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HINDUISM TODAY®

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

Ramana Maharshi's Profound Legacy



(Cover) Famed Sage Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), the subject of our Insight Section this issue; (above) master wood carver Murthi Sundarrajan of Kallakurichi, India, applies final details to an exquisite image of Lord Ganesha

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2025 • The Hindu Year Viśvāvasu, 5127 • विश्वावसु

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Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi

Devotees come by the thousands to worship at the famed temple, foremost of the 12 Jyotirlinga Temples. Read the experience of a teen and his family on page 34

One Resilient Temple: The ancient Siva temple was destroyed by invaders in 1194, rebuilt in 1230, destroyed again in the 15th century, rebuilt in the 16th, destroyed again in 1669 and rebuilt in today's form in 1780. Photo taken in December, 2021

GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

300-Year-Old Siva Temple Unearthed

NAGESWARA SWAMY TEMPLE in Perumallapadu, India, has been rediscovered after 80 years buried under the sand. Archeologists believe the structure is some 200 years old and was swallowed by a massive flood in 1850. By 1940, it was completely immersed in sand.

Archeologist Ramasubba Reddy of *The Smithsonian*, posits that extreme weather may have changed the course of the Penna River, causing a redirection of the sand towards the temple, which was gradually buried. There are debates whether the temple is 200 or 300 years old.

According to the Ancient

Origins website, the temple was built for Lord Nageshwara, a form of God Siva.

Even though elder generations of Perumallapadu shared tender memories of visiting the temple before it was buried, descendants did not pursue a rediscovery until a few years ago. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people returned to their home towns. Old stories of the lost temple resurfaced, and about 35 people, some of them miners, decided to dig and see whether it was a tall tale or real.

After the throng of ambitious villagers raised enough money to fund the dig, the work began in earnest. Many worked on



Temple emerges: The gopuram was rediscovered by town residents in 2020 as they dug the sands after hearing stories of the lost temple.

the excavation for free. Their dedicated efforts unearthed the temple's main shrine. It took an entire day of digging in the sand merely to expose the temple's pinnacle indicating the scope of the project.

Perumallapadu resident Pothugunta Varaprasad told *The New Indian Express*. "Now that some enthusiastic youngsters dug up the temple, we have plans to rebuild it to perform puja there."

TRINIDAD / TOBAGO

She Helps Save Indian Culture from Extinction

GLOBAL ADVANCEMENTS should not come at the expense of culture, says Leena Yarna, cultural advocate and dance instructor at the Param-jyoti School of Dance in Trinidad. Indian culture is part of the architecture of Yarna's life, as shared in her October 2024 interview with the *Trinidad Express*.

"Indian culture has always taught ahimsa (nonviolence) and dharma (righteousness), which I believe are the most important words to remember and abide by in today's world. It emphasizes that everyone is equal and should be shown kindness because we are all sparks of Divinity," she says.

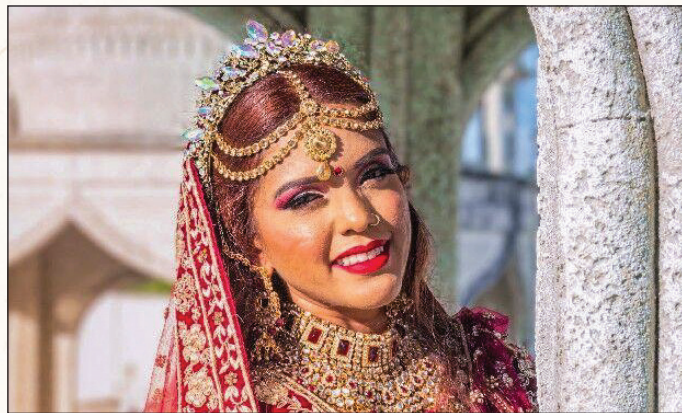
Attracting new students is not difficult; the challenge is getting them to stay in class and committed to the art form, which looks beautiful on stage

but takes hours of rigorous and repetitive practice.

Yarna does much more than teach dance to her 25 students. Teaching them to have a love and appreciation for their culture rather than being ashamed of it, she says, is important in order not to completely lose children to Westernization.

"It is my job to adapt to this ever-changing world, inculcate new aspects into my dance style while maintaining the traditional aspects. It also requires me to have regular, in-depth conversations with the girls, explaining aspects of our culture which they may not understand fully or were never taught."

Many, if not all, of the values Yarna imparts to her young students were instilled in her by her large close-knit family. Growing up in the town of Debe, respect for elders, religion,



Dancer and mentor: Yarna conveys her life passion to her students through dance and motivational heart-to-heart talks.

neighbors and teachers was first and foremost. Understanding the value of hard work, sacrifice and being helpful came second, followed by other important qualities like patience and gratitude. Her home life and heavy involvement in activities like Ramleela—which she says brings communities together and makes youths proud of their culture—made her determined to advocate for Indian culture

and keep its traditions alive.

Yarna takes her role very seriously. She feels that women are the carriers of our traditions and are the ones who can ensure that the beautiful Indian culture does not disappear in the future, but is held in high reverence.

"To other women out there: be proud of who you are, stand up for righteousness and be your sister's keeper," says Yarna.

USA

India Retrieves US\$10 Million Worth of Antiquities from USA

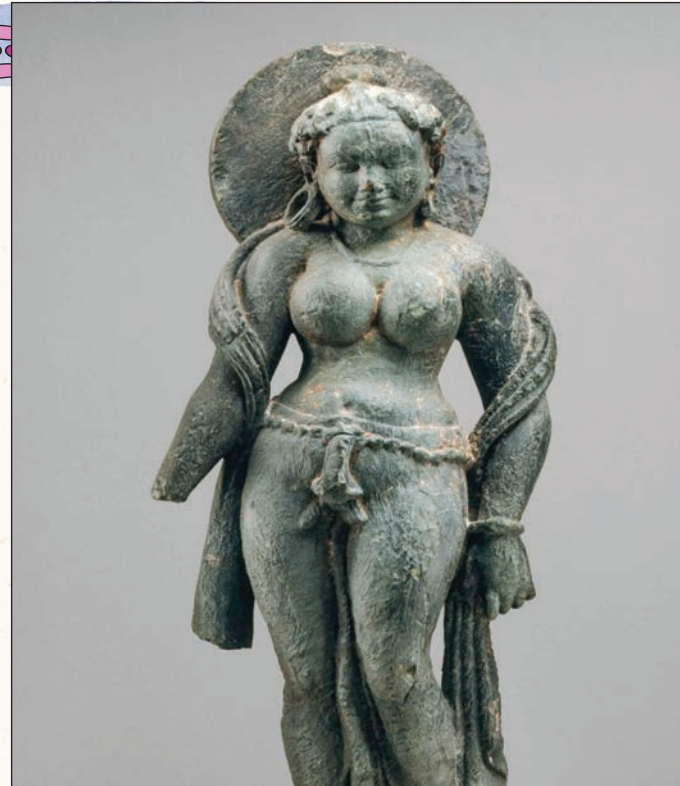
COUNTRIES FROM SOUTH and Southeast Asia are currently trying to retrieve their stolen antiquities from Western nations. Officials in the USA announced in late 2024 that they have returned over 1,400 antiquities looted from India since repatriation began decades ago. They are worth US\$10 million. Since 2016 alone, 578 artifacts have been returned.

According to CNN, the recovered trafficked goods include items that were recently on view at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Among them is a sandstone sculpture of a celestial dancer. It was smuggled from central India to London, before being illegally sold to one of the Met's patrons and donated to the

museum.

In a press release, New York's Manhattan District Attorney's Office said that the reparations resulted from "several ongoing investigations" into looting networks, including those operated by convicted art traffickers Nancy Wiener and Subhash Kapoor. Kapoor was an antiquities dealer sentenced to ten years in jail for running a multi-million-dollar looting network through his New York gallery.

Notably, in July 2024 the USA and India signed an agreement to protect cultural property by preventing illegal trades and streamlining the process of returning stolen antiquities back to India.



Ancient Deity: The Tanesar Mother Goddess statue was looted from a village in Rajasthan, India, in the 1960s before eventually ending up on display in New York.

SOUTH AFRICA

Temples Celebrate Thaipusam

THAIPUSAM IS A WIDELY CELEBRATED festival everywhere in the world where Hindus worship Lord Murugan. In South Africa, it is one of the biggest festivals for the Hindu community. A common tradition is to carry kavady, a decorated wooden structure often including milk pots, on the shoulders as an offering for Lord Murugan.

At the Umbango Sri Siva Soobramoniar temple in KwaZulu-Natal, the event was scheduled to run from February 2 to 16, 2025, according to the *South Coast Herald*.

The flag-raising celebration, scheduled for February 2, would mark the beginning of ten days of fasting that lead up to the main Thaipusam day.



Procession: Devotees are pulling the chariot carrying the Deity in a parade, while others carry kavady.

NETHERLANDS

First Balinese Hindu Temple Opens in The Netherlands

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2024, Mayerfas, Indonesia's Ambassador to The Netherlands, inaugurated the first-ever pura (Balinese Hindu temple) in The Netherlands. It is located in the town of Kallenkote, Overijssel province, as per www.tempo.co.

"This pura is not only a place for worship rituals for the Balinese Hindus in The Netherlands and surroundings, but also a symbol

of shared pride, evidence of determination, harmony, tolerance and spirit of togetherness," said Mayerfas, quoting from the official statement of the Indonesian Embassy in The Hague.

The Balinese community in The Netherlands, consisting of over 250 people, had long wished to build a pura where they could worship and celebrate important occasions.



Commemoration: Indonesian Ambassador Mayerfas signs the certificate of approval for the new temple in Kallenkote.

PILGRIMAGE

Mata Vaishno Devi Welcomes Increased Number of Pilgrims

THE SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI Shrine in Trikuta Hills, Jammu and Kashmir, India, has attracted over nine million pilgrims annually for the third time since 2022, as mentioned by [etvbharat.com](#). The CEO of the Shrine Board, Anshul Garg, shared this milestone on his X account, highlighting the consistent devotion from people across the globe.

These numbers reveal the shrine's status as one of India's

most spiritual religious pilgrimage destinations. The management board said it has adopted a proactive approach to improve facilities and ensure a safer and more comfortable spiritual journey for the pilgrims. The improvements are expected to be completed in 2025.

Garg recently posted on X a list of 2025 projects. The New Vaishnavi Bhawan is a lodging



Reverence: (top to bottom) Devotees wait in line patiently to enter the temple and get blessings; main Deities of the cave shrine.

facility with family rooms. A Seamless Crowd Exit Track is a new pathway intended to increase safety and manage foot traffic. The All-Weather Queue Complex at Darshini Deodi will protect devotees from unfavorable weather that might effect smooth entry into the shrine.

The shrine holds great significance in Hindu mythology and spirituality. Mata Vaishno Devi is a reincarnation of Goddess Durga and symbolizes the divine energy (Shakti) of this universe. The shrine's story dates back to ancient times when, people

believe, Mata Vaishno Devi lived in the Trikuta Hills, performing penance and meditating.

There is a historical connection between this shrine and the *Mahabharata*. It is believed that Arjuna prayed to Mata Vaishno Devi for victory in the war. Over time, the shrine evolved from an obscure cave to one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations.

The shrine attracts millions of devotees annually, offering a chance to bask in the blessings of the Goddess and stay connected to the divine surroundings of Trikuta Hills.

LAURENE POWELL JOBS VISITED

India in January, 2025, to attend the Maha Kumbha Mela, fulfilling her late husband Steve Jobs' dream of attending this giant festival. *The Economic Times* says that Steve Jobs, widely known as the founder of Apple, wrote a letter in February, 1974, describing his interest in Kumbha Mela pilgrimage and Zen Buddhism. Jobs wrote this two years before founding Apple. The letter was later auctioned for US\$500,312 in 2021. During Laurene's recent pilgrimage, she participated in the ritual of taking a dip in the Ganga River. While there, she received the Hindu name Kamala from her guru, Swami Kailashanand Giri.

A RIVERBANK IN ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA, was officially designated in 2024 for Hindus to scatter

their late loved ones' ashes. According to [sbs.com.au](#), Rajendra Pandey, a volunteer in Vishva Hindu Parishad Australia, was approached a few years ago by a community member with the idea to establish a safe "Water Ceremony Site" for Hindus. The local council spent US\$75,000 to construct a staircase to the river for easy access.

Global Dharma news provided by

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PHOTO: (TOP TO BOTTOM): THE TRIBUNE INDIA; WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



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Founder:

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

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Editor-in-Chief:

Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami

Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami

Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami

Production Manager: Sannyasin Saravananathaswami

Assistant Editor: Sannyasin Tillainathaswami,

Subscription and Distribution Manager:

Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami

Advertising Manager: Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami

Russian Edition Editor: Dinanatha Bodhiswami

Correspondents: Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru;

Lavina Melwani, New York; Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun;

Nikki Thapa, Nepal; Anne Petry, France/India,

Claire Burkert, USA/Nepal. *Copy Editor:* Chamundi

Sabanathan. *HPI Staff:* Chandra Sankara. *Consultants:*

Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar. *Photo Contributors:*

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IN MY OPINION

Inner Balance, Outer Calm

Applying Hindu Wisdom to Our Oh-So-Many Modern Teenage Challenges

BY ARAN MALHOTRA

WHO AM I? WHY AM I this way? These questions surfaced in my early teens when I noticed my personality differed from my peers. I learned to accept what was out of my control and improve what I could. I didn't feel as upset or stressed, often telling myself, "I am all right, right now." I felt calm, confident and content—qualities many high schoolers aspire to but often struggle to attain.

Today's competitive society demands focus, discipline and time management. High schoolers are constantly busy with classes, clubs, homework and the looming pressure of college applications. Many feel compelled to excel—not just academically but also in extracurriculars, often pursuing activities they aren't passionate about, leading to burnout.

Social media and peer pressure add to the stress as teens try to fit in, be popular and keep up with trends. Balancing schoolwork, relationships and personal challenges can result in anxiety, frustration or depression. Many teens resort to distractions or harmful habits to cope, but problems often linger beneath the surface.

High school is a critical period for self-discovery, yet it's easy to lose sight of personal identity and values. Observing my peers, I reflected on my ability to internalize challenges and not seek external validation. I wondered: how did I develop this resilience?

I believe it started with my upbringing in a devout Hindu family. From age three, I was encouraged to introspect daily for a number of minutes equal to my age—a practice I still follow. Regular pilgrimages to Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii, where my parents are formal devotees, exposed me to Hindu philosophy and the disciplined life of the monks. Even as a child, I absorbed these teachings, though I didn't fully understand them at the time.

In the summer of 2023, I spent a month at Kauai's Hindu Monastery on a solo pilgrim-



age. Living among the monks, I witnessed their disciplined, minimalist lifestyle rooted in Hindu principles like dharma (duty), karma (action), ahimsa (non-violence) and meditation. Despite their rigorous routines, the monks radiated positivity and calmness, exemplifying a soul-centered approach to life.

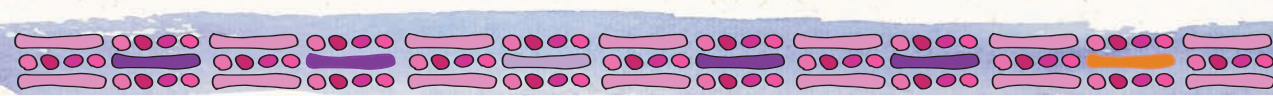
During this time, I realized how much my upbringing had shaped me. My emotional stability, strong values and distinct perspective on life stemmed from Hindu teachings. Yet, I saw I was far from the monks' level of mindfulness. As one monk explained, young people often appear directionless, but those exposed to positive influences early in life tend to return to those values as they mature. Everyone is on a journey, learning and growing at their own pace.

At the monastery, I attended classes on Hindu philosophy, helped with daily tasks and explored scriptures like *Living with Siva* and *Merging with Siva* by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. This deepened my understanding of Hinduism and its practical applications. The experience brought an unparalleled sense of peace and purpose. I wished my friends back home could feel what I was experiencing.

In fall 2023, I started a Hindu Students Club (HSC) at my high school to explore Hindu values, celebrate festivals and promote cultural awareness. In 2024, I launched Hindu Tools for Teens (HTT), a blog and website sharing Hindu principles like dharma, karma and ahimsa as tools for life. Practices like yoga and meditation help students manage stress and find purpose.

HSC and HTT ([hindutoolsforteens.org](#)) inspire teens to lead values-driven lives, embracing love, honesty and non-violence while respecting all faiths. I hope to inspire others to create similar clubs.

ARAN OM MALHOTRA, 17, is an 11th-grade high school student from Chicago, Illinois, with a keen interest in Hindu philosophy, cars and sports



Honoring Life's Five Great Guides

Practical ways to express dharmic gratitude to God & Gods, to ancestors, humanity, nature and our sacred texts and teachers

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

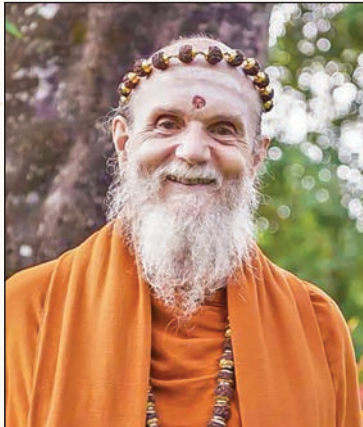
IN OUR JANUARY 2025 ISSUE, JAYENDRAPURI Mahaswamiji wrote about the Vedic call to five great duties (Pancha Maha Yajnas): Deva Yajna, Pitru Yajna, Bhuta Yajna, Manushya Yajna and Brahma Yajna. As Swamiji pointed out, the common translation of Pancha Maha Yajnas is "five great sacrifices." Pancha Maha Yajnas is an important concept, but unfortunately this common description of them simply as five daily sacrificial duties brings to mind an image of an orthodox Hindu performing an ancient ritual in his home shrine. This approach makes the concept difficult for Hindu youth and children to relate to. As a result, the true significance of the yajnas is easily overlooked.

A YouTube video on this topic offers a description that is much easier to relate to: The practice honors five great guides that contribute to making a person's life what it is, and therefore the person has an obligation to joyously give back to them as an expression of appreciation.

A charming story about my paramaguru, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, illustrates this idea. Yogaswami arranged for a grand festival meal to be served at his ashram. Devotees came early in the morning to start cooking. Others came to sit with Swami and sing with him. Lunchtime came, and he was still heartily singing, so deeply absorbed that no one wanted to disturb him. They all patiently sang. Hours after lunch should have been served, Yogaswami stopped singing and fell quiet for awhile. Next he asked them to chant from the *Upanishads*. In the mid afternoon he asked eleven strong men to dig a deep, square hole in the ground. They stepped forward and he indicated the spot where they should dig. Finally, just before dusk, the pit was completed, and the great saint indicated that it was time to serve the food. "Come, children, surround this pit," he said and asked that the rice and the curries be neatly placed in the hole.

He then asked the devotees to "Pick up the eleven shovels, shovel some dirt over this delicious meal and then pass your shovel on to the next person. We have fed our Mother Earth, who has given so generously of her abundance all these many years to this large Saivite community. Now we are sacrificing our prasada as a precious, heartfelt gift. Mother Earth is hungry. She gets little back; we take all. Let this be a symbol to the world and to each of us that we must sacrifice what we want most." Yogaswami had created a lesson in the importance of joyously giving back in appreciation for what has been given to us, a lesson that the devotees present would never forget.

The modern secular concern shared by many youth—of protecting the environment to ensure future generations have access to a healthy, sustainable world and natural resources—fits well into



the Bhuta Yajna. This yajna emphasizes respect towards and protection of nature in the form of other living beings, vegetation and other natural resources and all manifestation, animate or inanimate, as a repayment of the debt we owe by making use of these resources for our benefit.

Family involvement in such efforts is ideal, providing an opportunity to highlight Bhuta Yajna and its reflection of Hinduism's commitment to protecting the environment. At home, Bhuta Yajna can be practiced by caring for animals, recycling waste and tending a garden—each act reinforcing the importance of giving back to nature and honoring the interconnectedness of all life.

Next, here is a story which relates to the Manushya Yajna. While attending a kumbhabhishekam for a temple in Illinois, I was hosted by a young man who taught yoga classes at the temple. He had been studying the writings of my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, and had come across my guru's statement "We must perform our duty to our community." He asked me what the statement meant, as he actually had no idea to what it referred. I explained that the community in which we live is like a distant part of our family, and as such we have a duty to it just like to any other relative. We need to devote part of our time and financial resources to addressing community issues, such as providing food and clothing to the poor, organizing volunteers for after-school programs and so on. I added that he could encourage the temple itself to establish social outreach programs for this same purpose.

What that encounter showed me was that even a young Hindu adult who was serious in his scriptural studies could lack a practical understanding of the traditional Hindu concepts of duty. The yajna that relates to duty to community is Manushya Yajna, which includes acts of hospitality, charity and service to others. Inviting guests, feeding the hungry and aiding those in need are all ways to express this yajna, reinforcing the idea of social responsibility and compassion toward fellow humans.

Parents naturally focus on making sure their children are as successful in life as possible, which is good. Unfortunately, some Hindu parents feel it is a waste of time, a distraction, for their children to help out occasionally in volunteer work. This, of course, ignores the



Giving back: The artist shows, from top to bottom, people thanking the clouds for life-giving rains, feeding the needy, giving much-needed clothing to the impoverished

with no sense of punishment or compulsion. If temple activities are not convenient, then alternatives can be found, such as participating in food or clothing drives.

