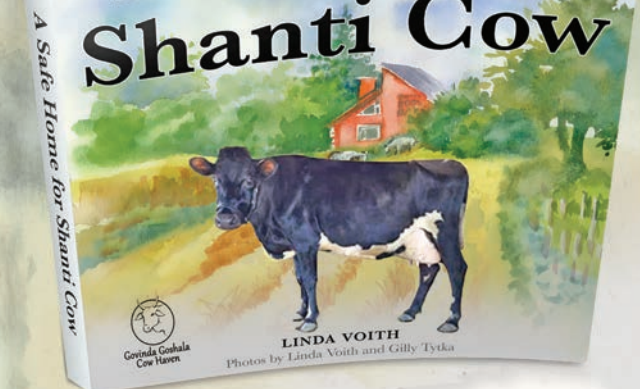


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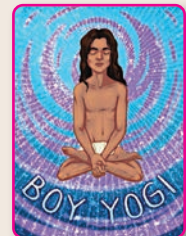


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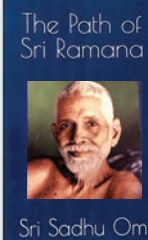


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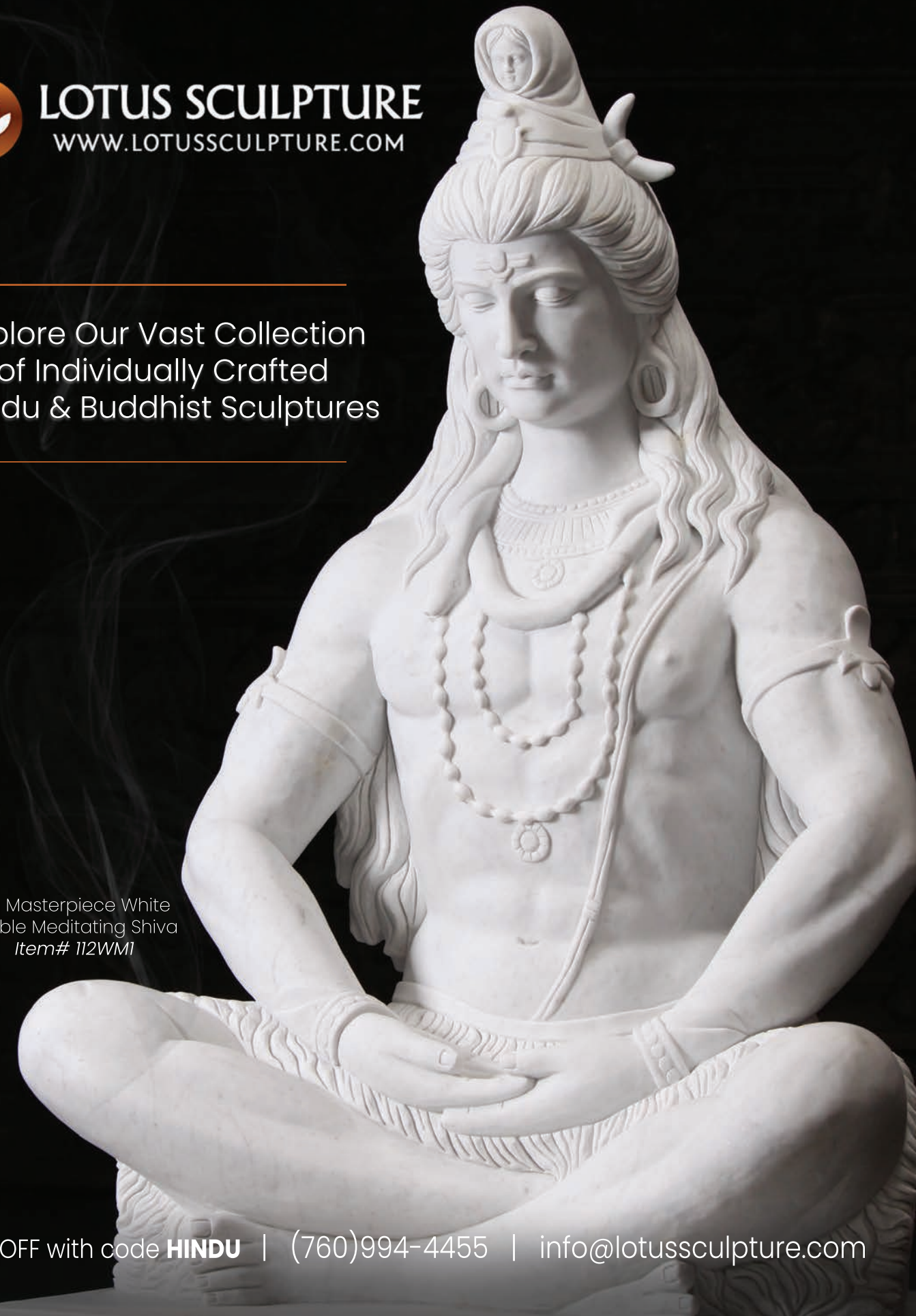
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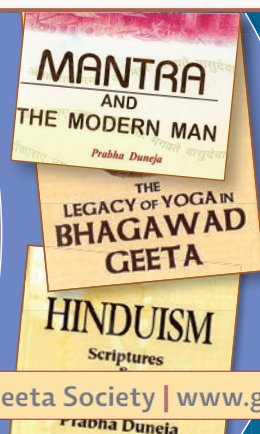
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Apr 4-7 **Spring Weekend Course I**