The understanding and practice of the three remaining Pancha Maha Yajnas is well established in many Hindu families. Deva Yajna is observed by family members at least offering a daily prayer, arati or puja in the home shrine to a Deity of their lineage. This can also be expanded to attending a local temple once a week, attending the major festivals and undertaking a pilgrimage to a distant temple once a year. Deva Yajna is an expression of appreciation for the Deity's abundant blessings.

Brahma Yajna is showing appreciation for the spiritual knowledge given to us by the authors of our scriptures and by the teachers of those scriptures. In addition to daily scriptural readings, we can share these wisdom-filled texts, at the very least, with our own children, if not more broadly. My guru often stressed the importance of teaching the children: "We have one duty to perform, which is to pass our religion on to the next generation, the next and the next. And how do we do this? How is this done? It is done by causing the children to memorize the precepts of our scriptures."

Pitru Yajna is offering appreciation to our ancestors for the family traditions they have passed down to us. This is generally observed through *tarpana* offerings and *shraddha* rituals according to the customs that the family follows. Tarpana is a sacred ritual of offering water mixed with sesame seeds, barley or other substances to honor ancestors. It is performed with the intention of expressing gratitude, seeking their blessings, and ensuring the spiritual well-being of departed souls.

A broader approach to Pitru Yajna is to regularly share stories of the family's ancestors with the children, to give them a better sense of the family history. Additionally, feedings of groups, *anna dana*, can be done in the ancestors' names. Paramaguru Yogaswami gave this insight about such actions: "All the good done by charity and alms-giving in the name of the dead will reach them. And they will also help you. They will come and help you in dreams."

The Pancha Maha Yajnas are deeply rooted in Vedic and Smriti literature, forming a framework for ethical living and spiritual progress. They embody Hinduism's holistic worldview, connecting individuals with the Deities, scriptural knowledge, ancestors, nature and society. What is needed is to explain these five duties in ways that enable Hindu youth and children to understand how they can meaningfully integrate the Pancha Maha Yajnas into their lives.

concept of fulfilling our obligation to community. Therefore, parents need to teach the importance of Manushya Yajna, encouraging children to spend time regularly helping others. What better way than having the entire family spend time together on weekends in karma yoga at a local temple. Of course, such family community efforts should always be done in a high-minded spirit,



LETTERS

The Passing of a Great Soul

Regarding the article “A Saint’s Self-Willed Death” (Sep/1997) by Choodie Shivaram—Swami Nirmalananda was my guru since 1986, and many times I visited him at his ashram. In 1997, I attended his mahasamadhi ceremony. He was a blessed soul, a political anti-war activist, and a critic of TV who called himself “the anarchist-swami.”

DAVID LIFE KIRKPATRICK
DAVID@JIVAMUKTIYOGA.COM

This willful method of leaving the physical plane needs to be explored. I always wondered if there was a better, more dignified way for the old and infirm to exit from the world by fasting, which is not self-killing but rather a way of renouncing the world for the younger generation, having fulfilled one’s duties. One day we all will be old and infirm.

JANA
JANAKIRATHOD@YAHOO.COM

Turmeric’s Amazing Qualities

Thank you for the article, “A Testimony to Turmeric,” by -Lakshmi Sridharan (Oct/Nov/Dec 2024). Knee replacement is a popular surgical answer for several conditions that turmeric, in my experience, has eliminated. Tumeric’s anti-inflammatory properties have allowed me to regain mobility from osteoarthritis in my lower body without surgery and the huge costs associated with modern mainstream healthcare.

TIRU ADI SRIKANTHA
ADISRIADI@GMAIL.COM

Honoring the Feminine

To Erica Bassani: thank you for your beautiful interview with Vanamali Mataji, “All Women Are Sacred” (Oct/Nov/Dec 2024). What a great perspective on the traditions, scriptures and role of women today. Mataji makes everything so simple and beautiful—filled with wisdom and sweetness. Yet it remains sublime and uplifting. I feel so grateful to read this and learn. Thank you!

RAMYA
N_RAMYA108@YAHOO.COM

A beautiful interview! Thanks for this divine exchange. Vanamali Maa is a powerhouse of love, bhakti and compassion.

PRIYANKA KADAM
PRIYANKA.KADAM99@GMAIL.COM

Transformed by an Artform

Ms. Oviaa Madanganesh Sumathi has penned an excellent article that beautifully showcases her passion for Bharatanatyam and its deep connection to our tradition, in “The Value of Hindu Art Forms” (Jan/Feb/Mar 2025). Her unwavering dedication and

consistent efforts have transformed her into the accomplished artist she is today. The article radiates her inner happiness and self-assurance. Congratulations to Oviaa and her proud parents and teachers!

DR. VISALAKSHI P.
VISAPSG@GMAIL.COM

Becoming a Hindu

Thank you, Devala Rees, for your opinion piece, “How I became a Hindu” (Jul/Aug/Sep 2018). I would like to add to your thoughts that no one is a Hindu by mere birth; dharma and karma make it so. May God bless you to achieve even higher levels of attainment.

RAMESH UPADHYA DR.
DRRAMESHUPADHYA@GMAIL.COM

Learning from a Master

Greetings and namaste Priya. Thank you for the wonderful article about Swami Bua Ji Maharaj, “I Learned Yoga from a Living Master” (Jul/Aug/Sep 2023). Reading it brought back many memories of Swamiji. I was fortunate to begin studying with him in 1982 and well into the 2000s. Joanne O’Day and I traveled with Swamiji, demonstrating asanas in temples and yoga centers throughout the Northeast. It was truly a blessing to study yoga so intimately with a true hatha yogi. I am always grateful for having a close

relationship with him. I treasure the conversations with him on Sanatana Dharma and fondly recall the delicious vegetarian meals he would prepare following a class. You have captured many wonderful moments in your article and I thank you for sharing. Hari Om.

RAYMOND WOLFF
RWOLFFDC@AOL.COM

Swamiji blessed me every time he saw me. He was a true spirit. I was his doorman at 330 West 58th Street, in New York City, where he lived.

RICHARD M VRANA
JCVELLEN@AOL.COM

Spiritual Parallels

I am a student of philosophy trying to understand and feel ancient knowledge for a deeper insight into Life. Your article, “Taoism’s Hindu Parallels” (Jul/Aug/Sep 2022), profoundly met my expectations and enhanced knowledge about Taoism. I fell in love with Tao upon first encountering the concept of Wu wei. I made no effort to understand it—it simply resonated. Thanks for augmenting a what I just felt deep inside.

ABINAV VINAYAK V
ABINAVVINAYAK@GMAIL.COM

What Is Karma?

FROM: “FOURTEEN QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK ABOUT HINDUISM”

KARMA IS THE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE OF cause and effect. Our actions, both good and bad, come back to us in the future, helping us to learn from life’s lessons and become better people. Karma is one of the natural laws of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Just as God created gravity to bring order to the physical world, He created karma as a divine system of justice that is self-governing and infinitely fair. It automatically creates the appropriate future experience in response to the current action. Karma simply means “action” or “cause and effect.” When something happens to us that is apparently unfortunate or unjust, it is not God punishing us. It is the result of our own past actions.

The *Vedas*, Hinduism’s revealed scripture, tell us if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Thus we create our own destiny through thought and action. And the divine law is: whatever karma we are experiencing in our life is just what we need at the moment.



A woman gives clothing to a youth. Later (below), she receives an unexpected gift as her good deed brings its natural reward.

The Self God

I found “The Self God” in the book *Merging with Siva*, by the founder of HINDUISM TODAY magazine, and sought a more readable version online (The Self God: Life’s Ultimate Goal,” Sept/1997). How does a human describe the unexplainable? I personally don’t know, but Subramuniyaswami has made a most remarkable attempt, in my opinion. What an incredible Being! This treatise is not to be read casually just one time, but to be studied again and again. . . and savored!

RICHARD
RICHLAUDT@GMAIL.COM

The Logic of Reincarnation

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your article, “Do Hindus Believe in Reincarnation?” (Jan/Feb/Mar 2024). The law of karma and reincarnation are two linchpins of Hinduism that can explain just about everything that happens in the lives of living beings. Reincarnation alone can explain phenomena that are otherwise inexplicable within the framework of a single lifetime. One, how else can we explain the apparent disparity in individual talents and predispositions and some individuals displaying exceptional skills or talents from a very young age, seemingly without any prior exposure or training in their current lives?

Two, how else can we explain cases of children who remember past lives and exhibit talents that cannot be attributed to their current life experiences? Three, how else can we explain phobias and irrational fears? Four, how else can we explain the phenomenon of déjà vu, where individuals feel a sense of familiarity with a situation or place they have never encountered before? Five, how else can we explain some children correctly remembering their birthmarks and congenital anomalies of previous lives? Lastly, how else can we explain the phenomenon of near-death experiences (NDEs), where individuals report vivid encounters with a realm beyond our conventional understanding?

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA
PRADEEPSCOOL@HOTMAIL.COM

Kudos

Please accept a heartfelt appreciation for your January 2025 edition of HINDUISM TODAY, which I found rich with insights and resources—as usual! Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami’s reflection on the continued relevance of Hinduism and the beautifully translated verses of the *Sarvajnanottara Agama* by Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam struck a wonderfully counter-cultural tone for this hectic era where our lives are increasingly consumed by trivialities and ego-driven pursuits

that distract us from what truly matters. .

DR. ASHA C. SHIPMA, DIRECTOR OF HINDU LIFE
YALE UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN’S OFFICE
ASHA.SHIPMAN@YALE.EDU>

The latest issue featuring the Nallur Temple was greatly appreciated, coming at the time of Karthigai Deepam! The Murugan Temple of North America, Maryland, was built with a Pillaiyar idol gifted from Iraivan Temple. I frequent it and had the fortune of seeing seers from Hawaii when the kumbhabhishekam of the Rajagopuram was done. My friend from here has gone to Nallur for Deepam festival. She was excited to know of the article. I will pass on the magazine to her when she returns. Thank you very much for the vibrant editions.

SUNITHA MADHAVAN
SUNITHA.MADHAVAN44@GMAIL.COM

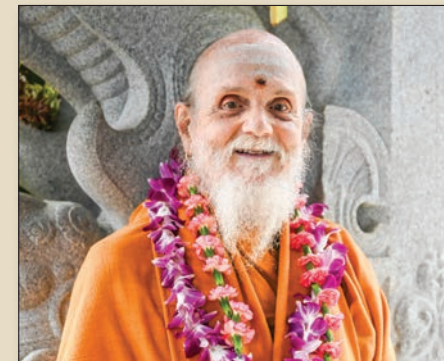
Letters with writer’s name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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.

Preserving and Promoting Hinduism in the Modern World

Our publisher submits that help given to this magazine benefits all Hindus



Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, often emphasized that we have one duty to perform. Can you guess what that duty is? That duty is “to pass our religion on to the next generation, the next and the next.” We provide needed resources in HINDUISM TODAY.

Dharma can be taught in children by teaching them to study and memorize the yamas and niyamas—which together form the ethical restraints and religious observances of Hinduism. They comprise a broad set of

principles to guide our conduct. Stories are an excellent way to introduce these guidelines to young children. The October 2024 issue of HINDUISM TODAY featured two stories based on these principles.

The educational Insight, “Raising Children as Good Hindus” (April 2021) was expressly written to teach children Hindu concepts related to contemporary concerns. The section “Teach of Hinduism’s Greatness” notes, “Since the middle of the 20th century, Hindu teachings have become more widely understood throughout the world. As a result, cardinal aspects of the Hindu approach to living have been taken up by many thoughtful individuals of diverse religions and ethnicities far beyond India. This is because they find them to be wise and effective ways of living.”

Youth will be inspired to learn that many Hindu precepts are being widely adopted in our modern times. These include following a vegetarian diet; a reverence for and protection of the environment; resolving conflicts non-violently; tolerance towards others; viewing the world as one family; the belief in karma as a system of divine justice; the belief in

reincarnation; the practice of yoga and meditation; and seeking for personal experiences of the Divine.

HINDUISM TODAY also encourages educating Hindu children in their religion through reporting on the successful teaching programs of organizations such as Chinmaya Mission. Our article on their Bala Vihar program (April 2024) quoted from their curriculum: “Remember that values are more important than valuables.” Pujya Swami Tejomayananda has noted, and Chinmaya Mission emphasizes 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.”

Help our magazine continue to promote Hindu education to the young by helping it to remain financially strong and secure. Donate at: bit.ly/help-HT, or contact us at: +1-888-464-1008 or support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“The highest form of grace is silence.”

Swami Chinmayananda (1916–1993)

Other religions have all been founded by individuals, but Hinduism is not based on the teachings of any one single person. Before any prophet was born, the Sanatana Dharma was there.

Swami Rama Thirtha (1873–1906)

From one seed arises a huge tree; from it comes numerous seeds, each one of which in its turn grows into a tree. No two fruits are alike. Yet it is one life that throbs in every particle of the tree. So, it is the same Atman everywhere. All creation is That. There is beauty in the birds and in the animals. They too eat and drink like us, mate and multiply; but there is this difference: we can realize our true nature, the Atman. Having been born as human beings, we must not waste this opportunity. **Sri Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *Bengali mystic*

Water is sufficient to cleanse the body, but truthfulness alone can purify the mind. *Thirukkural* 298

Let me tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind towards God; otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands. **Sri Ramakrishna** (1836–1886)

Divisions are imaginary lines drawn by small minds. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952)

India has come to preserve spiritual traditions which many ancient cultures and countries have lost. Today, Hinduism

represents not only India but the ancient wisdom of humanity. In Hinduism many ancient countries can still rediscover their religious past, their old Gods and their old spiritual traditions. **Ram Swarup** (1920–1998), *Indian writer and scholar*

You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. **Khalil Gibran** (1883–1931), *Lebanese-American mystic, poet and writer*

An equation for me has no meaning unless it expresses a thought of God. **Srinivas Ramanujan** (1887–1920), *Indian mathematician*

By practicing tolerance of those who insult us, we will feel honor and insult

as the same. Just as we feel good when someone praises us, we should feel just as good when we are insulted. Stability in honor or insult is the ability to still have love for our aggressor. **Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj** (1921–2016), *spiritual guru of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha*

Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws. **Plato** (427–347 bce) *Greek philosopher*

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the Earth all one's lifetime. **Mark Twain** (1835–1910), *American author*

I felt great need of a holy pilgrimage, so I sat still for three days and God came to me. **Saint Kabir** (1440–1518)

In dwelling, live close to the ground. In thinking, keep to the simple. In conflict, be fair and generous. In governing, don't try to control. In work, do what you enjoy. In

family life, be completely present. **Lao Tzu** (551–479 bce), *Chinese philosopher*

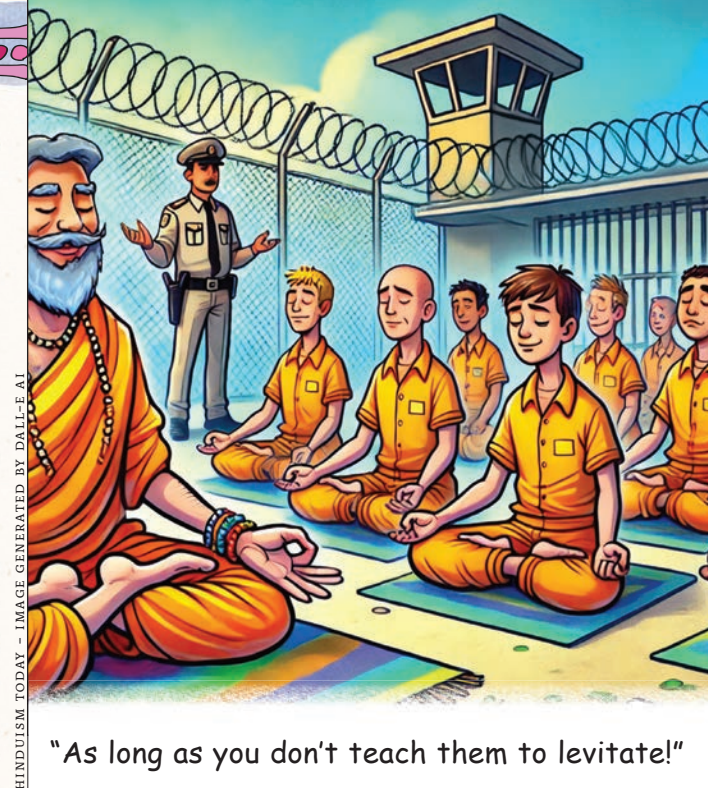
In the *Vedas* I have found eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken peace. **Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803–1882), *American philosopher and writer*

For the Self, all that is seen is but mirage; it lasts but for a moment. Whatever is seen, we know it is not the real “I.” Who could call real this personal self that changes every moment? **Adi Shankara**, 8th century Indian saint

Rise above the cycle of unhappiness, desire, acquisition, excitement and unhappiness again. **Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *HINDUISM TODAY*

Your journey on this earth has only one goal, Self Realization. You are here to attain the

highest possible states of consciousness. You are not here to react to the petty incidents that occur in the valley of the subconscious. You are here to learn to control the mind and live on the mountaintop. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *HINDUISM TODAY*



“As long as you don't teach them to levitate!”

DID YOU KNOW?

The Maha Kumbha Mela

THE KUMBHA MELA IS THE LARGEST SPIRITUAL gathering on Earth, held at four sacred sites in India—Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik—in a 12-year cycle. Each city hosts the event in rotation every three years, with the Purna Kumbha Mela occurring once every 12 years. Prayagraj and Haridwar also observe an Ardha Kumbha Mela every six years. The event's timing is determined by specific planetary alignments involving Jupiter, the Sun and the Moon. For instance, in Prayagraj, the Kumbha Mela occurs when Jupiter is in Taurus and the Sun is in Capricorn, while in Haridwar, it happens when Jupiter is in Aquarius and the Sun is in Aries.

The Maha Kumbha Mela, a once-in-144-years celebration, occurs once every 12 cycles of 12 years. It is the rarest and most auspicious of these gatherings, hosted exclusively in Prayagraj. The 2025 Maha Kumbha Mela, held from January 13 to February 26, drew hundreds of millions of devotees. At its core

is the ritual bathing (*shahi snan*) at the sangam—the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mystical Sarasvati rivers. This act is believed to purify the soul and move one closer to moksha, liberation.

The event traces its origins to the *samudra manthan*, the cosmic churning of the ocean, during which it is said that drops of the divine nectar of immortality, *amrita*, fell at these four sacred sites. The celestial configurations of Jupiter, the Sun and the Moon are believed to heighten spiritual energy and provide an unparalleled opportunity for purification and inner growth.

Beyond its spiritual significance, the Mela is a monumental expression of cultural heritage and devotion. Each event is a temporary city, with massive infrastructure, built to host millions of visitors, including saints, yogis and seekers from around the world. The vibrant atmosphere is alive with rituals, discourses, and cultural programs, showcasing



Worship at scale: An aerial view during the Kumbha Mela at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

the timeless ethos of the *Sanatana Dharma*.

The Maha Kumbha Mela is a profound reminder of humanity's shared quest for personal growth and the enduring power of dharma. It unites millions in a collective quest for higher truth, offering a glimpse into the sacred tapestry of Hinduism. This extraordinary gathering serves as a testament to the universal yearning for the Divine, embodying the timeless principles of purification, liberation and devotion.

PUZZLES

Word Search

Instructions: in the word cloud, find and circle the words given below. They might be horizontal, vertical or diagonal.

K T V E T N Q Z E U U E N R U D R A T P A N U G R A H A M Q
W Y T V G A W L H P K G N X W Y R T E Y X P D R E B I K Q I
K S U O J X Q V C A Z L X A Y A E B E F L E A P E M U R T I
M C Q I I F Y V O S K O R O H A U X D E V A Q Q F U S U Q W
M N S H R A D D H A U I Y A R S L G X I P N Q X M H H R V E
R F A K Q Q U Y X N Q S Y A C C G Y X Y W L W K E B A A T A
Q Y M P V E M A N A S T V V T R I P U N D R A A I Q R N R W
U M S X C Q T A F U A H W M A H T U O C S R J V L K A T G V
X M K X A E T G M R S Q C B X X B X M P A O F K H C N F O D
M O A N D A Z A P E N W T S E I P B K N X H A G R A A I X N
M M R H P A G Y R P A N C H A K S H A R A R I L T R G D X R
S A A U A N S A Z C P U A X O R L I R D T G N A O R A N E M
V U S V I T N T N H S W F U P W F M F O Z A B H J R T U A G
H A V L F A I R S A I Z N M K R P N T X I L G H A V I D Y A
P N J F H X X I A I G T W A P S A S F M Q A Z G S G U S S W
Y A B D B N A P M T M J Z N Z V N K I Q N A T A R A J A H K
X M R P L A U F T A A P Y D J K B U R Z C O T A T T V A S I
A A W H K F N Y A N N Q N A P U F J V I A K A I V A L Y A D
Q H B V T Q K I T Y B Z T L B X Y V B O T Y S A N A T A N A
S D U P A R A S H A K T I A R C O E R H M I Y S R U R O M J

ANUGRAHA
AVIDYA
CHAITANYA
DEVA
GAYATRI
KAIVALYA
MAHAT
MANDALA
MANAS
MURTI
NAMAH
OMKAR
PANCHAKSHARA
PARASHAKTI
PRAKRITI
PRATYAHARA
RISHI
SAMSKARA
SANATANA
SHARANAGATI
SHRADDHA
STOTRA
TANTRA
TATTVA
UPASANA
VARNA
VIBHUTI
LINGAM
ARDHANARESHVARA
NATARAJA
RUDRA
PASUPATA
AGHORA
TRIPUNDRA



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.



Join Us at 4 Dharmic Temples in L.A.

These four ten-minute videos capture class visits to a Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh temple. They were developed by Hinduism Today for use in California sixth and seventh grade social studies classes in which the history of these four Indian-origin faiths is taught. Each visit was hosted by a member or clergy of the temple and approved by the temple management. By these tours, students learn the basics of the related faiths and experience their sacred spaces.



HINDUISM



JAINISM



SIKHISM



BUDDHISM



See the videos at: bit.ly/TempleTourPlaylist



MAITRI UPANISHAD Path to the Supreme

Transcending the elemental body Through austerity and grace

The following is an excerpt from S. Radhakrishnan's translation of the Maitri Upanishad, chapter 4, verses 1-6, edited for length and clarity

.....

A group of Valikhilyas, ascetics renowned for their rigorous practice of chastity and discipline, approached Prajapati Kratu, their teacher and said to him: "Revered teacher, salutations to you. Please instruct us further. You are our guide and way to liberation, and there is no other. We seek to know: What is the method or rule by which this embodied soul (*jivatman*), after leaving this elemental body, obtains union with the true self (*Paramatman*)?" Hearing this, Prajapati Kratu replied. 1

"This has been explained elsewhere. Consider this: Like waves in a mighty river, the actions and experiences of the past cannot be undone. Like the tide of the ocean, the arrival of death is unstoppable and inevitable. The embodied soul is bound, much like a lame man, caught in fetters forged by the fruits of good and evil actions. It is like a prisoner, lacking freedom and independence. Caught in the realm of death, it is beset by many fears. It is as though it were intoxicated by the liquor of delusion, rushing about aimlessly. Like one possessed by an evil spirit, it is lost in confusion. It is as though bitten by a great serpent—the objects of sense, such as sound, touch and sight, which poison the mind. This condition is likened to being in gross darkness—that of passion and ignorance. It is like witnessing a juggler's tricks, filled with illusion, or living in a dream of false appearances. Like the hollow and insubstantial inside of a banana tree, these worldly objects are devoid of true substance. The embodied soul is like an actor, endlessly changing its dress, giving the illusion of reality to its audience. Thus, it has been said: 'The objects of sound, touch and the like are worthless to a man striving for liberation.' When the embodied soul attaches itself to these, it forgets its highest state and its true nature." 2

"There is, however, an antidote for the suffering of the embodied soul: the acquirement of the knowledge of the *Vedas* and the diligent performance of one's own duties. Each individual must pursue the duties of the stage of life (*ashrama*) to which they belong—this is the path prescribed for one's dharma. The other pursuits are like branches diverging from the central stem of a tree. By following one's proper duties, one ascends toward liberation; by neglecting them, one descends into lower states. The duties set forth in the *Vedas* are one's true guide. To transgress these duties is to stray from the path of liberation. If someone claims that a man practicing austerity belongs to no stage of life, this is incorrect. However, if one does not practice austerity, there is no success in the knowledge of the Self, nor in the perfection of one's actions. For, as it has been said: 'By austerity, goodness is obtained; from goodness, understanding arises; from understanding, the Self is realized. He who realizes the Self does not return to the cycle of birth and death.'" 3

"One who attained the knowledge of Brahman has said, 'Brahman



is.' Another, purified through austerity, has declared, 'This is the door to Brahman.' Yet another, deeply absorbed in meditation, has stated, 'Om is the manifest greatness of Brahman.' Thus, Brahman is apprehended through the triad of knowledge, austerity and meditation. One who practices this triad surpasses Brahma (*Hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic creator) and reaches the supreme Divinity that is beyond the Gods. Such a person, who knows and worships Brahman with these three practices, attains happiness that is undecaying, immeasurable and free from sickness. Freed from all that previously bound and afflicted him, the charioteer of the body attains complete union with the true Self." 4

The Valikhilyas then asked: "Revered One, you are our teacher. Your teachings have been firmly fixed in our minds. Now we have another question: Fire, air, sun, time, breath, food, Brahma, Rudra, Vishnu—some meditate upon one, and others upon another. Which one of these should we meditate upon as the best?" To this, Prajapati Kratu replied. 5

"All these are but chief forms of the Supreme, the immortal, the bodiless Brahman. Each of us, devoted to one of these forms, rejoices in that aspect in their respective world. For it has been said: 'This entire universe is Brahman.' The various forms—fire, air, sun, and so on—are its chief manifestations. One meditates upon them, worships them, and ultimately transcends them. Through this practice, one ascends higher and higher in the worlds. And when all things dissolve in the universal dissolution, the meditator attains unity with the supreme Purusha, the Eternal Self." 6

SARVAPELLI RADAKRISHNAN, (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first vice president (1952–1962) and second president (1962–1967). He held doctorates in science, philosophy and theology.

Capturing Divinity

India's ancient crafts, thriving to this day, tell awe-inspiring tales of human creativity and religious fervor. Stone etching, metal casting, wood carving, earth molding and primordial musical instruments—let's experience the living stories of these five arts with traditional exponents in Tamil Nadu.

Text by Padma Krishnan, photos by Anne Petry



An artisan carves final touches on a Goddess murti in a new temple in Tamil Nadu

Stone



IN THE ANNALS OF HISTORY, WHEN OUR ANCESTORS wanted to express themselves, they turned to the most enduring medium available to them: stone. From primitive cave paintings, early humans progressed to carving. They chose stones for their exceptional durability, a choice that has preserved their contributions to our shared heritage for millennia.

In the rich mosaic of India, stone carving gave rise to magnificent temple architecture that stands as a testament to the ingenuity and devotion of its diverse population. Marvels such as the Kailasanatha Temple in Ellora, the Khajuraho Temples in Madhya Pradesh and the Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur are not mere structures. They are living narratives, frozen in stone. India is also home to many stone astronomical observatories. The Jaipur observatory, built in the 1700s, has the largest sundial in the world and is still functional.

India's vast landscape offers a wide variety of stone for artisans to create timeless magic. In the state of Rajasthan, marble takes center stage, giving rise to the renowned latticework seen in the Dilwara Jain Temples on Mount Abu. Agra and Rajasthan have been hubs of marble inlaid work since the sixteenth century. In the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, abundant granite has given birth to magnificent temple complexes such as the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, Nelliappar in Tirunelveli and the rock-cut structures of Mahabalipuram, adorned with grand pillars and colossal monolithic statues. Similarly, the availability of basalt in Telangana played a pivotal role in the creation of the exquisite sculptures at the Ramappa Temple.

WHILE THE AWE-INSPIRING CATHEDRALS of the West continue to enthrall us to this day, the craftsmanship that created these magnificent structures has dwindled. In India, however, ancient art and craft forms show historical continuity even now, since they are intertwined with living religious practices. The stone sculptors, carving Deities and temples, preserve their rich heritage as a sacred duty. As Hinduism spreads beyond the borders of India, stone artisans take their traditional skills to construct Chola-style temples in faraway places like Hawaii.

The traditional sculptor of today follows the same rules that governed the massive temples built during the eras of the Cholas, the Pandyas or the Chalukyas. He uses similar tools as the sculptors of the past—the hammer and chisel. The master carver intuitively wields his chisel and hammer, forgoing the use of machine tools in the final stages of carving a Deity. So immersed does he get, that the Deity he is carving lets itself be known to him at times. One of the artists we spoke to for this article, Shiva, said he had the experience of the Divine Mother when he was carving the head of Amman. The dedication of such workers channels the *prapancha shakti*, cosmic energy, into the murti, making it accessible to the devotees who visit the temples.

Four Stages of Deity Sculpting

The sculpting of Deity murtis is done in stages. Stone murtis are expected to last for

3,000 years, so sculptors pay close attention to each step, mindful of their legacy. Stone carving is a physically and mentally demanding craft. Even the slightest error can render an entire work futile, resulting in the loss of valuable resources and labor.

Selecting a stone: Carvers select stones according to the size of the murti and the quality of the stone. They use traditional methods such as visual inspection, sound and water tests to identify the best stones. Stones that make a clear sound when struck and do not leave watermarks when wetted are best suited for carving Deities. Watermarks indicate hidden cracks, and the stone will break easily during the carving or soon after. In Tamil Nadu, stone carvers divide the rocks into three types: male, female and neutral. Female stones are good for carving a Deity because they are pliable and hold the form of the image well. Once a suitable rock is identified in a quarry, it is cut to the desired size and transported. In olden days, a puja was performed before cutting the rock, so that the broken piece would retain its life energy.

Carving: Carving Deities is a complex and time-consuming process. As a first step, the rock is soaked in water for a few days to soften it. A puja is performed to seek the blessings of the intended God or Goddess. Then, the sculptor draws the image of the Deity on the stone from memory, based on ancient texts. Most craftsmen today use power tools to carve the rough shape of the murti, but the finer details are always chiseled by hand.

Treating: After the image of the Deity is

carved completely, the murti is rubbed with sesame oil to give it a sheen. A mixture of burnt coconut shell and sesame oil is applied for darker shades. The Deity's eyes are of great significance. They are covered with a cloth until the kumbhabhishekam and revealed only after the murti's consecration in the temple.

Consecration: When the murti reaches the temple, it is installed after an elaborate puja. Traditionally, it is immersed in water, grains and coins for 48 days before the kumbhabhishekam. If the murti is a replacement for a broken one, the energy from the previous murti is transferred to a miniature replica made of fig wood. The replica remains energized through mantra chants and pujas until the replacement is installed.

During the creative processes, the master carver is always present. He selects the stone, supervises cutting, relies on his memory to sketch the image and carefully chisels to reveal the hidden God. Stonework requires a multitude of skills. Sculptors must have a very clear sense of scale and proportion, as well as knowledge of mythology and iconography. Each Hindu God is worshiped in myriad forms, and a sculptor needs to know each of those forms in detail.

Ancient stone carvers demonstrated their skills by building massive pillars, extensive temple complexes and exquisite murtis. One can see their amazing artwork on the roofs and pillars at the big temples in Madurai, Tiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Thiruvavur, Thiruvakkarai, Tiruvarangu and Tirunelveli. Each of these temples features grand halls known as Ayiram Kaal Mandapam

(“thousand-legged hall”) characterized by their thousand-pillared design. The pillars depict mythological stories and the everyday lives of common people. They also effectively control the noise level.

Stones that Sing

The skill of ancient stone sculptors was such that they could make stones sing. Yes, a talented sculptor could choose the right type of stone and carve it in such a way that the stone pillars would resonate with melodious notes when struck. We can listen to musical pillars at temples in Thiruperunthurai, Suchindram, Tirunelveli and Alwarthirunagari in Tamil Nadu, as well as in Hampi, Karnataka and Lepakshi, Telangana. They amaze visitors with classical Indian musical notes centuries after their construction. In olden days musicians would tune their instruments using these pillars.

Monolithic Marvels

India boasts colossal statues and temples carved from single rocks and mountains across the country. The Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora Caves, carved from a single cliff rock approximately 1,200 years ago, stands as an architectural marvel. Similarly, the Masroor rock-cut temples in Himachal Pradesh, known as the Ellora of Himachal, are monolithic temples. They are dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Durga and the Sun.

The state of Karnataka is home to five massive monolithic statues of Jain Tirthankara Bahubali, including the colossal 57-foot Gomateshwara at Shravanabelagola. This granite monolith was among the tallest statues in the ancient world. Madhya Pradesh's

Bawangaja features the world's second-largest monolithic statue, of Lord Rishabhadeva, carved from a mountain in the 12th century. It still stands tall at 84 feet.

The expertise in carving massive monoliths persists even today. Recently, a 35-foot-tall Hanuman statue was carved from a single stone in Allagadda, Andhra Pradesh, and transported to the Seetha Ramasamy Temple in Kerala. Another colossal monolith was sculpted in Tamil Nadu—an impressive 64-foot-high statue of Vishwaroopa Maha Vishnu. This mammoth creation, weighing a staggering 300 tons, was installed in the Kothandaramaswamy Temple in Bengaluru. These contemporary marvels serve as compelling evidence of the historic continuity of the talent for carving monoliths.

The knowledge and skills are conventionally passed down through male members of artisan families. While the next generation of a traditional artisan family may opt for different professions, many educational institutions now offer professional courses in traditional crafts, infusing new talent into these ancient vocations. It is worth noting that students often continue their training under traditional sculptors to refine their craft.

The growing interest in handcrafted artifacts has increased the demand for stone-carved objects for decor and cookware. The handicrafts industry is a major employment generator in the unorganized sector in India, and Indian handicrafts are sought globally. Religious festivals like Navaratri, Ganesha

Chaturthi and Diwali keep the ancient crafts alive, as people buy murtis, dolls and lamps to celebrate. Additionally, a steady demand for artists like Shiva is maintained by the construction of temples worldwide and the restoration of temples in India. These artisans will continue to play a pivotal role in making the formless Divine accessible and relatable to devotees in the years to come, much like their stone-carving predecessors did thousands of years ago.



(Clockwise from top right) Master craftsman Mani Velumani transfers a yali drawing to a granite block; a silpi carves the yali shape, which is part lion and part elephant; finished yali; workers select suitable stones at a quarry



Phases of Manifestation

Metal



INDIA'S LEGACY OF METALWORK GOES back to 3,000 bce, evident from the handcrafted relics found across the subcontinent, such as the "dancing girl" statue of the Indus Valley civilization. That renowned bronze figure showcases early mastery in the lost-wax method, still practiced by Indian artisans. In the centuries that followed, metalsmiths crafted the Iron Pillar of Delhi, nicknamed "rustless wonder." This 1600-year-old sentinel continues to intrigue experts for its remarkable resistance to rust.

Beyond its mastery of iron, ancient India also excelled in the production and export of steel. From the crucibles of South India, Wootz Steel was forged. Wootz—derived from Tamil "uruku" or "ukku"—formed the crucial raw material for the legendary Damascus swords.

Indians were also skilled in creating alloys. Bronze, an blend of copper and tin, has been used widely for centuries in religious metalwork. Ancient texts mention the precise composition to create *panchaloha*, or *panchdhatu*—a mix of five metals: gold, silver, copper, zinc and iron. Another alloy, *ashtadhatu*, mixes eight metals: gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, tin, iron and mercury. Each metal is associated with a positive quality—gold with purity, iron with courage, etc. Gold and silver were once used to craft grand chariots.

Swamimalai, the Hill of God

Bronze casting, once widespread across the Tamil region, is now practiced only in Kumbakonam and nearby Swamimalai, and a few centers around Cuddalore and Thanjavur. Swamimalai, now the heart of this ancient craft, has become synonymous with bronze icons. The town lies on the banks of the Kaveri River where, according to mythology, the primordial sound Om was revealed to Lord Siva by His precocious son Lord Murugan. Swamimalai is also one of Murugan's six abodes.

Here, the rhythmic clangs of metals take us back to the 9th century, when the great Cholas ruled. During their long reign (9th to 13th century), art and culture thrived. They built marvelous temples, many which—like the Thanjavur Brihadeeswara Temple—are still functioning. Bronzsmiths gathered to forge murtis and paraphernalia for the great temples at the behest of Chola rulers like King Raja Raja, King Rajendra and Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi. Drawn by the continuous patronage of royalty, alluvial sand and weather suitable for their creations, the artisans settled near rivers. Through the centuries, they stood as sentinels, guarding a legacy that has outlived kingdoms. The locals proudly say, "Our art is as old as the holy mountain."

The seed of the marvelous bronze creations is a wax image of the desired icon. In the past, this was created from beeswax; nowadays a mixture of resin and wax is used. The *Shilpa Shastras* mention a lost-wax method. The wax model is coated with clay, forming a mold known as a *karu*, or "womb." This mold is strengthened with charred husk, salt,

cotton and metal wires before being left to dry in the sun.

In the next stage, metal for the murti is melted to 1200 degrees Celsius in a crucible fueled with firewood and briquettes of cow and goat dung. The wax is melted and drained from the mold, and skilled bronze casters, pour the lava-like metals manually into the empty mold. The metal takes shape as it fills the mold. After cooling, the clay mold is broken to retrieve the rough bronze murti. It is then cleaned using the ashes from the fire.

Finer features, expressions and ornaments are chiseled by hand. The eyes (*netra*) are carved in the last stage; the murti becomes sacred and revered after the "netra (eyes) opening" ceremony. Born of fire, sweat and sound, the murtis are finally mounted on ornate platforms. A puja is performed before the icons leave the workshops.

The Swamimalai sthapatis emphasize the uniqueness of their craft. It is single casting and the entire icon is done once, unlike the Moradabad method, where molds are reused, arms and legs are cast separately and brazed together. Craftsman Suresh Subramanian says, "Using my knowledge and creativity to bring a smile to my customers' faces, and seeing their satisfaction once they have the statue in their hands, is something extremely gratifying and joyful for me."

The laborious and dangerous process takes weeks to years, depending on the size and complexity of the murti. Temple murtis are proportional to the size of the temple and the chief icon, *mulavar*. The murtis are usually solid, but the *vahanams*, like Nandi or Lion, and chariots are hollow.

Changes through Time

The ancient craft, passed down through millennia, has undergone transformations with time. Long ago, sthapatis paraded their wax models through villages, their artistry judged by the community before committing to precious metal. Such rigorous critique, no longer practiced, minimized waste and ensured adherence to tradition. Similarly, mud from anthills and earth gored by elephants or pigs, earlier chosen for its texture and symbolic purity, has given way to faster-drying, cheaper plaster molds. The fire in the furnaces, too, is changing from wood-fire to gas and oil. But the murtis cast for worship in temples and homes are still molded in beeswax-resin mix and alluvial soil.

Coconut leaflets, marked in the "Thala" system (head-to-chin distance), served as traditional measurements. Some sthapatis now use tapes, but ancient iconography and proportions remain sacred.

Swamimalai's artisans carry their icons to the state capital for export certification from the ASI (Archeological Survey of India) officials, who visit from the national capital monthly. Meant to safeguard antiques, this process has become a deterrent to patrons and a burden to the artisans, causing unnecessary delays, cost escalation and even lost orders. They have been asking for a local center for certification for years to ease foreign trade.

Iconic Murtis

The Chola rulers were ardent devotees of Siva. Saivism flourished during their long and glorious rule; they built numerous temples and patronized artisans and poets celebrating Saivism. Inspired by the imagery of bhakti

poems and royal support, early Chola metalwork primarily focused on Siva murtis, later expanding to include icons of Devi, Ganesh and Murugan.

Dancing Siva, Nataraja, became a popular motif, alongside sculptures of Saivite poets. A rare depiction shows Siva as Bhikshatana, the naked beggar. Subtle stylistic shifts emerged over time. Early icons featured minimal decoration, while later periods embraced intricate ornaments and detailed clothing. As Vaishnavism gained favor, Vishnu, Lakshmi and Krishna icons were cast; but Nataraja and Ardhanarishwara retained their dominance.

Facing the Future

This ancient craft is facing a trifecta of challenges: price rises, cheap imitations and changes in personalized worship. Once a cornerstone of faith, personalized murti worship grapples with societal transformations. A friend recently mused about the fate of the murti of Krishna her mother worships fervently in the bhakti tradition. The Lord is fed, bathed and dressed in splendor and put to sleep with songs at night. My friend and other members of her family have gravitated towards a non-ritualistic path and would never care for their family icon as their mother does, after her. While old murtis might find another worshiper, one might ponder how future generations will uphold the individualized forms of murti worship. Meanwhile, murtis of Deities have become popular as decorative props. This drives demand, but some artisans

feel this belittles their sacred art, which is rooted in worship.

Increasing prices of metals have depressed local demand, and

cheaper machine-made imitations further challenge Indian handicrafts in the international market. Geographical Indication tags are a big boost. They also offer protection from imitations, and help artisans form cooperative collectives to train, build awareness and raise capital. NGOs and government initiatives foster market expansion and introduce technological innovations to scale. However, ensuring that this growth doesn't erode the distinct value of traditional craftsmanship remains crucial for the survival of craft and its artisans.

Despite the challenges, artisans are keeping their artistry alive. Our interviews with metalsmiths revealed a profound sense of responsibility and commitment to ensure their timeless handiwork continues to inspire generations to come. Non-hereditary workers share this dedication. All are united by a profound appreciation for the opportunity to leave an enduring legacy. This sense of sacred duty makes them resolute in preserving their craft. As one said poetically, "India is art; art is India. As long as we are here, art will be there. As long as art is there, India will be there." Their craft, forged in fire and molded in soil, is engraved in their souls and the soul of their land. Hopefully, it will survive the age of AI, 3D printing and lunar mining.

From wax to cast bronze



(clockwise from top left) Softening wax; shaping a hand mudra; encasing the wax murti in a clay mold; heating the mold to harden it



(counterclockwise from far left) pouring molten metal into the empty mold after the wax was melted out; artisan Suresh Subramanian scrapes remaining clay off the murti; final chiseling and polishing of a Ganesha murti

Wood



IN INDIA, TREES ARE HELD IN DEEP REVERENCE, believed to be the abode of divine beings. Sacred groves, once an essential part of every village, served as sanctuaries for old trees. Ancient temples often feature a *sthala vriکشam*, a tree where a sage meditated or where a Deity first appeared. These trees are diligently protected, embodying the profound connection between India's geography, religious traditions and spirituality.

This reverence for trees has naturally permeated India's rich heritage of wood carving. The time-honored craft has evolved over centuries, shaped by the type of timber available and the influence of diverse cultures. This has resulted in a rich tapestry of regional styles and techniques. From the intricate artistry of Rajasthan to the life-sized sculptures of Tamil Nadu and ornate walnut carvings of Kashmir, each timber narrates a unique regional saga.