(Thu-Sun) Swami Sachidananda • Astāvakra Gītā

Apr 25-28 **Spring Weekend Course II**

(Thu-Sun) Swami Sachidananda • Astāvakra Gītā

May 12-21 **Ten-Day Vedanta Course**

(Sun-Tue) Swamini Svatmavidyananda:
Upadeśa-Sāhasrī, Padyabandha

May 24-27 **Memorial Day Family Vedanta**

(Fri-Mon) **Course** • Swami Vidadatmananda:
Katha Upanisad • Swamini
Paraprajnananda: Mundaka Upanisad

May 31-Jun 7 **Vedanta Camp with Sri**

(Fri-Fri) **Vijay Kapoor** • Kaivalya Upanisad

Jun 13-16 **Long Weekend Vedanta Course**

(Thu-Sun) **for Adults** • Swami Vidadatmananda,
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Jul 3-6 **Independence Day Weekend**

(Wed-Sat) **Vedanta Course**
Swami Vidadatmananda, Swamini
Paraprajnananda: Katha Upanisad

Jul 10-24 **Two-Week Bhashyam Course**

(Wed-Wed) **for Adults** • Swami Vidadatmananda:
Brhadāranyaka Upanisad, Swami
Muktatmananda: Īśāvāsya Upanisad

Jul 27-Aug 2 **Family Vedanta Course I**

(Sat-Fri) Swami Vidadatmananda: Upadeśa-
Sāram • Swami Muktatmananda:
Īśāvāsya Upanisad

Jul 27-Aug 2 **Children's Course I**

(Sat-Fri) Ages 9-16 yr.

Aug 3-9 **Family Vedanta Course II**

(Sat-Fri) Swami Vidadatmananda: Ātma-anātmā-
viveka • Swami Muktatmananda:
Aparoksānubhūti

Aug 3-9 **Children's Course II** • Ages 9-16 yr.

(Sat-Fri) unaccompanied by parents,
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Aug 10-16 **Family Vedanta Course III**

(Sun-Sat) Swami Vidadatmananda: Ātma-anātmā-
viveka • Swami Muktatmananda:
Aparoksānubhūti

Aug 15 **Pujya Swamiji's Jayanti Day**

(Thursday)

Aug 18 **Gurukulam's 38th Anniversary**

(Sunday) Surrender (Śaranāgati)

Aug 22-25 **Patrons' Complementary Course I**

(Thu-Sun) Swami Vidadatmananda: Tyāga
Swami Muktatmananda: Taming Anger

Aug 22-25 **Arsha Vidya NextGen Retreat**

(Thu-Sun) Swami Vidadatmananda

Aug 30-Sep 2 **Patrons' Complementary Course II**

(Fri-Mon) Swami Tattvavidananda: Drg-D.-Viveka
Swami Muktatmananda: Bh.Gita 3.3

Sep 6-20 **Two-Week Vedanta Course**

(Fri-Fri) **for Adults** • Swami Tattvavidananda
Aparoksānubhūti & Visnusahasranāma

Sep 23 **Pujya Swamiji's 9th ārādhana, Swami**

Pratyagbodhanandaji's 4th ārādhana

Sep 24-Oct 27 **Fall Vedanta Five-Week Course**

(Tue-Sun) **for Adults** • Swamini Tattvavidananda
Aitareya Upanisad & Visnusahasranāma

Nov 28-Dec 1 **Thanksgiving Family Vedanta**

(Thu-Sun) **Camp** • Swami Muktatmananda: Con-
templation • Swami Sachidananda: Love

Dec 24-31 **Year-End Family Vedanta Course**

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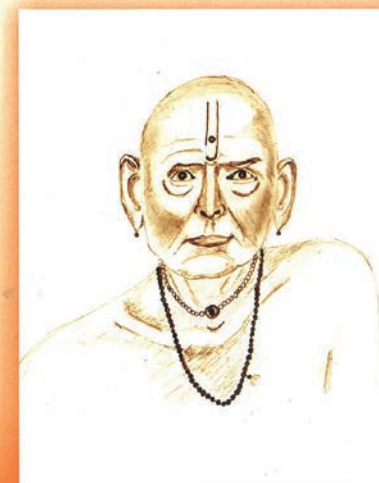