Ancient Lineage

Hereditary woodcarvers in India trace their lineage to the divine architect Vishwakarma, who is invoked at the commencement of carving Deities, chariots and other sacred relics and in the construction of homes. Familial skills are passed down through generations, in workshops laden with sawdust and chips. Artisan Subarayan, whom we interviewed

for this article, recalls how his training commenced when he was around seven. He and boys his age from his family learned about tools, trees and carving during the day and dedicated their evenings to learning to draw. He laments that the ubiquity of cameras has led to a drastic reduction in the time people spend honing their drawing skills these days. As the current generation pursues formal education, the apprenticeship is different nowadays. Even artisans from traditional households embark on their crafting careers at a later age. Unlike stone carving, women participate more actively in creating sacred objects in wood.

Sacred Items

Religious wood carving encompasses a wide range of objects used in worship and temple festivals. From grand temple sculptures to delicate figurines of Deities, chariots, exquisitely carved personal shrines and vehicles for the Deities, the artisans' hard work is visible in many forms and shapes.

Carved doors stand sentinel at temple entrances, holding images of Deities and celestial events on their sturdy frames. These huge doors are not mere entrances but portals into realms where mythology and reality intertwine like vines to create a spiritual resonance with the stone walls and sculptures inside the temple. The massive wooden temple chariots are a marvel in themselves.

Woodwork plays an important role in personal worship in Hinduism. Tied to rituals of murti worship, devotees create dedicated places of worship in their homes with carved wooden platforms, small shrines, personal altars and murtis. In the past, wooden objects

were part of everyday life in Indian households. Even today, traditionally constructed houses have images of Gajalakshmi on the top of the wooden frame of doors at the entrance. Sacred symbols, such as the lotus flower, trident and conch, are meticulously carved on the pillars of houses and temples, each symbol carrying spiritual significance.

Carving a Wooden Murti

Woodcarvers possess immense knowledge of native trees handed down through generations of oral transmission. Trees are carefully chosen based on their intended purpose. Commonly used trees include rosewood, teak, monkeypod, neem, jackfruit, sandalwood, walnut and fig, among many others.

A wooden sculpture is created in three stages: rough cut, sculpting and polishing. Sculpting sacred murtis begins auspiciously with a puja performed by the master carver. He seeks the blessings of the intended Deity, as well as Vishwakarma and the family God or Goddess of the client. It's an acknowledgment of ancient beliefs that the act of creation is sacred.

The rough cut: In the first stage, the rough cut, the log is cut and shaped into the basic form of the intended sculpture. The carver uses chisels, axes, mallets and other tools to remove excess material, revealing the rough contours of the envisioned form. The jadippu process is crucial as it lays the foundation for subsequent stages of carving, where the details and finer features are sculpted. The dhyana sloka of the Deity is chanted during carving to invoke the essence of the Divinity.

Sculpting: As the rough shape emerges,

the crafting enters the second stage, the sculpting phase. With gouges, chisels and wooden mallets, the calloused hands of the artisans skillfully create intricate features. A Deity emerges from the wood, not merely as a sculpture but as a vessel of spirituality.

Polishing: In this phase, the murti is chafed to a smooth, polished finish, and then painted if desired. Women contribute significantly to polishing and painting the sculpted murtis. With sandpaper and hand tools they remove the final veil from the timber, and the sculptures come alive, vibrant embodiments of devotion and artistic synergy.

After a puja, the finished sculpture is handed over to the customer. The artisans express gratitude to the Divine for the completion of the work, seek blessings for the new owner and bid adieu to their creation. This ritualistic handing over helps the master carver and his team let go of their creation and relieve their minds from the intense, almost meditative act of carving.

Rethinking the Future

Artisans work in teams, each playing a key role in transforming a block of wood into an object of worship. They can spend a week to six months on a sculpture, depending on its complexity. Small workshops employ up to ten artisans, with wages ranging from US\$10 to \$18 per day. Some artisans welcome the proliferation of CNC (computer numerical control) machines that reduce costs and increase production. They feel machines can make wooden artifacts affordable to common people. The final detailing, polishing and coating with paint or varnish is always done by hand. Sculptures of Deities meant

for worship in temples or at home are fully handcrafted as a sacred duty.

Rampant deforestation has posed a major challenge to the availability of native wood. India now imports wood, causing cost escalation. Despite the challenges faced by traditional crafts in the face of modernization and the loss of native trees, Indian religious woodcraft continues to thrive, thanks to the dedication of skilled artisans and the efforts of preservation initiatives. As one example, the Odisha state government is growing the variety of trees used in building the Jaganath chariot in a special project to meet the annual demand.

Efforts to promote and preserve this craft include fairs, exhibitions and educational programs. The central and state governments award artisans, recognizing their talent. They are huge morale boosters for the craftsmen toiling away in their workshops. Many of them painstakingly work on their masterpieces for months to showcase their talents.

The current generation of woodcarvers is tech savvy and uses digital mediums to sell and market their craft globally. Equipped with smartphones, these youngsters manage basic websites, maintain social media accounts and promptly respond to leads generated through Instagram and Facebook pages. Another avenue is opened through word-of-mouth references within expat communities and instant messaging apps. Passionate woodcarvers share their knowledge and showcase their work via YouTube channels, attracting substantial audiences and generating clientele

leads. While smaller murtis and puja artifacts are also sold as decorative pieces on online platforms, personalized Instagram pages appear to attract a larger clientele. Artisan Subarayan's son Giri Dharan, responsible for their online business, mentions that they achieve more sales through social media postings than through their websites. Video calls and payment gateways have successfully bridged the gap between traditional woodcarvers based in small towns and villages and their patrons in far-flung locations.

Contemporary artists are reinterpreting tradition. They create modern images reflecting current scenarios while retaining the essence of the ancient art form. On the road in India, you might find murtis of Lord Ganesha holding a laptop or wearing glasses. These innovative works find their way into galleries, exhibitions and private collections. They have not yet made it into temples; perhaps in years to come. Keepers of this ancient craft are adapting to a changing world by finding substitute materials, embracing technology and expanding their horizons. The harmonious blend of ancient knowledge and modern thinking keeps the tradition alive.

Hewing revered Deities from blocks of wood



(left to right) Artisan Subarayan draws Ganesha on a block of wood, with a completed Goddess behind him; Subarayan begins chiseling to turn the 2D drawing into a 3D murti; a guardian Deity; detailed carving of a bird; polishing a sculpted Ganesha; Subarayan's grandson plays woodcarver



Terra Cotta



THE EARTH HAS BEEN A MEDIUM OF artistic expression since ancient times. Baked or burnt earth, called terracotta, is a popular material to create sculptures, plaques, and other objects of worship across civilizations. In India, artisans still create baked-earth Deities that resemble figurines from the Indus Valley relics. Terracotta figurines play a key role in rural rituals in the culturally rich state of Tamil Nadu. Archeological findings of terracotta pots, figurines, etc., from Arikamedu, Urayiur, and Tirukampuliyur in the state are testimonies to the long-standing tradition. This archaic art is still alive in terracotta hubs, such as Villianur, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli and Coimbatore. We explored the craft as practiced in Villianur.

Significance in Tamil Nadu

On rural roads in South India, massive figures of vibrantly colored local Deities stand tall near paddy fields, ponds, river banks and at the borders of villages. With swords, machetes, tridents, sickles and whips, they are armed and ready to decimate any enemies trying to harm those under their protection. Made of terracotta, these figurines are deeply connected to the local culture, with roots in ancestral worship. This tradition of creating terracotta figurines for protection and prosperity continues in modern times.

While there were numerous local Deities in the past, currently only a few are worshiped regularly. Among them, Ayyanar and Mariamman are the most prominent. Found at the foothills of holy mountains and temples, their blessings are sought before entering the sacred places they guard. In Tamil Nadu villages, huge terracotta horses are offered to Lord Ayyanar in annual festivals called "Kuthirai Eddupu" or "Puravi Eddupu." Votive offerings of these terracotta horses are called Ayyanar horses now. Individuals offer votives to express gratitude for wishes fulfilled, and communities offer them for prosperity and protection from calamities.

Villianur Terracotta Works

Sankaraparani River flows through the town of Villianur; the locals regard it as sacred. The riverbank is studded with many ancient temples, and the mud from the riverbed is rich in copper, aluminum and iron. The strength of the soil lends itself to building large terracotta artifacts. Villianur terracotta products have earned the government-issued Geographical Indication tag owing to the river, the soil and the craftsmanship they birthed.

We met celebrated artist V.K. Munusamy at his workshop, close to an old Siva temple. His infectious energy and passion are palpable. V. K. Munusamy is a 23rd-generation artist in a lineage of talented terracotta craftsmen. His parents, Krishan Pathar and Mangalaxmi, also award-winning artists, lived up to 100; their picture adorns the walls of his workshop. His wife and daughters specialize in creating clay miniatures, and his son is pursuing a Masters in Fine Arts in London. Munusamy says he has loved making horses since he was a child.

His dream is to keep making taller and taller horses and other sculptures as long as he lives, till 100 like his parents.

Creating terracotta objects can be a form of religious ritual or meditation, connecting the artist to the Divine. Munusamy compares creating a terracotta murti to *laya* ("merging") yoga. "It takes patience and concentration, and you have to keep the image of the God you are making in mind all the time. Then your hands move." He says the five elements, *pancha bhuta*, have to cooperate and bless the process; only then can we create a sculpture from the mud. As we break down the process, the interplay of elements becomes clear.

The Elements of Sculpture

Earth: Mud is collected from the river banks. Three types of soil from the river bed are taken; each is visibly different. The mud is sifted to remove fine stones and mixed with sawdust, paddy husk and straw. In the olden days, elephant dung was added. The mixture ferments for fifteen days.

Water: Water is added to the mud. Locally called *mannu mithithal*, the lumpy mud is stomped by men to make it smooth and pliable, like how dough is kneaded by hand for a perfect loaf of bread.

Mud to Figures: Prepared clay is molded into desired shapes by hand. Potter's wheels are used in some places. In Villianur, artisans use coiling and pinching techniques that bring to mind a building emerging from the ground, inch by inch. The bigger figures are molded in parts and assembled at the time of installation. This makes transportation easier. Previous generations of artists camped near

temples while building larger statues and went wherever their work took them.

Air drying: Smaller figurines, jewelry and lamps are left to dry naturally. Larger statues are dried and fired.

Fire and air: Larger figurines are baked in an open wood fire to strengthen and stabilize them. Logs of tamarind trees, cow dung, coconut shells and fronds are used. Firing is crucial: overheating can break the figurines, while underheating makes them fragile.

Air and ether: Under the sky, baked sculptures are extracted carefully and left to cool in an open space. "Mixing the clay is physically tiring work. We can't do anything the next day," says Munusamy. He and his team prepared 100 tons of clay to make 25-foot terracotta figurines of Chelliamman and other local Deities at Tiruvachiyur. This is a record of sorts. But he finds it hard to get labor nowadays. He believes that developing a machine for *mannu mithithal* could ease the process, reducing time and labor. However, this innovation may also raise questions about the impact on traditional artisanal practices.

"We watch. And we do," Munusamy says. The symbols of each God and Goddess, their weapons, expressions on faces and stance are learned from childhood. The aesthetics and proportions are intuitive. "I did not study these in school. I learned by observing the sculptures in the temples, by watching people making them." He fondly recollects watching his father and making miniature clay figures as a child. He wants to pass on that magic of handcrafting to children. In his training sessions they play with mud and make toys and whistles. At his workshop

the tools are rudimentary, and great skills are needed to create forms out of a handful of clay. "Only fingers, hands and a stick—it is totally handcrafted," he says with pride.

As we watch, Munusamy deftly wields his hands. Within minutes, the lump of clay becomes a face, and as he rolls and plasters a little clay on the face, it becomes a man with a mustache. In the next few seconds, the face gets two protruding teeth and it becomes a fierce face; a demigod is born. Miniature figures are made directly from the clay. Due to their cost effectiveness and portability, they are created in large numbers. Heads of Buddha and political figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar are in demand. During festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Vinayaka statues are in high demand. This kind of seasonal demand is the primary source of income for traditional potters.

Kindling Flames of Learning

Munusamy's speech is peppered with quotes from Tamil poet-saints Auvaiyar and Thiruvalluvar, who laid down rules for corporal and spiritual lives. Their philosophy emphasizes the importance of spreading knowledge, which inspires him to freely and passionately share his expertise in the craft and local culture. He has trained thousands of students, teachers and unemployed youth in India and worldwide. He believes India's traditional crafts can be a great source of employment.

He has collaborated with Kota tribes in the hills of Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu to make their pottery commercially viable. He regularly works with self-help women's groups to

train them. He stresses the need for self-reliance, learning new techniques and responding to new opportunities. He also works with brass, fiberglass and other materials using molds. He hopes his son will introduce modern techniques and help him transform Villianur into a hub for terracotta art training and production.

As with woodcarving, efforts to promote and preserve this craft include fairs, exhibitions and educational programs. The central and state governments award artisans. They are huge morale boosters for the craftsmen, many of whom painstakingly work on their masterpieces for months to showcase their talents.

Challenges and Future

Urbanization is posing significant challenges to the preservation of local cultural practices, such as the annual renewal of Ayyanar horses, which were once a vital part of village life. Cement murtis are fast replacing clay ones. Munusamy asserts, "It is a misconception that cement lasts longer. Terracotta figures last for thousands of years; cement will start deteriorating after seven years." Artisans face difficulties in finding raw materials and skilled labor. Growing concerns about extracting mud from rivers and around ponds have led to restrictions. Traditionally, potters had hereditary rights to areas of village commons where they could source clay, but shifting attitudes toward land ownership and perspectives on common resources are challenging that. As a result, the main raw material has become scarce and costly.

Timeless creations fashioned from earth



(left) Master artisan V.K. Munusamy shapes a new figure; (below) a potter's wheel is sometimes used; (right) Seven-foot high Ayyanar terracotta horses from Tamil Nadu at Anandgram Sanskriti Museum in Delhi



Music



GODS ARE OFTEN DEPICTED WITH instruments: Krishna with a flute, Siva with a drum and bull horn, Saraswati with a veena, Ganesha with a drum, Shakti with a hourglass hand-drum and Vishnu with a conch. Each instrument symbolizes a nuance of Divinity, and mystics interpret their music as levels of consciousness. Kailaya Vathyam, or Siva Vathyam, is an ensemble of ancient instruments more than 2,000 years old still played at Siva temples, predominantly in South India. They are played during all manner of religious events: festivals, consecrations, processions and whenever Thevaram or Thiruv-asagam are sung.

Myths connect the instruments to Lord Siva: Brahmathalam, cymbals, was given to Brahma by Siva. The Panchamuga Vathyam, a drum with five faces, represents Siva's five faces. The Rudra Veena was invented by Ravana, who plucked his veins to create music to appease Siva. Siva broke the hourglass drum, Udkai, to create Parai, the frame drum. He gifted Thiruchinnam, a brass wind instrument, to Saint Sambandar. The bull horn, His favorite, adorns His hip.

Types of Instruments

The Kailaya Vathyam ensemble employs three main categories: membranophones, brass percussion and brass wind instruments. Two other groups are strings and conches.

Membranophones (drums): Around 200 types of unique drums form the backbone of ancient Tamil music. Barrel, hourglass and frame drums play significant roles. Drumming is not for the faint of heart. Large Kailaya Vathyam drums are strapped to the shoulders of musicians when they play, and they can be heavy. Guru Vamadevan Janardan says, "Playing Thimilai (an hourglass drum played with fingers) is grueling. The fingers swell up and you can't wear your rings afterward." But it's his favorite instrument to play!

Nowadays plastic is often used instead of hides, though Kosainagaran Sivakumar, a well known Kailaya Vathyam guru from Chennai who heads the Kosainagaran Group, insists on using animal hides. "From plastic, we get only sound, no music, no *natham*."

Brass: Cymbals, gongs and bells add rhythmic accents and metallic tones to the ensemble. The heavier the cymbals, the better the sound. Student Ashwini likes to play a set that weighs three kilograms, "It is like a workout. Of course, the next day the hands hurt. But I love the resonating sound."

Wind: Natural harmonics are provided by brass wind instruments—horns, archaic trumpets and bugles, along with conches, and the tharai, made of long brass pipes with

circular bases. Instruments like Thiruchinnam, Kutta Tharai and Nedun Tharai create majestic sounds that can be heard two kilometers away.

These instruments have no holes or valves to control air flow; relying on incredible skill and breath control to produce different notes. They are played by the movement of the lips. Siva Kanikavel says, "It is difficult to play Nedun Tharai and Kutta Tharai. After a few minutes, we have to stop." In the orchestra, musicians take turns to maintain a continuous melody.

Strings: The Yaal and Veena were mentioned by saint Karaikal Ammaiyar in her ancient poems, but these are not part of Kailaya Vathyam, as their soft tone makes them impractical for processions.

Seashell instruments: The ever ubiquitous conch horn is blown to invoke the attention of the Gods and devas. Sivakumar noted its use in three rites of passage: "First, during infancy, a newborn is fed milk and honey through a small conch; second, the conch is played at weddings; and third, it is sounded at funerals." Conches are blown in different ways as befits the occasion: held sideways to announce war, pointed downward at funerals, and pointed toward the sky for temple events.

Practical Challenges

Transporting and storing instruments is challenging. Some are huge, and all are delicate. Even a slight dent in the metal or a tear in a drum head can be tragic. Hence they

require a lot of proper storage space. Artists often give them to their students to avoid the burden of transporting them from place to place.

The music of the Kailaya Vathyam ensemble is bold and majestic; announcing to the world, far and wide, the arrival of kings and Gods. Playing them in the city can raise objections, as they are loud and offensive to some ears. Sivakumar says, "Over time we've stopped listening to strong sounds (*valisai*) like we did before, whether it was the sound of an elephant's trumpet or the sound of drums; they are not part of our life anymore. The big sounds of Kailaya Vathyam could make even an injured soldier get up and fight. They had life. That sound was life. It was God. We have become too weak and cannot tolerate such sounds. Your neighbor will complain if you play at home."

Temples as Custodians

In literature it is evident there were hundreds of instruments in the ancient Tamil land. During the Chola period, the number of Kailaya Vathyam had reduced to 70, and only about thirty are in use nowadays. Of these instruments, only five to seven are played in the temples.

Ancient temples in Tamil Nadu each have a chief musical instrument for initiating sacred routines such as puja, procession and festivals. For example, the temples at Chidambaram and Tiruvarur play the suda mathalam, a large version of mridangam. And the tharai horn is played at Ekambareshwar temple in Kanchipuram.

Ritualistic musical performances at

temples follow a structured pattern, with the sound of the instruments signaling to those outside the temple what's happening inside. As the Deity's procession progresses, the music changes accordingly.

The Journey of Musicians

For the musicians, playing Kailaya Vathyam is more than playing music; it is a spiritual journey. As Saiva initiates, music is a divine offering to Siva and a way to experience Him. Every musician we spoke to had a fascinating story to share. Sivakumar was a regular office worker until he heard the Vathyam at Thiruvaiyaru thirty years ago. On that holy day, the music impelled him take off his shirt, smear himself with holy ash and dance. His journey into sacred music led him to various places to train and become a devout Saivite. In 2008 he quit his job after his guru's demise and dedicated himself to playing and propagating ancient Tamil music.

In order to touch any of the instruments, one has to become a devotee of Siva, which means wearing a rudraksha, smearing holy ash on sixteen places on the body, becoming a vegetarian and performing puja to the Sivalinga twice a day. Many artists have become more serious about their spiritual life after getting initiated into Saivism. Their paths to music vary. Some are captivated by reading Thevaram and Thiruv-asagam, while others are struck by the music at temples and want to play.

Shanthi, a middle-aged woman, was spellbound by temple music four years ago: "The first time I heard it, I became a slave to the sound. I just wanted to play the instruments

they were playing." She found her guru, Vamadevan Janardan, in Chithalapet, near Chennai. Now she performs with him at temples. Ashwini was learning holy texts as a college student, when she heard about a music training program. She signed up and has been playing now for eight years.

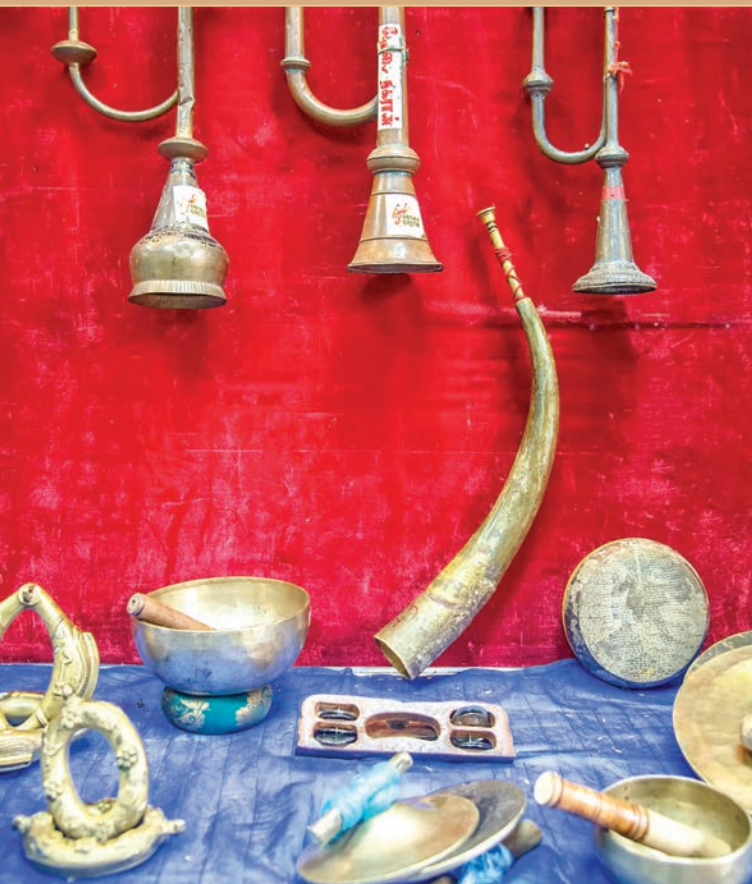
Whether it is the music alone or the connection with Siva through the music, musicians are captivated and see it as the divine will. They simply submit to it. Experienced ones do not distinguish between music and Siva. Siva comes to them through music and they reach Siva through their music.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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

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)



Primordial Instruments of the Gods

(far left to far right) A selection of Kailaya Vathyam instruments. Sounds of the Vathyam are elemental, and their physical limitations make it challenging to blend them harmoniously with other instruments, thereby restricting their scope of use; The Kosainagaran Group (Sivakumar in blue shirt) with their instruments, including the Panchamuga Vathyam, a drum with five faces representing God Siva's five faces; blowing on two brass pipes at the same time; thick clashing cymbals; barrel drums played at the temple





ARTS

Mumbai's Stunning Arts Center

Traditional dance, music, theater, crafts, clothing and more get top-notch exposure at this state-of-the-art complex created by India's wealthiest family

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

NO OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD HAS riches of the arts to compare with India: 5,000-year-old dance forms, music from classical to modern to jazz, hundreds of languages, theater in every dialect and visual arts from ancient to contemporary. Thanks to the astute Ambani family, India's most powerful business house, India now has a gorgeous jewel box in Mumbai to showcase these magnificent arts and performers: the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre. The Centre is shrewdly embedded in the massive Jio World Centre complex, so that culture, commerce and consumerism are intermixed, all next to each other, in order to meet all the needs of a fast-moving international city. Its facade, right next to a waterjet show called Fountain of Joy, welcomes visitors with a larger-than-life cuff bracelet design inspired by India's rich heritage.

This cutting-edge Centre, the epitome of an international world-class theater, started as the small personal dream of a child living

in this crowded city by the sea. Nita Ambani grew up as Nita Dalal in a middle-class family. She was only six years old when she embarked on her love affair with Indian dance. She became passionately dedicated to all of India's art forms. As the wife of Mukesh Dhirubhai Ambani, India's richest billionaire industrialist, Nita Ambani is a philanthropist and chairperson of the Reliance Foundation. She opened this performing arts and multi-disciplinary cultural and exhibition space on March 31, 2023. At the inauguration, she said, "For me, dance is a form of meditation. Something inside me connected so deeply to the world of arts."

Her daughter, Isha Ambani, co-director with her at the Centre, says, "My mom is a philanthropist, educationist and businesswoman, but at her core, her strongest identity is that of a dancer. For more than 50 years she has danced every day. Her passion for the arts is unparalleled, and she has always wanted to create a space dedicated to the heritage and culture of India." Appropriately

enough, NMACC's opening evening was marked by the debut of the theatrical experience, "The Great Indian Musical: Civilization to Nation," celebrating Indian dance, drama, music and art by playwright and director Feroz Abbas Khan.

I was invited to explore the Centre on its off day. With no crowds, I had the run of the place to myself. It was a strange sensation, as if I were the sole inhabitant of this elaborate palace, without the cacophony of multiple voices or the echoes of thousands of footfalls.

Three Show Halls

The Centre has three halls to accommodate all kinds of shows, from the biggest international openings to small, intimate workshops. Here, technology is king. The Grand Theatre is the most advanced in India, with a combination of world-class surround sound, a virtual acoustic system and a programmable lighting system enhanced by 8,400 dazzling Swarovski crystals. It can seat 2,000 people across various price levels; the 18



DUET BY KASI AYSOLA & ARCHANA RAJA
KUCHIPUDI



MITTI DI MAUJ WITH PUNJAB FOLK DANCE ACADEMY
DANCE - FOLK BHANGRA



RASA
HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL
BY VINAY DESAI (SANTOOR) & ISHAAN GHOSH (TABLA)



THE KAAVAD PROJECT'S MAYA
A KAAVAD KATHA PERFORMANCE

WRITER & PERFORMER:
AKHSHAY GANDHI
VISUAL ARTIST:
ROHIT BHASI
KAAVAD MAKER:
DWARKA PRASAD JI
CREATIVE PRODUCER:
ANITA GANDHI



Diamond boxes have a special lounge. Dedicated to the latest trends in design, it uses special absorbent wood that reduces reflections. It also incorporates some of the best user-friendly traits of theaters abroad, such as assistive learning devices and accessibility for the disabled.

At the time of this writing, one could attend a medley of plays in Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi; Kathak, Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam dance performances; and classical musical evenings with noted artists. A walk through the website's calendar, nmacc.com, shows a breathtaking range of events, touching all aspects of Indian cultural

life. There's even The Kaavad Project's *Maya*, a performance in Hindi verse devoted to the ancient Kaavad storytelling tradition, unknown to many even in India. The Grand Theatre also hosts international shows, including Broadway shows from the US.

What about local, home-grown shows? The 250-seat Studio Theatre is just the right space for more intimate performances by new artists as well as established artists. It features a telescopic seating system that allows seat transformation depending on the needs of the event and artistic flexibility. It also features a tension wire grid, the first of its kind in India, for flawless lighting and

Luxury cultural space: (clockwise from opposite page left) Facade of the NMACC fronted by the Fountain of Joy; advertisements for performances in various theaters; the Studio Theatre

rigging during production.

The third performance hall is the 125-seat Cube. With a moveable stage and seating, it can be transformed to host a variety of performances, making it an incubator for emerging Indian artists in new and experimental theater, spoken word, stand-up comedy and music. The space features a laser projection system and an Assisted Listening system. Infrared emitters enhance each performance. The filming and streaming of live performances is facilitated by a fully integrated video recording and production setup and 5G connectivity.

The Art House

Then there's the Art House, which can compare to any world-class museum. This four-story space showcases a shifting array of Indian and global art installations and exhibits. Keeping community building and collaboration at its core, the Art House encourages new talent while enabling India to see the world through a wider cultural lens.

The several prominent public art installations include *Kamal Kunj*, one of the largest commissioned Pichwai paintings at 56 feet tall, depicting scenery from the life of Krishna, and *Clouds*, a 90-piece set





Exhibitions: (clockwise from left) An artist creates Thewa jewellery in a Swadesh pavilion; the Swadesh store sells crafts; a full-blown Kanjivaram fabric weaving station; a painting in the style of Kamal Kunj Pichwai usually depicting scenery from Krishna's life

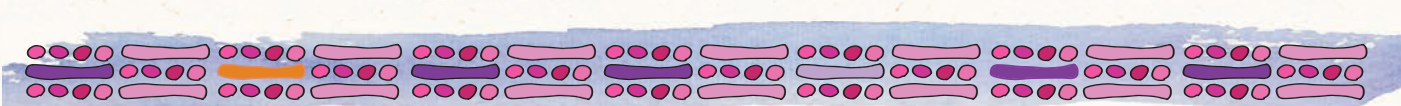
of stainless steel structure mirrors by Yayoi Kusama, displayed on the ground. Other memorable art pieces include Tanya Goel's *Mechanism 12*, in which she uses pigments from the sites of architectural demolitions in and around Delhi, and *Arboretum I*, a work by artist duo Thukral & Tagra, comprising illustrations of over 60 floral species from across India.

A big exhibit in 2023 was *India in Fashion: The Impact of Indian Dress and Textiles on the Fashionable Imagination*. As the noted designer Manish Malhotra says: "Nita has always been an avid supporter of uplifting the age-old crafts that constitute the cultural legacy of our country, and we have been united by our shared love for heritage-driven crafts. The NMACC is where we will get to see more of the untouched arts of India, and this will hopefully be the beginning for the awakening of appreciation for our profound culture."

Perhaps the most important part of the Art House is Swadesh, Nita Ambani's tribute to the forgotten craftspeople of India, who are a dying breed unless efforts such as these strengthen and fortify crafts as a viable option of livelihood. Swadesh, an India-inspired art and craft exposition on the ground-level concourse, celebrates this legacy through an ever-evolving showcase of regional artistry from across the nation. It serves as an interactive platform where master artisans on-site in pavilions share their crafts and stories with visitors from around the world. Ambani has worked with these weavers and craftspeople for a long time through Reliance Foundation. The expositions provide livelihoods for the craftspeople, including the sightless.

This showcase has celebrated over 30 iconic Indian crafts so far, including Pichwai painting, Sozni embroidery and Blue Pottery. In early 2025, visitors will see craftspeople working on Kanjivaram silk of Tamil Nadu, Banarasi brocade from Varanasi, Thewa jewelry of Rajasthan, Thangka paintings from Ladakh and Sikkim, and Sunrise Candles from Maharashtra. Each craft has a fascinating story behind it, going centuries into the past.

Kanjivaram silk sarees, from the sacred town of Kanchipuram, are known for their lush hues, intricate designs and unparalleled craftsmanship. Steeped in legend, the weavers of Kanjivaram are believed to trace their heritage to Sage Markanda, the divine master weaver of the Gods. Each sari is a masterpiece,



meticulously woven using the age-old korvai technique, where borders are crafted with real gold or silver zari. Kanjivaram saris are more than just garments—they are a canvas of cultural storytelling, with motifs drawn from temple architecture, epics and the natural world.

Thewa jewelry, from the vibrant town of Pratapgarh in Rajasthan, is a centuries-old craft that fuses delicate gold designs with colored glass, creating pieces of breathtaking beauty. Today, just 12 families in Pratapgarh continue to preserve this rich legacy. Each piece of Thewa tells a story, depicting scenes of nature, royal life and majestic hunts.

Celebrated globally, these creations have found a place in prestigious museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Sunrise Candles, founded by Dr. Bhavesh Chandubhai Bhatia, is a story of empowerment and social transformation in Maharashtra. This initiative offers employment to the visually impaired, who handcraft a range of candles of beauty and utility.

Sustainability and Visitors

This jewel box is very much a part of the sustainability culture of the future: it is Platinum LEED compliant and surrounded by

over 700 native trees. Nearly 75% of all regularly occupied areas are designed to receive natural daylight, resulting in saving 40% of normal energy costs.

In the end, it's very much a people's house. Anyone from the streets can come enjoy a bird's-eye view of the Fountain of Joy and the stunning water, lights and music show which is held every week from Wednesday through Sunday. They do have to get a pass via their mobiles for entry, but it's free to see this choreographed show with water jets of changing color shooting 45 feet high to synchronized music. In the café, too, items are economically priced, so a middle-class family can eat out together, even without attending a performance.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors, both local and international, have passed through the doors of the arts center to see a show, experience the crafts or stage a family wedding. Aroon Shivdasani of New York, founder of the award-winning Indo-American Arts Council, is one such visitor. She says, "The Nita Ambani Centre is a cultural haven for both artists and audiences. Artists have several smaller auditoriums and rehearsal spaces to work in; while for audiences, it is well worth trotting out to the Centre to indulge in the multiple cultural presentations and then finish off the day with a mouthwatering meal in one of the adjacent restaurants."

From nurturing aspiring artists to showcasing India's crafts and talent to the world and bringing global artists to India, a young girl's improbable dream has become a reality. The Nita Ambani Cultural Centre is a blueprint and a talisman for young Indians yearning to create a new and vibrant India.





SACRED PLACES

Performing Grandpa's Last Rites

A year after his passing, my family traveled to Varanasi to visit the famed Vishwanath Temple and ceremoniously deposit his ashes in the Ganga River

BY KRATHU SANKARANARAYANAN

LAST WINTER MY FAMILY TRAVELED TO the holy city of Varanasi in India. This was a significant trip for us because it marked the one-year death anniversary of my late grandfather. It was also the first time that my American cousins would visit India. After a nearly 24-hour journey from Houston, we got to our first stop in India: Chennai, Tamil Nadu. My family and I stayed with my maternal grandfather, waiting anxiously for our visit to Kashi, as Varanasi is known. We left Chennai around noon and touched down in the holy city later that day. This part of the trip was important for me because it was also the first time that I visited any place outside of Tamil Nadu. My excitement could not be contained.

My first impressions of the city were noteworthy, as it was nothing like I had ever experienced before. The city was different from

any other South Indian city. The hustle and bustle of Varanasi was a constant stimulation of the senses for me. It was loud. There were people everywhere. But the city somehow maintained a spiritual touch in almost every aspect of its core. I saw pilgrims across the city from all parts of the world, a unique experience for me coming from the USA. Colorful murals of Gods and Goddesses dotted the walls of every alley and fence. Each mural depicted visual elements from Hinduism. This reminded me of the murals in Chennai, which depict things from all parts of Tamil culture.

Shortly after landing in the city, I was reunited with my cousins, Ava and Luci, and my paternal grandmother whom I call *Patti*. After meeting with the rest of my family, we took an auto to our first stop, the Kashi Vishwanathan Temple, one of the most iconic temples in the world. I was ecstatic to visit

such a holy place. To get inside the temple required a long procedure, including taking identification and going through security, almost like at an airport. After entering, I was astonished to see how it looked on the inside. The temple had experienced sweeping developments in the last few years, with a large renovation project occurring that transformed it from a small mandir to the remarkable place of worship it is today.

My grandmother recalled the time when the temple was "the size of our living room" and could barely accommodate the number of devotees that would come. After hearing about these large renovations, I asked various parties what they thought of the project. Our tour guide, Moluji, said, "I am very happy to see that this temple is more prominent in Kashi, receiving the recognition it deserves." Having a tour guide in Kashi is a must, especially if you're not from North India. As I



Last rites: (left) the author's parents offering rice balls in the Ganga prior to immersing his grandfather's ashes on the one-year anniversary of his passing; (right) mass cremations underway at the famed Manikarnika Ghat

mentioned before, Kashi is a loud place with lots of people. It is very dense and many of the temples are tucked in alleys, away from the main road. This makes accessing them difficult for people who are not from the city, making a tour guide very helpful.

Compared to many South Indian temples I have visited, the mandir was much more open on the inside. The temple was very well maintained and there was no trash or even dirt in sight! The white tiled floors welcomed me into the abode of Shiva and my excitement could not be contained. We visited each golden mandapam featuring a different Deity, taking the blessings of the Gods and Goddesses at each stop. My cousins were especially amazed as it was their very first time visiting India, stating that they had never seen something like this before. It was a unique experience for us all, giving us a change in scenery and perspective. After visiting the Kashi Vishwanathan Temple, we went back to our hotel and ended our day there.

The second day of our Kashi trip had the most things planned for it. We began the day bright and early, maintained a fast and headed for the Hanuman ghat on the Ganga river. Hanuman ghat differs from other ghats because of the surrounding area's large South Indian

presence, contrasting with the predominant North Indian influence in the area. As we headed to the priest's house, the area around me began to look more and more familiar, as the style of temples resembled that of South India and I could hear Tamil being spoken. The first thing we had planned today was the long-awaited remaining death rites for my late grandfather. This was an emotional time for my entire family, as it marked the dissolution of Thatha's ashes into the Ganga and a final death rite for him. We performed a long *karyam* with the priest in his house, which took around four hours, and then headed to the Ganga River to spread his ashes. The walk

from his house was an emotional trek, with many heartfelt remarks and hugs exchanged between us all. After reaching the Ganga, we boarded a boat along with the priest and began the *pindapradanam*, where my mother made rice balls which were dropped into the water as an offering to my grandfather for nourishment. After these rice balls were placed into the holy river, we braced ourselves for the final task on the boat, which was spreading his ashes into the river. As my father and the priest chanted mantras for protection, my uncle poured the ashes into the river. This was a sorrowful moment for us all; however, it provided my family the well-needed closure. Tears were exchanged, but the thought of our Thatha being in a better place among our ancestors comforted us all.

Soon after this, we reached the Manikarnika cremation ghat. Passing this ghat was a distinctive sight for my cousins and me. Growing up in the Western world, death is viewed as almost a private affair, where people offer support and space to people suffering a loss in their family. When my grandfather passed away in The Netherlands, we held his funeral and memorial with friends and family in the area. The event we had for my grandfather was a humble affair, and people preferred to give my family space during this tough time for us. Many people from my grandfather's family were unable to attend due to their residing in India.

This contrasted with the cul-



Family on pilgrimage: (from left) father Krishnan, aunt Barbara, grandmother Kokila, mother Ayshwarya, brother Sathvik, author Krathu, cousin Ava, cousin Luci and uncle Murali at their hotel



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HINDUSTAN TIMES/SIPA USA/NEWSCOM

City temples: (clockwise from above) Devotees offering Ganga water; entrance to the Vishalakshi Temple; priest worshipping the Siva Lingam at Kashi Vishwanath Temple; crowds surround the temple waiting for darshan; Kalabhairava Temple on a small street

ture of death in India, where it is viewed as another part of life along with birth. People treated funerals not solely as a ceremony of death, but as a celebration of life! Sadhus covered in vibhuti with long dreadlocks meditated along the steps of the ghat as families mourned and cremated their loved ones. An ashy smell filled the air, complemented by the fresh morning breeze, contributing to an overall renewing atmosphere. My cousins and I came to the general consensus that we all had somewhat of an uneasy feeling while passing this area. Maybe it was that we were still processing the loss of our grandfather, or that seeing others grieve the loss of their relatives made us low spirited—but overall we had a strange feeling that we could not come to the bottom of. Despite this, there was still a bittersweet feeling remaining in all of us. Seeing the sadhus meditate on the banks of the Ganga reminded me of the spirituality and the holiness of the area. The energy uplifted my spirit and helped give me true closure, reminding me that nobody can escape the cycle of life and death.

Following this, the boat docked right where we started, and we got ready to take a dip in the river. At this time in the year, the Ganga was freezing cold, but there were still many local people coming and taking bath in the

river. Because of the temperature, there were not nearly as many pilgrims in the area, allowing us to take a more leisurely approach to bathing in the river. I changed my clothes quickly and watched as my father, mother, and brother all seamlessly swam into the river. I, however, had strongly underestimated the actual temperature of the water and thought that it would be much warmer than how it actually was. Coming from Houston, most bodies of water that I swim in are at least 80 degrees, so when I first got into the



DINODIA PICTURE AGENCY

river, it was definitely a shock. I began by slowly entering before quickly realizing the sheer frigidness of the river. Immediately, I ran out of the water, as my cousin said, “screaming like a baby.” After overcoming

my initial fear, I took the river head on and quickly submerged myself into the Goddess Ganga’s abode. The river was cold, but it provided its own warmth through the personal satisfaction it gave in its own unique way. I immersed myself from head to toe three times, with each time becoming easier than the last.

After exiting the river, it soon became apparent to me how badly people are maintaining her. It is such a shame that pilgrims from across the Earth come to take blessings from the Goddess Ganga, but still leave trash everywhere as if it’s nothing. I decided that this is nowhere near okay and filled up a small bag, along with my cousins, with trash collected from the river to dispose of properly. Hopefully, one day we can see an India where the Ganga is as clean as she deserves and rightfully should be. Because of this revelation, I decided to ask some people that were bathing in the river what they thought of this. I asked an older lady named Gayatri who commented, “It is horrible the way people treat the Ganga. Devotees come from all across India and perform various rites, taking the blessings of the Goddess. Rather than cleaning up after themselves, they throw any trash they have off the boats they are on into the water, polluting the

local ecosystem. It has gotten so bad that you barely see any fish or marine life that once inhabited the area. How can people think this is okay to do?” After this insightful conversation with her, we headed back to the hotel to

rest up for the remaining part of the day we had ahead of us.

The next stop in Varanasi was visiting some smaller temples in the area, starting with the Kalabhairava Temple. As an animal lover, I was really looking forward to visiting this temple because Kalabhairava (a form of Siva whose *vahana* or mount is a dog) has always been one of my favorite Gods. I love Him so much that I even named my dog after Him, Bhairavi.

The temple is located in the heart of inner Kashi. Getting there was a lot different from how it was when we visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple, which was easily accessible but had lots of security. Getting to Kalabhairava Temple involved going through many tight and crowded alleyways before even seeing the entrance of the mandir. With my grandmother, this was a bit of a challenge, but with Siva’s grace—and a God-sent rickshaw driver—we were able to make it in time. This temple again was a lot different from anything I had ever seen before. It differed from the large South Indian temples I had visited prior to coming to Kashi.

Passing through the crowded alleyways was a new experience for me; however, it was nostalgic for my New York cousins. It brought them back to the time when they would pass through Manhattan and other crowded parts of that city. After going through all the chaos, we finally reached the temple. We waited in a long line to enter, and finally I was able to see my beloved Kalabhairava.

The inside of the temple was small and filled to the brim with devotees. We did circumambulation and took the blessings of Kalabhairava, after which we participated in a

rather unusual ritual. On the side of the temple there is a priest who, before giving you a rudraksha bead (sacred to Siva), will hit you lightly on your back. I was not informed of this when I arrived, so it was a bit of a shock initially. The priest, after tapping you on your back, ties the bead very tightly onto your arm. This practice is done to quite literally “shake away” any bad omens and energy that you may be possessing. Though it hurt a little bit, I was delighted to know that any bad energy was removed from my spirit.

Next was the Vishalakshi Temple, last on our list. It is a special blend of North and South Indian architectural styles, reflecting the temple’s unique origin story. Despite being geographically located in North India, it was built by Tamils and is one of the most important temples for the Tamil community in Kashi. The three main Goddesses that are worshiped by Tamil people are Meenakshi (whose main temple is in Madurai), Kamakshi (whose main temple is in Kanchipuram), and Vishalakshi here in Kashi. Each of those temples is one of Hinduism’s 51 revered Shakti Peetham temples.