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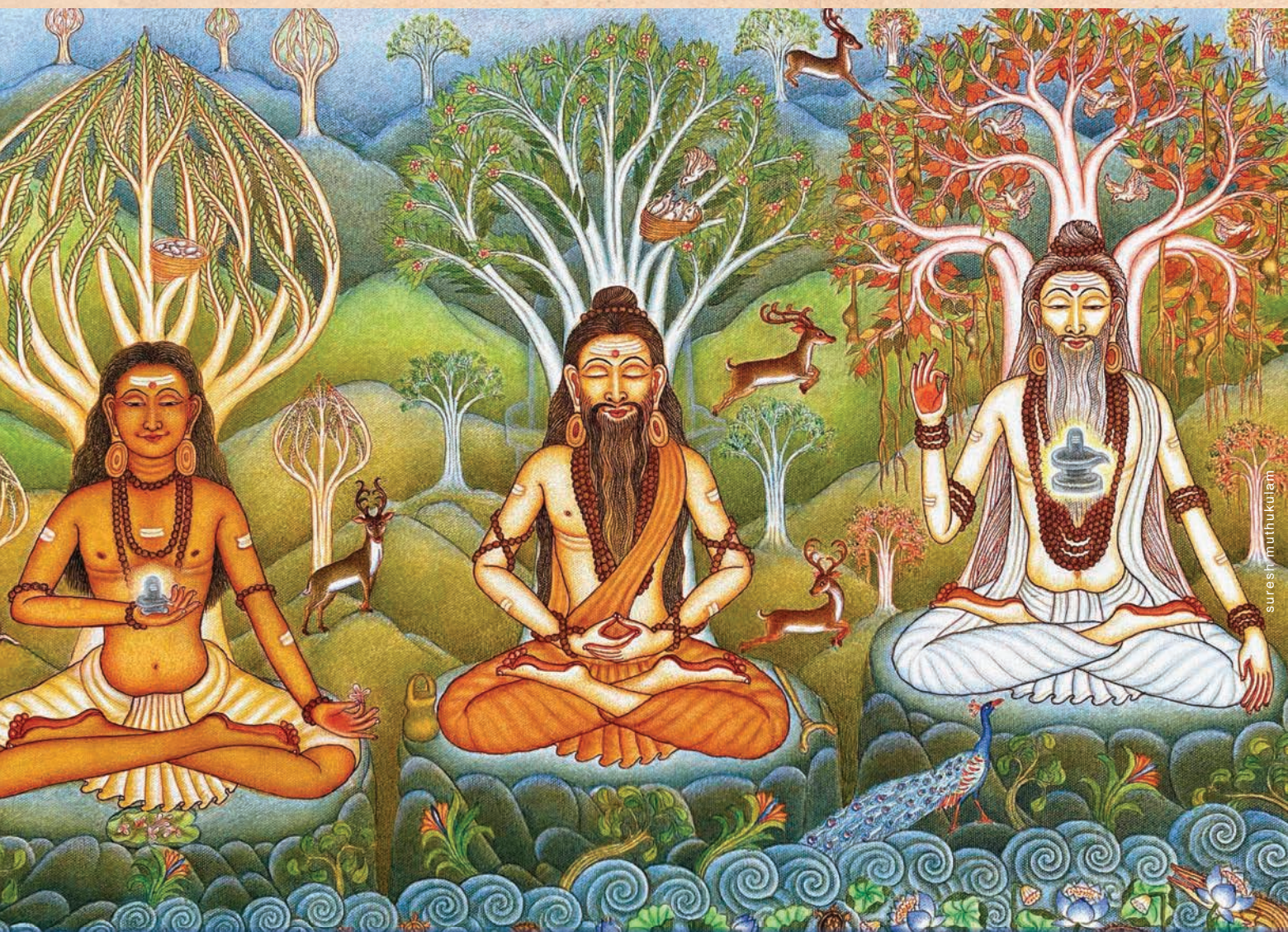
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There,
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Is.

*The Science of Silence by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam.
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia • 27th April, 2020*

From Patanjali's Yoga Sutras: dharana, dhyana and samadhi



Kerala artist Suresh Muthukulam depicts the three advanced stages or limbs of yoga, one leading into the next. On the left the yogi is practicing dharana, concentration. He holds a Sivalinga in his hand, his eyes open as he seeks to have an unbroken series of thoughts about the subject of his focus. In the middle the same yogi's eyes are closed as he draws within in dhyana or contemplation. On the right he has attained samadhi, oneness with Siva and with all things, shown by the Linga in his heart. The artist has shown the long-term progression of these practices in the landscaping which moves from a tree's first flush to fully blossoming, from a nest of eggs to a flock of birds, from a young deer to an antlered adult. A similar growth is happening in the river below.

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