The temple blends in with its local surroundings, only being distinguished by its entryway arch. Upon entering, I quickly noticed the Tamil influence in the temple. I was greeted by the beautiful and colorful arch featuring many symbols that you see in Tamil Nadu. It reminded me of the gopurams, entry towers, that you would see on any temple.

We did the usual procedures that one would do in any temple, including placing money into the offering

box and taking the blessings of the Goddess there. Additionally, my mother was able to talk to the priest and actually got us the opportunity along with my cousins to help perform the abhishekham, sacred bath, for Vishalakshi.

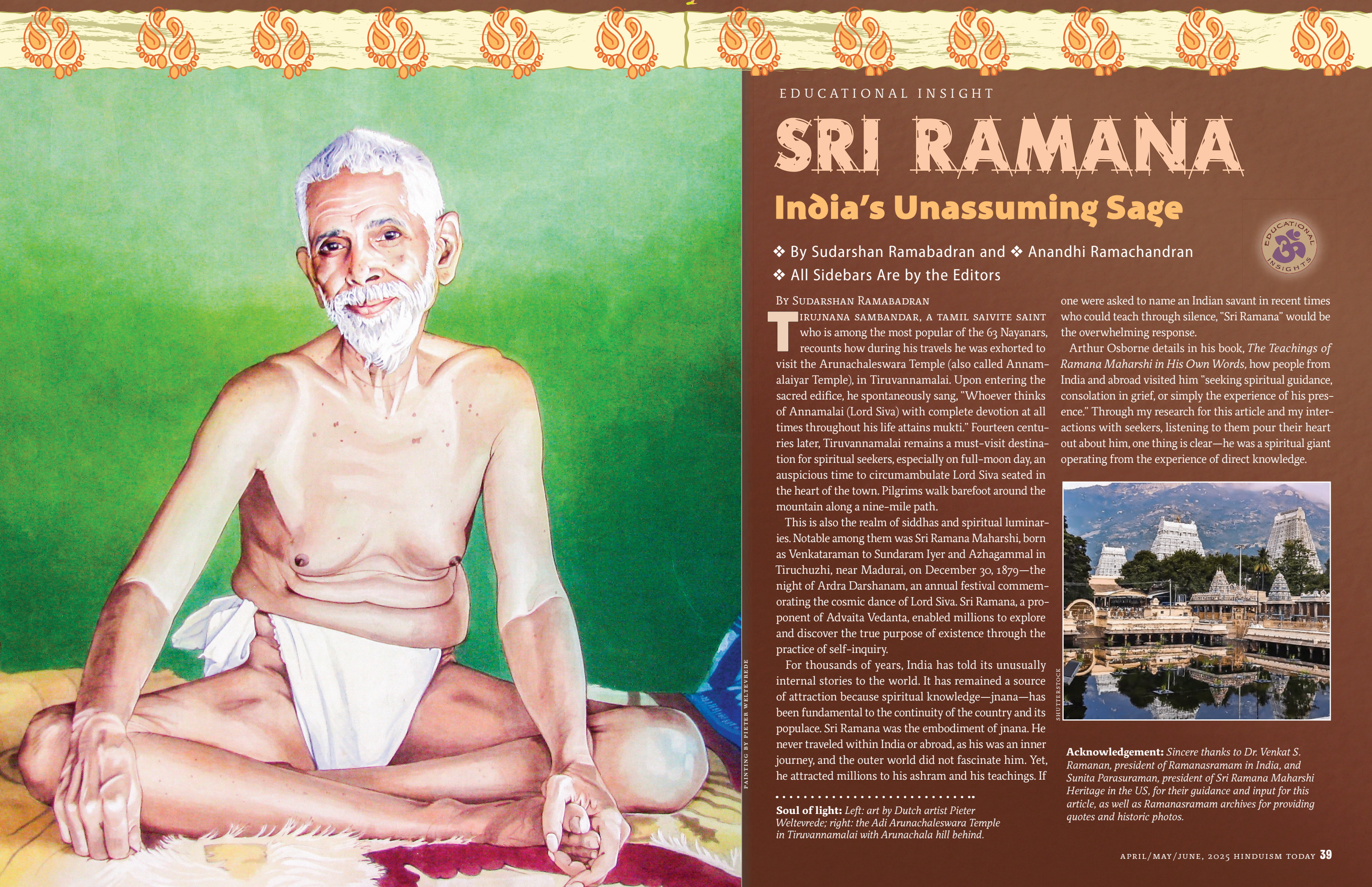
This really tied the whole trip together for my cousins and me because for most of the trip it was just us watching the priests do everything, and we would just take in the blessings. This made me feel much more satisfied and fulfilled about my whole experience, allowing me to truly take in the blessings of my beloved Vishalakshi. We ended our day by eating dinner at a restaurant along the Ganga, and finally going back to our hotel to rest.

Though my visit to Kashi was short, it was one of the most fulfilling and fun trips of my life. I got to bond with my cousins and share such a special trip with them. Many tears and laughs were exchanged across the duration of this visit, and we saw many special things. It was a welcome change in scenery from the green, coconut-tree-filled and humid South India. I thank God everyday that I was able to visit this holy city in India and experience the things that I did, and I cannot wait for my next visit.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krathu Sankaranarayanan is a 10th grader at Ridge Point High School in Missouri City, Texas. He enjoys debating, politics, volunteering and learning new languages and cultures.



PAINTING BY PIETER WELTEVREDE

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

SRI RAMANA

India's Unassuming Sage

❖ By Sudarshan Ramabadran and ❖ Anandhi Ramachandran
❖ All Sidebars Are by the Editors



BY SUDARSHAN RAMABADRAN

TIRUJNANA SAMBANDAR, A TAMIL SAIVITE SAINT who is among the most popular of the 63 Nayanars, recounts how during his travels he was exhorted to visit the Arunachaleswara Temple (also called Annamalaiyar Temple), in Tiruvannamalai. Upon entering the sacred edifice, he spontaneously sang, “Whoever thinks of Annamalai (Lord Siva) with complete devotion at all times throughout his life attains mukti.” Fourteen centuries later, Tiruvannamalai remains a must-visit destination for spiritual seekers, especially on full-moon day, an auspicious time to circumambulate Lord Siva seated in the heart of the town. Pilgrims walk barefoot around the mountain along a nine-mile path.

This is also the realm of siddhas and spiritual luminaries. Notable among them was Sri Ramana Maharshi, born as Venkataraman to Sundaram Iyer and Azhagammal in Tiruchuzhi, near Madurai, on December 30, 1879—the night of Ardra Darshanam, an annual festival commemorating the cosmic dance of Lord Siva. Sri Ramana, a proponent of Advaita Vedanta, enabled millions to explore and discover the true purpose of existence through the practice of self-inquiry.

For thousands of years, India has told its unusually internal stories to the world. It has remained a source of attraction because spiritual knowledge—jnana—has been fundamental to the continuity of the country and its populace. Sri Ramana was the embodiment of jnana. He never traveled within India or abroad, as his was an inner journey, and the outer world did not fascinate him. Yet, he attracted millions to his ashram and his teachings. If

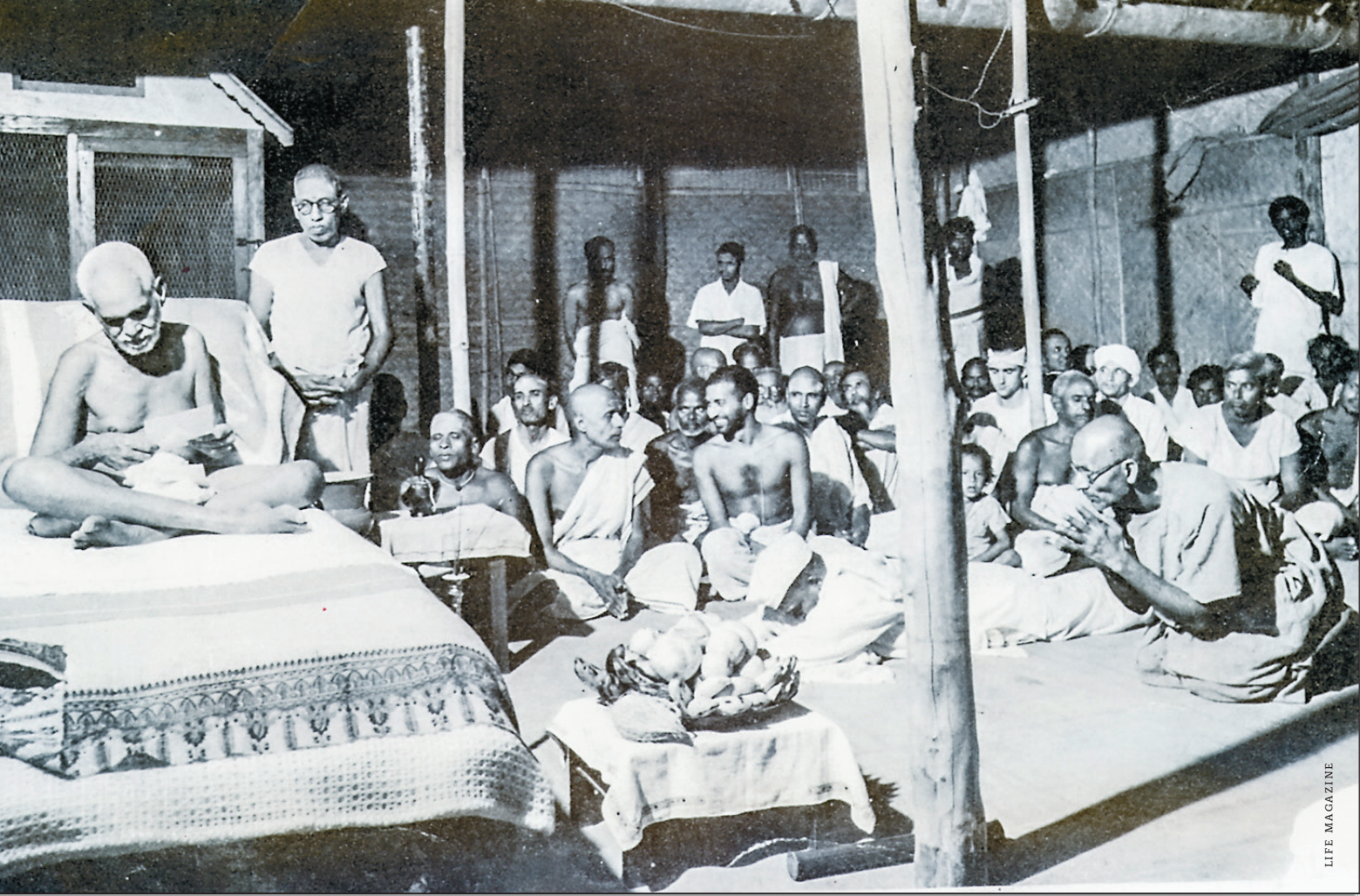
one were asked to name an Indian savant in recent times who could teach through silence, “Sri Ramana” would be the overwhelming response.

Arthur Osborne details in his book, *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, how people from India and abroad visited him “seeking spiritual guidance, consolation in grief, or simply the experience of his presence.” Through my research for this article and my interactions with seekers, listening to them pour their heart out about him, one thing is clear—he was a spiritual giant operating from the experience of direct knowledge.



Acknowledgement: Sincere thanks to Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan, president of Ramanasramam in India, and Sunita Parasuraman, president of Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage in the US, for their guidance and input for this article, as well as Ramanasramam archives for providing quotes and historic photos.

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Soul of light: Left: art by Dutch artist Pieter Weltevrede; right: the Adi Arunachaleswara Temple in Tiruvannamalai with Arunachala hill behind.



Life in the open: Clockwise from left: for most of his life, Ramana sat in an open courtyard as thousands of visitors came for his blessings; earliest photo of him, taken in 1902 when he was twenty-two; meeting with Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, during which not a single word was spoken.

Being with Bhagavan

Ramana did not travel; those who desired wisdom had to come to Arunachala, just as Ramana himself had done. Many are the popular stories told about these visits. Once the great Tamil saint, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, came to visit Ramana. They sat together on the floor for half an hour. Neither uttered a word. Later, in Jaffna, Yogaswami responded to devotees' curiosity about the conversation, "We said all there was to be said."

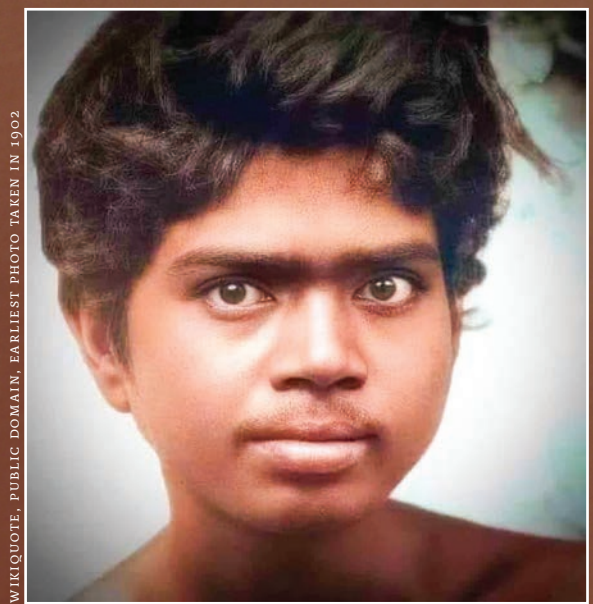
Not all visitors were so enlightened. Once a group of devotees, professional men from Chennai, came in a specially chartered bus to demand the total removal of the ashram management and the institution of a new system. They marched into the hall and sat before the silent sage. He did not speak, and they dared not initiate a conversation. Finally, they left the hall in frustration and returned to Chennai. Afterwards Bhagavan playfully offered, "I wondered what they came here for. Did they come to reform themselves or to reform the ashram?"

The English novelist and playwright Somerset Maugham went to see Sri Ramana in 1936. Upon entering the ashram after a tiring journey, he fainted. He was taken to a hut and remained unconscious. When he opened his eyes, he saw Ramana Maharshi. "He bore himself with naturalness and at the same time with dignity. His mien was cheerful, smiling, polite. His eyes with a gentle benignity rested on my face. His body was absolutely still. He smiled and said, 'Silence is also conversation.'" Somerset Maugham's famous *Razor's Edge* is a story of a seeker who finds such a satguru.

Sri Ramana was intensely focused on whatever was happening, his mind attentive to every detail, whether he was walking, eating or petting the cow. His motherly nature was legendary, as reflected in his care of visitors, feeding them without fail, and refusing to eat until they had been served. Visitors remarked about his frugality, saying he would stoop to retrieve a single grain of rice, and spoke of his almost military punctuality.

Among the many renunciates to visit him was Dilip Kumar Roy, who asked about the need for a guru, as Ramana was often described as having had no guru. "I might have had at one time or another," Ramana replied. "Guru is God or the Self. First a man prays to God to fulfill his desires. Then a time comes when he does not pray for the fulfillment of a desire, but for God Himself. So God appears to him in some form or another, human or non-human, to guide him as a guru in answer to his prayer."

When Ramana was still observing total silence, Sivaprekasam Pillai, a very learned gentleman, asked, "What is the nature of consciousness?" Ramana wrote on his slate, "It is *sat chit ananda* (being, consciousness, bliss) in which there is not even the trace of the 'I' thought. This is also called *mauna* (silence) or *atma* (Self). That is the only thing that is. If the trinity of world, ego and God are considered as separate entities, they are mere illusions, like the appearance of silver in the mother-of-pearl. God, ego and world



Teachings in a Nutshell

Ramana Maharshi's teachings, as presented by Arthur Osborne, are rooted in the profound simplicity of self-inquiry (*atma-vichara*) as the direct path to Self-Realization. At the heart of his philosophy is the idea that the true Self (*Atman*) is eternal, pure consciousness, beyond the mind and body. Realizing this Self is the ultimate goal of life, dissolving the illusory sense of individuality (*ego*) that causes suffering.

The method of self-inquiry revolves around the question, "Who am I?" When thoughts arise, one should trace them back to their source—the "I"-thought, or the ego. By persistently questioning the nature of this "I," the "I" eventually dissolves, revealing the Self as pure awareness. This practice bypasses elaborate rituals, intellectual debate, and ascetic practices, offering a direct and accessible path to liberation.

Ramana emphasized that the ego, or the false sense of individuality, is the root of all ignorance. The mind, identified with the body and external objects, creates dualities such as subject and object, which obscure the ever-present reality of the Self. Liberation (*moksha*) arises when the mind ceases to project these illusions and abides in its source—the Self. He described this state as "silence" (*mauna*), a wordless awareness that transcends intellectual comprehension.

Osborne highlights that for Ramana, the world, body and mind are not ultimately real but are transient manifestations of the one reality—pure consciousness. The world appears to exist only because of the mind, which is itself a reflection of the Self. When the mind is stilled, the world is seen for what it is: a projection, like a dream.

Part 1: Biography of a Sage (1879–1950)

BY ANANDHI RAMACHANDRAN, CHENNAI

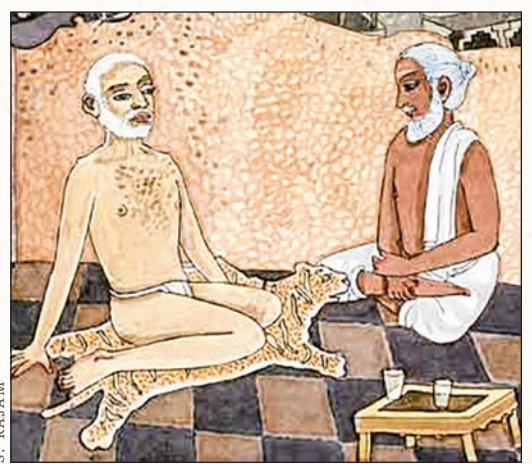
ONCE AS A CHILD I ASKED MY FATHER, "ARE THERE RISHIS LIKE Agastya, Vishwamitra and Vashishta living today? Can we find them residing in forests?" My father took my question seriously. "Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a great sage who lived in recent times and had seen Devi. He lived in Calcutta, his disciple was Swami Vivekananda. You must read about them. A great sage, Ramana Maharshi lives today in Tiruvannamalai. He is a Jivanmukta. He has attained freedom from rebirth."

After a few days, we journeyed to Tiruvannamalai (100 miles southwest of Chennai) and had darshan, sacred sight, of Ramana Maharshi. I remember that it was a crowded day and only vaguely recollect the ashram and people we saw.

Many years later, in 1992, in Trondheim, Norway, I went to visit a friend, and she introduced me to her friend Sol. When I entered Sol's house on the fiord, I saw peaceful eyes looking down on me and felt a thrill. There was the photo of Bhagavan. Sol was devoted to him, as were many non-Indians I met in Europe.

At that moment, I regretted not having had darshan of Sri Ramana

Maharshi again when I was older. He attained Mahasamadhi on April 14, 1950. At the exact moment he left his body, witnesses saw a bright shooting star moving towards Arunachala, the sacred hill above his ashram. I could have gone many times to have his darshan.



Young people do not attach importance to spiritual aspirations, and that opportunity lost was lost forever.

What was his message? It is very simple. He said "Know Thyself." Read his many books in English and Tamil. Again and again it is the same message, "Know Thyself." He taught, "A conscious bliss ensues when one abides as the Self, by inquiring, 'What is the true import of I?' This bliss is spontaneous, indestructible and limitless." His method is called *atma-vichara*, Self-pondering inquiry.

Devotees found him to be the embodiment of compassion. One said, "The most striking feature of his physical structure, which even the casual visitor ought to observe, is his ever-shining eyes. They can be compared to powerful electric lights that always shed a shower of cool and gracious looks upon everybody who came before him."



SHUTTERSTOCK

are really Sivasvarupa (the form of Siva) or Atmasvarupa (the form of the soul).” In an enlightened person, Ramana once explained, “the existence of the ego is only apparent. He enjoys unbroken transcendental experience. This ego is harmless; it is like the skeleton of a burnt rope—though it has a form, it is of no use to tie anything with.”

Boyhood Realization

Venkataraman Iyer (Ramana’s childhood name) was like any other boy. What was being kindled in him nobody knew. He went to school, played with friends, swam in the village tank and always won in any competition or game. He was also devout. He went to Tiruparankundram and used to go around the temple in pradakshina with a Muslim classmate whose name was Sab Jan. “God’s creation is alike. There is no differentiation in creation. God is the same, the apparent differences in God are created by men,” the youngster told his Muslim friend.

In his boyhood years, he was prone to abnormally deep sleep. He recounted, “The boys didn’t dare touch me when I was awake, but if they had any grudge against me they would come when I was asleep, carry me wherever they liked, beat me, paint my face with charcoal, and then put me back, and I would know nothing about it until they told me the next morning.” His father died when he was 12, throwing the family into hardship.

In July of 1986, at age 16, Venkataraman, alone in his home, was overwhelmed by the fear of death. He explained, “The shock drove my mind inwards, and I said to myself mentally ‘Now death has come. What does it mean?’ I dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with

my limbs outstretched stiff as though rigor mortis had set in, and imitated a corpse. ‘Well then,’ I said to myself, ‘this body is dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and burnt and reduced to ashes.’ But with the death of this body, am I dead? Is the body I?” Suddenly the fear of death vanished and he became absorbed in the Self. Venkataraman’s life changed. Later in life, he called his death experience *akrama mukti*, “sudden liberation.”

On August 29 of that year, while writing his grammar lessons, he suddenly put away his books and sat down to meditate. His brother heckled him, “What use is all this to such a one?” Venkataraman recognized the truth of this remark and decided to leave the house. He took three rupees and boarded a train, not knowing its destination.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Three days later, he arrived at the great Arunachaleswara Siva temple of Tiruvannamalai, below Arunachala Hill. He entered a trance-like state of tapas in a nearby cave. Day by day his austerities increased. So deep was his meditation, so removed from body consciousness, that ants had eaten into his skin; the scars could be seen throughout his life. Nearly a year later, his uncle Nellaiappan found him. Venkataraman would neither speak nor hear what was said. Nellaiappan notified the boy’s mother, who arrived shortly. Initially rebuffed by her son, she and her younger son were later allowed to stay.

More traditional devotees did not like Bhagavan’s mother and brother staying with him. Once Seshadri Swamigal, an ascetic in Tiruvannamalai, joked about it, calling Ramana a householder. In India, Hindus believe that renouncing family life is the first step in the quest for the truth of the Self. So, many people thought it odd that the yogi’s mother lived in the ashram. Today the ashram’s



A sacred town: Clockwise from left: Aerial view of the famed Annamalaiyar Temple (a.k.a. Arunachaleswara), one of five elemental temples to God Siva; Skandashram, where Ramana lived for years during his time of sadhana, before Ramanasramam was founded; an Indian stamp commemorating his life.

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administration remains in the family.

When his mother died, Ramana said, “She did not pass away. She was absorbed,” and a samadhi shrine was built for her. Around her tomb grew the ashram, which has become a pilgrim center for international devotees.

Abode of Peace

The ashram is not a desolate place now. There are auto rickshaws waiting outside the gate to take any devotee anywhere he wants to go. There is a branch of the post office close by to handle the heavy mail the ashram receives and sends every day. When Ramana was alive, a letter addressed “Maharshi, India” would reach him. As I enter the precincts of the ashram, I sense the all-pervading shanti. The office rooms are on the right. We go straight to a big hall where a few ladies are stringing garlands and softly talking. A German lady comes in with a little girl. The other women greet the child with smiles and give her a few flowers. She is delighted.

One of the women tells me that this woman from Germany has moved near the ashram because she wants her little daughter to grow up in this atmosphere. She is fortunate. The child will absorb the values of peace, worship and meditation. She must be only six years old, but she is gentle and seems so content for her age.

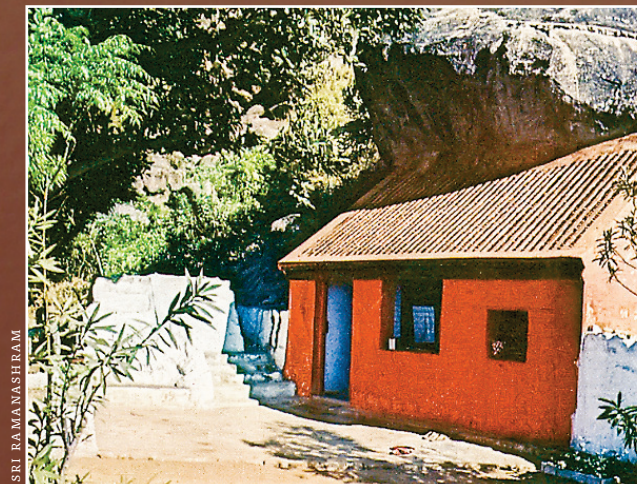
They do puja for Maharshi. Ramana did not believe in rituals. He did not believe in orthodoxy. He mocked his mother for being so orthodox even in food habits. She didn’t take onions because it was not sattvic food. Bhagavan teased her by saying, “Mind that onion! It is a great obstacle to moksha.”

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“Realization is not acquisition of anything new, nor is it a new faculty. It is only removal of all camouflage.”

The flowers are blooming at the back. We go to the hall where Ramana Maharshi gave darshan to his devotees. In his later years he wanted to be accessible to all. There is pin-drop silence. People are sitting on the floor with closed eyes. It is seldom easy to control the mind, but in this room devotees seem tranquil, and there is peace on their faces.

Many Flowers

Ramana left no formal successor, but his teachings today guide many thousands around the world. Some read his books and visit the ashram; others follow a teacher who perpetuates Ramana’s wisdom. “What is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it,” Ramana wrote on his slate. “Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.” 🍵



SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Timeline

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi’s journey to Skandashram was a significant chapter in his life of spiritual renunciation. The story begins when, at the age of 16, Ramana had a profound “near death” experience in Madurai. This awakening inspired him to leave his family home and travel to the sacred Arunachala Hill in Tiruvannamalai in 1896.

For the next several years, Ramana immersed himself in intense meditation, initially residing in the Thousand-Pillar Hall and Patala Lingam of the Arunachaleswarar Temple. His sadhana during this time was so deep that he became oblivious to physical needs, often sitting in silence, absorbed in the Self. From the temple, Ramana moved to various caves on Arunachala, including the Virupaksha Cave, which became his primary residence for 16 years (1900–1916). This cave, named after a 13th-century saint, offered seclusion for meditation and attracted a growing number of devotees who sought Ramana’s guidance.

In 1916, he moved to Skandashram, a small stone hermitage (see photo above) further up Arunachala Hill, named after Skanda (a name for Lord Murugan). At Skandashram, he was joined by his mother, Alagammal, who had renounced worldly life to serve him. Here, Ramana’s teachings flourished, and the ashram became a center for seekers, combining the serene beauty of Arunachala with the simplicity of Ramana’s presence.

Alagammal passed away in 1922, and her samadhi was built at the foot of Arunachala. Following her death, Ramana relocated to the site of her shrine, which later became Ramanasramam, marking the end of his time at Skandashram. Today, that humble structure remains a tranquil place of pilgrimage, accessible by a steep trail, offering a glimpse into Ramana Maharshi’s austere early life of contemplation and the legacy he left for spiritual aspirants.



LIFE MAGAZINE, 1950

Part 2: Ramana's Philosophy: Be as You Are

BY SUDARSHAN RAMABADRAN

The question that kindled interest in Sri Ramana as a young boy and encouraged him to engage in his profound internal journey was "Who Am I?" (*Naan Yaar?* in Tamil). Today, if one were to do a search on Ramana Maharshi online, this question would often accompany his name.

Sri Ramana did not propound a new philosophy. Instead, he continued the legacy of Sri Veda Vyasa, Adi Shankaracharya, and countless other rishis, helping seekers realize their spiritual potential. When Bhagavan was asked if his teachings were the same as Shankara's, he responded, "Bhagavan's teaching is an expression of his own experience and realization. Others find that it tallies with Sri Shankara's." It is pertinent to mention here that Sri Ramana referenced Adi Shankara's *Vivekachudamani* when defining the Self.

In response to a devotee's question on why self-inquiry alone be considered the direct path to realization, Sri Ramana said: "Because other paths except self-inquiry presuppose the retention of the mind as the instrument for following it, and it cannot be followed without the mind. The ego may take different and more subtle forms at different stages of one's practice, but it is never destroyed. The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind by methods other than Self-inquiry is like a thief turning policeman to catch the thief that is himself.

Self-inquiry alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exist and enables one to realize the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute." This is recorded in Arthur Osborne's seminal biography, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*. Arthur explained that the self-inquiry Sri Ramana encouraged differs from what psychologists recommend, in that true self-inquiry is intended to go "behind the mind to the Self from which it arises."

Path to the Self

Sri Ramana was clear that ridding ourselves of the ego is crucial in discovering the sacred, spiritual self. Many seekers who explain his teachings emphasize that he wanted them to believe that there is no "other." It is not a billion "I(s)" that he is referring to, rather there is one I which is the substratum of all creation. He urged seekers to dig deep within themselves and remove the notion of wrong thoughts and deeds, whether related to our physical bodies at the gross level or our thoughts at the subtler level.

A cursory reading of Sri Ramana and his interactions with devotees might suggest that he did not base his teachings on any particular philosophy, but it is clear that it aligns with Advaita Vedanta,

Honoring the knower: In this photo that appeared in *Life* magazine in 1950, Saiva priests present an offering tray to Bhagavan seeking blessings; Ramana with his forehead covered in holy ash.

though he worshiped God as Siva devoutly and had a deep affinity for the Saiva Siddhanta of Saint Tayumanavar and the 63 Saiva Nayanmar saints.

In Sri Ramana's words, Self-awareness is inherent in seekers. "The state we call realization is simply being oneself, not knowing anything or becoming anything. If one has realized, he is that which alone is, and which alone has always been. He cannot describe that state. He can only be That. Of course, we loosely talk of Self-Realization for want of a better term."

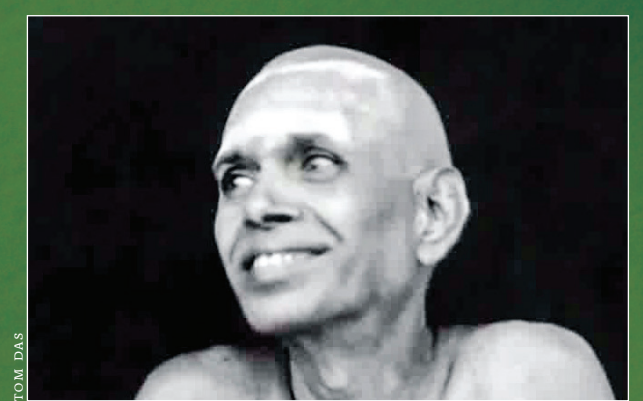
Ramana said, "Atman [the Self] is realized with *mruta manas* (dead mind), i.e., mind devoid of thoughts and turned inward. Then the mind sees its own source and becomes That. It is not as the subject perceiving an object. When the room is dark, a lamp is necessary to illumine, and eyes to cognize objects. But when the sun is risen, there is no need of a lamp, and the objects are seen; and to see the sun no lamp is necessary, it is enough that you turn your eyes towards the self-luminous sun. Similarly with the mind. To see the objects, the reflected light of the mind is necessary. To see the Heart, it is enough that the mind is turned towards it. Then the mind loses itself and the Heart shines forth" (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, by Munagala S. Venkataramiah, Talk No. 99, Nov. 19, 1935).

According to David Godman, a prolific author who was drawn to Sri Ramana's teachings and then to India, he consistently urged seekers and devotees to ponder two questions: "What is this thing inside you that is aware of your thoughts? What is this thing inside you that claims it is perceiving objects outside of yourself?" Godman explains that it is not some conclusion that Sri Ramana wants us to draw; rather he wants us to identify with that state of consciousness through deep self-inquiry. This understanding is essential to experience true happiness.

Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan, president of Sri Ramanasramam, explained the importance of jnana marga, knowledge of the Self, as the sole purpose of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy during an interview with me. "Jnana marga is the direct path. It has stood the scrutiny of time and is eternal. However, Self-Realization is only possible through sincere practice, even though it is the easiest path. Many devotees and mature seekers of Sri Ramana Maharshi have experienced being in the Self, but this realization comes only with practice." Dr. Venkat explained that the idea of Self-knowledge resonates strongly in today's world, a fact supported by the significant increase of Sri Ramana devotees even in Middle Eastern countries and China, without any evangelizing.

Inquire Within

According to Vedanta, there are five sheaths that cover the Self. In Sanskrit, these are known as *annamaya kosha* (food sheath), *pranamaya kosha* (sheath of prana or life), *manomaya kosha* (mind sheath), *vijnanamaya kosha* (knowledge or wisdom sheath), and *anandamaya kosha* (bliss sheath). Sri Ramana teaches that it is necessary not only to acknowledge these sheaths but also to peel them away. The ultimate goal is to understand that the "I" that we seek to discover is the underlying Reality that serves as the substratum of all existence. According



TOM DAS

Bhagavan's Take on Bhakti

While most historians classify Ramana as an Advaita Vedantin, his special affections for the Tamil Nayanars and Tayumanavar's songs and his building of a Siva temple at Ramanasramam indicate that "Advaita Siddhantin" may be a fitting category. This term denotes a non-dualistic interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta, as expressed in the ancient *Tirumantiram* of Rishi Tirumular, a form of monistic theism which emphasizes the unity of the individual soul (jiva) with the Supreme (Siva).

"Bhakti is the mother of Jnana. The intense devotion of the devotee eventually leads him to the path of Self-enquiry and wisdom" (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 272).

"The purpose of all religious worship is to focus the mind on the Divine. A murti is not just stone; it represents the Divine Presence, and worship can lead one beyond form to the formless Self" (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, entry dated 7-3-1946).

"Bhakti is not different from mukti. Bhakti is being as the Self. One is always that. He realizes it by the means he adopts. What is bhakti? To think of God. That means only one thought prevails to the exclusion of all other thoughts, so the Bhakta is the Jnani with the only difference that in the Jnani's case, the ego has resolved itself into the Self, and in the Bhakta's case, the ego retains itself" (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 28).

In the course of your worship, the worship becomes deep and intense and then the mind becomes completely absorbed in the One Being who is beyond name and form. That is realization of the Self. The path of devotion (bhakti marga) or the path of knowledge (jnana marga) ultimately lead to the same goal—liberation" (*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11-1-1946).



to Sri Ramana, self-inquiry is “the one infallible means, the only direct way, to realize the unconditioned, absolute being that you really are.”

Sunita Parasuraman, president of Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritagage, a registered non-profit in the United States (also a former finance executive at Meta [Facebook] and currently on their board of directors) explained the significance of Sri Ramana’s core teachings: “Advaita Vedanta says the *ahamkara*, or ego, is the root cause of our forgetfulness of our true Self, the Atma. What is special about Bhagavan is how he presented these teachings in the form of self-inquiry, emphasizing tracing the ego to the ‘I’ thought. This is a powerful tool. Otherwise, ahamkara or ego seems like a nebulous concept—we may understand the theory, but find it hard to put in practice and transcend the ego. By giving us the clue, tracing the source of the ‘I’ thought, Bhagavan brought the loftiest philosophy within the realm of personal experience.” Sunita was inspired by the writings of Sri Ramana Maharshi 20 years ago, and today her family is deeply anchored in his teachings and life.

Arthur Osborne notes that while Ramana emphasized Self-Realization as the sole goal, he also identified other means of spiritual progress, including satsang, which is profoundly encouraged in Hindu culture. Sri Ramana echoed the views of Sri Adi Shankara regarding the importance of associating with fellow seekers and sages and encouraged his followers to cherish such connections. Shankara wrote, “Through the company of the wise or the good, there arises non-attachment; from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion; where there is freedom from delusion, there



The ashram today: Clockwise from left: In the Samadhi Hall, Saiva priests offer milk to a Sivalingam, with a bronze murti of Ramana behind; the ashram compound with its several buildings and temples

is abidance in self-knowledge, which leads to freedom while alive” (*Bhaja Govindam*, verse 1).

Sri Ramana also advocated the practice of pranayama, but only under proper guidance from a guru who is specialized in this practice. He taught that all forms of breath control are a means to control the mind, with the end goal being to dive inward.

Maintaining silence was synonymous with Sri Ramana. Many stories recount contemporary saints meeting Sri Ramana without exchanging a single word. When asked after the meeting about the nature of their discussions, they would simply state that everything was said that needed saying. Such was the power of silence in the presence of these masters. Regarding diet, Sri Ramana recommended sattvic, vegetarian and non-stimulating foods for seekers. He refused to share

his preferences to the cook, eating whatever fare was prepared for his visitors. On japa, he said mental japa is preferable to verbal japa.

He was a votary of bhakti yoga and karma yoga, as long as they did not encourage the seeker to wander from the path of self-inquiry. Sunita testified, “By following Bhagavan’s path of combining self-inquiry with karma yoga unobtrusively, I have been able to discharge my duties with the greatest efficiency—as a mother, wife, daughter



at home and a financial executive at work. The secret as taught by Bhagavan is to not identify with any of these roles and to simply perform them as actors in a play,” she offered. “Tasked with managing billions of dollars at all the corporations I have worked at, I often remember Bhagavan’s illustration of a cashier handling large sums of money efficiently without emotional entanglement to explain how work should be performed with a detached attitude. Such an attitude helps me enjoy work and execute it well,” she said.

In significant ways, the sage of Tiruvannamalai cut through all of the opaque language of Vedanta. It was this radical simplicity that brought many to his feet. He cautioned them to not become lost in learning, to not be fascinated by the theater of the Divine, instead to simply be and see. Few, if any, have so ruthlessly condensed the

essence of the path to enlightenment.

Sri Ramana Maharshi gave clear instruction on karma and destiny, emphasizing that while destiny (*prarabdha karma*) influences the body and mind, the true Self remains unaffected. “Find out who it is to whom destiny or free will matters. While you are in the body, there will always be karma affecting you. But see if you are in the body. Understand the Self. Then destiny will not worry you” (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 427).

He wanted all of humankind, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, to attain the highest, and did not advocate renunciate life for all. If asked by devotees what is the purpose of Self-Realization, he promptly answered, “Self-Realization is the final goal, and itself the purpose.”

The Sage’s Forty Sutras

Upon the humble request of Sri Muruganar, an ardent devotee, Sri Ramana Maharshi wrote the essence of his teachings in poetic Tamil. Below are ten verses selected from that historic work that convey the essence of his philosophy. The English translations are considered to have been composed by Sir Arthur Osborne. (drawn from *sriamanamaharishi.com*)

Verse 2: All religions postulate the three fundamentals, the world, the soul and God, but it is only the one Reality that manifests Itself as these three. One can say, “The three are really three” only so long as the ego lasts. Therefore, to inhere in one’s own Being, where the “I,” or ego, is dead, is the perfect State.

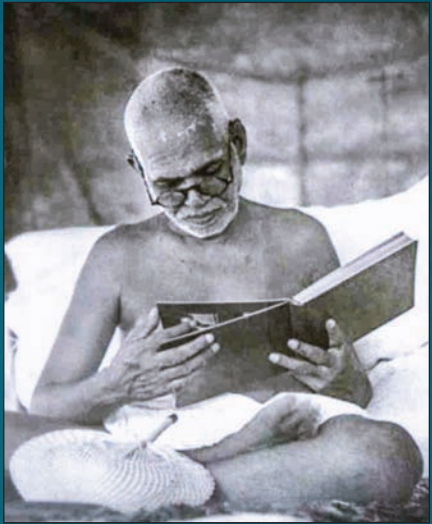
Verse 3: “The world is real;” “No, it is a mere illusory appearance;” “The world is conscious;” “No;” “The world is happiness;” “No.” What use is it to argue thus? That State is agreeable to all, wherein, having given up the objective outlook, one knows one’s Self and loses all notions either of unity or duality, of oneself and the ego.

Verse 6: The world is nothing more than an embodiment of the objects perceived by the five sense-organs. Since, through these five sense-organs, a single mind perceives the world, the world is nothing but the mind. Apart from the mind, can there be a world?

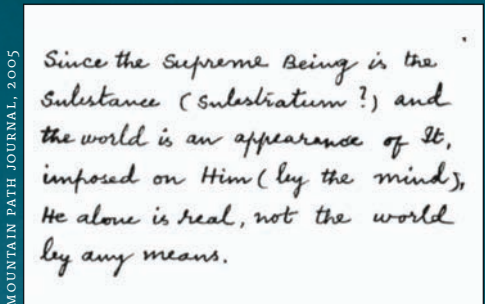
Verse 7: Although the world and knowledge thereof rise and set together, it is by knowledge alone that the world is made apparent. That Perfection wherein the world and knowledge thereof rise and set, and which shines without rising and setting, is alone the Reality.

Verse 14: If the first person, “I,” exists, then the second and third persons, “you” and “he,” will also exist. By enquiring into the nature of the “I,” the “I” perishes. With it, “you” and “he” also perish. The resultant state, which shines as Absolute Being, is one’s own natural state, the Self.

Verse 24: This inert body does not say “I.” Reality-Consciousness does not emerge. Between the two, and limited to the measure of the body, something emerges as “I.” It is this that is known as chit-jada-granthi (the knot between the Conscious and the inert), and also as bondage, soul, subtle-body, ego, samsara, mind and so forth.



Verse 26: If the ego is, everything else also is. If the ego is not, nothing else is. Indeed, the ego is all. Therefore, the inquiry as to what this ego is, is the only way of giving up everything.



Verse 27: The State of non-emergence of “I” is the state of being THAT. Without questing for that State of the non-emergence of “I” and attaining It, how can one accomplish one’s own extinction, from which the “I” does not revive? Without that attainment how is it possible to abide in one’s true State, where one is THAT?

Verse 30: If one enquires Who am I? within the mind, the individual “I” falls

A master of consciousness: Left: Ramana was an avid reader, especially of scripture and letters from devotees; Right: a rare example of Bhagavan’s handwriting in English.

down abashed as soon as one reaches the Heart, and immediately Reality manifests itself spontaneously as “I-I.” Although it reveals itself as “I,” it is not the ego but the Perfect Being, the Absolute Self.

Verse 33: It is ridiculous to say either “I have not realized the Self” or “I have realized the Self;” are there two selves, for one to be the object of the other’s realization? It is a truth within the experience of everyone that there is only one Self.



Part 3: Impact & Legacy

BY SUDARSHAN RAMABADRAN

The profound words of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the #“crown jewel of Vedanta,” continue to reverberate to this day. In my opinion, one of the prominent reasons for this is that he was accessible to all. Today, through physical and digital mediums, his teachings are preserved and communicated to seekers, who become encouraged to realize their true potential. Many prominent figures in the Indian socio-political sphere, as well as spiritual leaders and film actors, have been influenced by him. People in India and around the world have embraced the principles of Advaita Vedanta through his teachings.

Sri Ramanasramam

The primary institution preserving Ramana’s legacy and enabling millions of seekers to glimpse the rishi is Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai. Founded in 1922, it remains an essential guide for spiritual seekers navigating the path of self-knowledge. Reading accounts from devotees reveals a shared belief that Bhagavan’s presence continues to permeate the Ashram, guiding seekers even today. I experienced this personally during a visit in 2018, accompanied by youth from various districts of Tamil Nadu.

Even though I have visited the center many times, reading about how every block, hall, library and goshala was built is emotionally moving. Every aspect reflects Sri Ramana’s vision, and the authorities continue to uphold his legacy with great care, sensitivity and respect. Through their efforts, countless devotees have access to the sage’s teachings and the journey toward Self-Realization. Upon entering

this sacred space, one is naturally drawn into silence. It’s as though the sage is there, inviting us to dive deep into the journey of unfolding through self-inquiry.

Seekers from India and abroad converge here. Some visit and some stay. The Ashram offers accommodation for seekers in a 200-room facility, including sattvic food for nourishment of the body, and nourishment of the mind through the teachings. You will miss an incredible experience if you do not visit the Ashram archives, which preserves a diverse collection of everyday objects he used, and records of his interaction with devotees. Also be sure to check the schedule for events, spiritual happenings and Carnatic music concerts at the auditorium.

The year 2023 marked 100 years since the establishment of Sri Ramanasramam, which began as a simple thatched roof and was built up over the decades by dedicated followers. On May 19, 1922, Alagammal, his mother, passed away. Her body was interred at the base of Arunachala Hill, following the traditional rites as recorded in Tirumular’s *Tirumantiram*. A simple shrine was erected over her tomb. In December of that year, Ramana moved from Skandashram into a modest hut near the shrine, marking the humble beginnings of the ashram. Devotees began to gather around him, leading to the construction of thatched huts to accommodate the growing number of followers. By 1924, two additional huts had been constructed—one opposite the mother’s samadhi and another to the north.

In 1928, the Old Hall was constructed as Maharshi’s residence and the central space for his teachings, meditation and interaction with devotees. After his passing in 1950, the ashram expanded to include

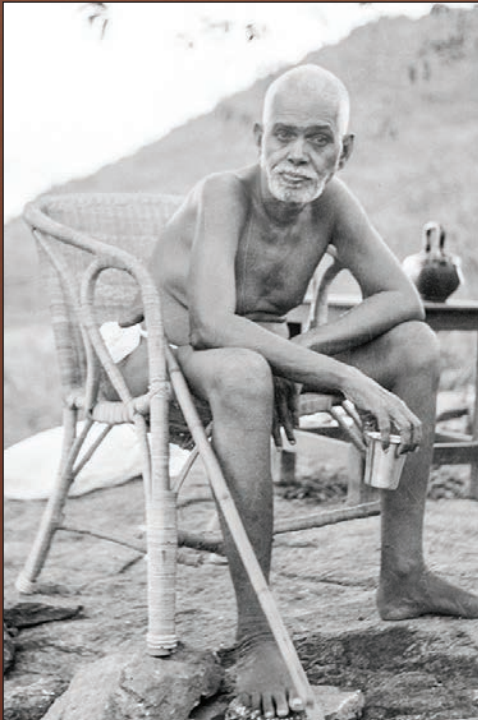
Darshan: Encountering the Sage

Paul Brunton, a British philosopher and journalist, documented his meeting with Sri Ramana Maharshi in his book *A Search in Secret India*.

“There is something in this man which holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him. I become aware of a silent, resistless change which is taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I have prepared with such meticulous accuracy drop away. It does not matter now whether he answers them or not. My heart beats a little faster; my breathing slows down. My thoughts are stilled. I know that I am in the presence of an extraordinary man. This is the only feeling that comes to me.”

Mercedes de Acosta, an American poet and playwright, visited Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1938.

“When I first saw him, he was seated on a divan in the lotus position. He was a slender, finely built man, with the most serene face I have ever seen. His eyes were large and luminous. I entered the hall and sat down with the other devotees. For a long while, no one spoke. The silence was profound. Then the Maharshi turned his eyes toward me. It was a strange, impersonal gaze, as if he looked through me rather than at me. Yet I felt the immense power of his presence.”



the Samadhi Hall, the New Hall (for gatherings), the dining hall, Veda Patasala, visitor accommodations, etc.

The ashram’s administration was overseen by Sri Ramana’s younger brother, Niranjanananda Swami, until his death in 1953. Leadership then transitioned to T.N. Venkatraman, then to his son, V.S. Ramanan. In 2020, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan, son of V.S. Ramanan, continued this legacy as president.

The Meditation Hall (a.k.a Samadhi Hall) is the spiritual heart of Sri Ramanasramam. At its center is the Samadhi Shrine of the Maharshi, offering a serene space for meditation, reflection, stillness, pujas to Bhagavan, and other spiritual activities. The hall is open daily from 5am to 12:30pm and from 2 to 9pm.

Another sacred space is the Matrubeswarar Temple, dedicated to Maharshi’s mother. Originally a simple shrine erected over Alagammal’s samadhi in 1922, it was later expanded under Bhagavan’s guidance and consecrated (kumbhabhishekam) on March 17, 1949, in his presence.

Ashram Seva

The Veda Patasala was established in 1934 to provide instruction in the *Krishna Yajur Veda*, offering an annual certificate course to young priest trainees. Through Narayana Seva, the Ashram provides 700,000 meals annually, and a medical dispensary offers quality healthcare for all. The center has renovated various temples in and around Tiruvannamalai, including the grand Arunachaleswara Temple, the smaller and older Adi Arunachaleswara Temple, Pachaimman Temple and Durga Temple. Prominent festivals organized and observed at the Ashram include Vidya Homam, Samvatasara Abhishekam and Karthigai Dipam.

Representative of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s love for all beings, the Ashram goshala cares for 200 bovines, including stud bulls, heifers, calves and milking cows of various Indian breeds, such as dharpakar, singhi and kir. The milk they provide nourishes

Life alone, life shared: Clockwise from above: Elders of the community and their students gather around Ramana as a young sadhu (seated at center) for a photo in the ashram; he loved to take walks around the region, to have time to himself.

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Ashram residents and visitors. In 2017, a facility for retired cows was established. In addition, a home for monkeys is maintained, honoring Sri Ramana’s love for and connection with monkeys, goats, squirrels and all animals.

Global Centers

The intellectual legacy of Sri Ramana is preserved through the Ashram Granthalaya (library), containing 30,000 volumes in multiple languages. These include Bhagavan’s writings and teachings, biographies and reminiscences, articles and essays, audio and video recordings, photographs and art, with many resources available online. Dr. Ramanan explained, “As part of our important efforts to serve Sri Ramana, we have translated 12 to 15 of his most significant books into nearly all major global and Indian languages.” Books from the sage’s personal collection, such as *Skanda Mahapuranam* and *Siva Mahapuranam*, are kept here.

The Ashram reaches out to seekers worldwide through the famous *Sarangathi* e-newsletter and the *Mountain Path* quarterly journal (also available as an app). Seekers are connected globally through social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. By official numbers, the Ashram has 50,000 followers on Facebook and one million digital followers across 11 Indian languages. The app Parayana provides a selection of mantras for seekers to chant anywhere, anytime. There is also a 24/7 online radio station called Voice of Arunachala.

The main centers beyond Tiruvannamalai are Ramana Satchidananda Mandali in Mumbai (established in 1923); Ramana Kendras in New Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai; and Arunachala Ashram in New York City. Sri Ramana’s thoughts reverberate globally, with roughly 100 centers in 65 countries, including the US, Switzerland, Mauritius, Japan, France, Spain and Eastern Europe. Dr. Ramanan explained that groups interested in



setting up a satellite center affirm their commitment to promoting the teachings and abide by specific rules, such as refraining from demanding funds. Once aligned, these centers are listed on the Sri Ramanasramam website. Some have physical facilities, while others are informal gatherings of devotees, often on weekends. Global satsangs, Jayanti, Aradhana Day and Advent Day are organized to connect devotees worldwide.

Sunita Parasuraman leads the Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage Centre in the United States, a nonprofit that also supports the initiatives of Sri Ramanasramam in India. Sunita explained, “Dr. Venkat Raman returned to India in 2020 to assume the role of president of Sri Ramanasramam and requested that I establish a nonprofit unit here to support the Ashram. I gladly accepted this responsibility. Serving Bhagavan and his Ashram is the greatest calling of my life.”

Legacy & Influence

In December of 2024, director Bombay Chanakya launched a web series titled “Maharshi.” The episodes not only traverse the past, but also speak about the present global influence of Sri Ramana. The series has been airing every Sunday on Sri Sankara TV and is also available on the creator’s YouTube and Facebook channels. Similarly, there are documentaries on Sri Ramana Maharshi on YouTube that have clocked a million views. One that comes to mind is “Jnani,” which is highly recommended, even by my family, as a must-watch.

Many famous individuals have drawn inspiration from Sri Ramana Maharshi. Notable cinema figures include icons Rajinikanth and Ilayaraja, who have publicly acknowledged his spiritual influence on their personal and professional lives. Rajinikanth’s philanthropy in Tiruvannamalai and Ilayaraja’s humble devotion during Ashram visits reflect their reverence. Other luminaries, such as freedom fighter Subramania Bharati, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and India’s Home Minister Amit Shah, were also profoundly impacted.

Early devotees included Major Chadwick, a World War I veteran; Mrs. Taleyarkhan, a Parsi; S. S. Cohen from Iraq; and Dr. Hafiz Sayed from Persia. Visitors also came from America, France, Germany, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Poland and other countries, as noted by Arthur Osborne. Among them was Maurice Frydman, a Polish Jew who

converted to Hinduism. Among the first Western devotees was F. H. Humphreys, a police officer.

Sri Ramana’s Indian devotees included Sivaprakasham Pillai, an officer in the Revenue Department of the South Arcot District; Natesa Mudaliar, a teacher; Muruganar; and Ganapati Sastri, also known as Ganapati Muni. Sri Ramana called him Kavyakanta, meaning “one with poetry in his throat.” It was he who coined the title “Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.”

Ram Mohan noted in the centenary souvenir that “prominent visitors included mahatmas like Shri Shankaracharya of Puri, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda, Swami Chinmayananda, Sri Yogi Lakshman Joo and Sri Chidbhavananda, among several others.” It was inspiring to learn that Sri Ramana’s influence continues to shape the Advaita Vedanta legacy through several acharyas and other spiritual lineages.

Publications

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, former Vice President of India, wrote in his brief foreword for Arthur Osborne’s biography of the sage, “Sri Ramana Maharshi gives us the outlines of a religion based on the Indian scriptures which is essentially spiritual without ceasing to be

LEARN MORE

- ❖ **Sri Ramanasramam:** The Ashram’s official website, featuring his teachings, writings, photos and details about ashram activities. www.gururamana.org
- ❖ **Who Am I:** A Q&A with Ramana Maharshi on his essential teachings (pdf). www.bit.ly/WhoAmIRamana
- ❖ **The Ashram’s YouTube channel:** www.youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam
- ❖ **Biography by Arthur Osborne:** *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*—widely available online
- ❖ **Video Documentary, by Arunachala Ashram:** A full biography, with footage of the sage at his ashram in the late 1940s. bit.ly/RamanaDocumentaryArunachala
- ❖ **Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage Centre in the US:** website: www.srmh.org



Pujas and Vedic training: Left: Students of the Ashram’s Veda Patasala chant in the Samadhi Hall during one of the daily pujas to the Sivalingam, held at 6:45am, 9am and 5pm; Right: Ramana wearing the sadhu’s traditional angavastram on a trail with walking stick and water pot.

rational and ethical.” Osborne, a British devotee and founding editor of *The Mountain Path* journal, produced four books about Sri Ramana. In addition to his biography, he wrote: *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*; *My Life and Quest* (Ramana’s autobiography, written in Tamil and translated into English); and *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Osborne’s books continue to serve as transformative guides, offering a glimpse into the profound vision and mission of the sage.

And who can forget Paul Brunton and his famous book, *A Search in Secret India*. The *New York Times* wrote in a book review, “In the Maharshi—the Great Sage—who lives in hermetic seclusion in a lowly dwelling at the foot of the Hill of the Holy Beacon and who formerly spent six years in a cave on the mountainside, Mr. Brunton found that which he had been seeking—the holiest of holy men.”

The Indian government has issued stamps in honor of the silent sage. The first was unveiled by President V.V. Giri on April 14, 1971. In 1998, President K.R. Narayanan released a stamp to mark the 48th anniversary of Sri Ramana’s mahasamadhi. In 2014, for Maharshi’s jayanti, the postmaster general of Chennai introduced a permanent pictorial cancellation—a special postmark featuring the Ramanasramam logo with text in Devanagari and Roman scripts.

Conclusion

With the simple but deep question “Who am I?,” Sri Ramana nudged seekers to look within. In an uncertain world, where significant wars are ongoing, his message of oneness needs to be carefully read, re-read and understood. From his remote mountain lair, he churned out thousands of ambassadors of oneness. Here was a sage who never asked us to learn anything or do anything except realize the Self. The Tamil expression, *summa iru* (“just be”) summarizes his life most appropriately. There can be a no better tribute to this inspirational sage than to put this into practice in our everyday life while discharging our duties. We must not mistakenly think that Ramana’s message is relevant only to the renunciate. It is applicable to all, and more relevant now than ever. 🙏

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 *Makers of Modern Dalit History*, published by Penguin Random House India.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Sage’s Grand Departure

In 1947, at age 68, Ramana Maharshi was suffering from cancer. When the doctors suggested amputating his left arm above a large tumor, Ramana replied with a smile: “There is no need for alarm. The body is itself a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it? A simple dressing on the affected part will do.” Still, two operations were performed to remove the tumor, but it appeared again, as large as a coconut. Indigenous systems of medicine were tried, and homeopathy, too, but the disease did not yield to treatment. The sage, supremely indifferent to suffering, remained unconcerned. He sat as a spectator watching the disease waste the body; his eyes shone as bright as ever, and his grace flowed toward all beings. Many were coming to say goodbye to the master. In this tradition, it is regarded as a special blessing to be near a realized soul at the time he or she gives up the body. Ramana insisted that the crowds be allowed to have his darshan, and he had his bed placed in a public courtyard and sat on it day after day leaning against a white pillow in just his loin cloth. Devotees came and went for weeks as his body slowly diminished. Ramana had compassion for those who grieved, and he sought to comfort them by reminding them of the truth that he was not the body. The Great Departure came on April 14, 1950. That evening the sage gave darshan to all present in the ashram. They sat singing his favorite hymn to Arunachala, the form of Siva as an infinite pillar of light. He asked his attendants to help him sit up. He smiled as a tear trickled down his cheek, and at 8:47pm his breathing stopped. As instructed, devotees prepared a pit in the earth and placed the body there in a seated yogic posture, encasing it in salt. Such interments of great masters are revered as supremely holy. A Sivalingam was installed above the crypt, and a shrine was constructed over it, known as the Sri Ramana Maharshi Samadhi Shrine. This shrine is centrally located within the ashram premises, serving as a focal point for meditation and worship.



ANNE PETRY

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Exploring the Varied Ways World Faiths Practice Meditation

Sign of the times: Our writer didn't need to leave India to interview ardent meditators from Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and more

BY ANNE PETRY, FRANCE/INDIA

MEDITATION... IS THERE ANY OTHER action, or should we say "non-action," that is so ancient and so modern at the same time? While in some countries, such as India, the practice of meditation has remained in people's habits, the practice there has deteriorated over time. But fortunately this is changing! Whereas meditation was initially linked to a religious context, and still is for most people, it has also become for many a more or less secular practice used to calm the stress and anxiety generated by our modern lifestyle. This has led to a resurgence of interest among younger generations in Asia and all over the world.

Sneha: Meet Sneha, a 31-year-old modern Indian woman in Chennai, who told me: "While it's normal and natural for us

Indians to sit cross-legged on the floor, it's not innate for us to sit still for any length of time without apprehending the thoughts that are constantly popping into our heads. As with every other person in the world, peace of mind is a matter of practice. And in this respect, I'm what you might call a 'beginner.' I've learned a few meditation techniques here and there, from talking to family and friends or at school; but until recently, I wouldn't say that meditation was a regular part of my daily life. However, I've just finished my second meditation retreat, and I can say that it has helped the energetic young woman in me to become more focused and calm. I know I need to deepen my practice to feel the full benefits, but I don't want to force anything, I'm going at my own pace, slowly discovering the different techniques that exist, step by step."

Rex Benedict: For others, meditation came earlier and immediately had a profound impact. Rex Benedict, 28, an Indian man from Coimbatore, shares, "My journey to meditation was the result of a spiritual awakening that occurred during a challenging period when I was 21, when past-life karma resurfaced, plunging me into what I'd describe as a 'dark mode.' It was a critical phase in my life, but I have been fortunate to receive guidance from gurus who helped me find my path. Today, I formally meditate for about 40 minutes every morning when I wake up and I feel immense peace, stability and clarity. It is also a powerful tool for finding answers when I am seeking advice. My meditation techniques vary. Sometimes I practice mantra japa dedicated to Lord Siva; other times, I concentrate on my breath, or let the energy flow through my spine. I also practice focusing on the



SHUTTERSTOCK/PRIVA DARSHAN

From hilltop to open air theatre: (left to right) A meditator on a rock outcrop near Tiruvannamalai; a group meditation on December 21, 2024—World Meditation Day, in Mysuru, Karnataka

center of my forehead, playing with my ego and dissolving it, and finally focusing on the chakras. I'm very fortunate to have several people in my circle of friends, both Indian and Western, who have their own spiritual path. Each of our encounters reaffirms a notion that is very dear to me: the universality of meditation."

This universality that Rex mentions is important. Meditation is too often thought of as an "Indo-Asian" practice reserved for Hindus and Buddhists. But Avi Farzan, who was born in Israel and has lived in the United States, bears witness to the fact that meditation is also used in Judaism: "I met my guru, Swami Muktananda, in 1979; he is the one who brought me to meditation. Today, in addition to self-inquiry, I like to meditate alone in my room, several times a day; it brings me profound peace of mind, and I definitely feel more focused. Although I now live in India, every time I return to my home country, Israel, I see a renewed interest in meditation, particularly among the youngsters.

"What many people don't know is that meditation has always been a major practice in Judaism, with techniques as diverse as visualization, the use of psalm chants, concentration on philosophical or mystical ideas, introspection and contemplation of divine names. These meditations can be part of prayer practices or separate from them. Over time, meditation practices have been developed in many movements, such as the Kabbalah, a set of esoteric teachings designed

to explain the relationship between the unchanging, eternal God—The Infinite—and the mortal, finite universe which is God's creation. Kabbalah forms the foundations of the mystical religious interpretations within Judaism. One of the many types of Kabbalah meditation, for example, involves returning to the here and now, connecting our mind with that of others and creating new channels of connection, love and openness in order to strengthen humanity as a whole. Through visualization, we also connect our soul to the Source, open ourselves to the divine current and feel the holiness and transcendence of the different dimensions of the Divine."

Shankar Nair: In Sufism, according to Professor Shankar Nair of the University of Virginia, there is a particular meditation practice called *Mouraqaba* ("observation"), also known as the vigilance exercise. The meditator kneels down—eyes closed, thumb touching index finger, breathing under control—and focuses all attention on a single point. This point is usually the visualization of the Sheikh, one's Sufi master, seen as a bridge between the world of illusion and that of reality. The aim is to gradually reach what is known as the state of "obliteration" (absence from the world of the senses), or the highest state, which is "extinction." In this state, attachment to the material world, to the grip of the senses, will diminish, and the absolute emptiness of God should descend upon the meditator.

As we can see, meditation is within the reach of many adults around the world, since it is practiced in some form in most major religions, as well as in secular settings. But it is also becoming a practice accessible to younger people, as it is increasingly

integrated into school systems, particularly in India. Manikandan Ramanandan, 36, a meditation and yoga teacher, has been working for eight years at Shanthimalai School in Tamil Nadu, South India. This school, which has around 800 students, took a pioneering step a few years ago when they decided to integrate meditation classes into the curriculum for children age six and up. Mani explains: "At this early age, children are very curious and quick learners. So we teach them meditation through mantras, control of prana (energy) as well as relaxation and yoga postures. While I see them sometimes reluctant to go to math or Tamil classes, I always find that they're happy to come to the meditation class, and I've noticed that when they leave my class, they're more disciplined and definitely more energetic than they were when they arrived."

Mahi: Certain children seem to be born with a native aptitude for spirituality in general and meditation in particular. I met seven-year-old Mahi at Ramana Ashram, in South India. Of Indian origin, she was born in Australia. Because Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings have always resonated strongly with Mahi's father, he felt the need to bring Mahi and her sister to this place. Mahi happily answered my questions: "I meditate every day, more or less 30 minutes a day. I usually meditate in the morning before going to school, but when I'm late, I take advantage of the ride to school in my mum's car to do my meditation. It doesn't really matter where I am, I can meditate anywhere, but my favorite place is in my room, with my big sister next to me. Sometimes I use mantras my father taught me, but most of the time I stay with the question, 'Who am I?' This question makes all my thoughts disappear. When



ALL PHOTOS: ANNE PETRY



Seeking the within: (left to right) Shobha Surendran moved from atheism to sensing the existence of God; Chitartha Ellamnee Grube fled Europe at age 30 for Sri Lanka, where he encountered Vipassana; Geetha Rubingh discovered meditation after a near-death experience at age 33; Father Cyril Mathew learned to reconcile his Christian beliefs with Zen meditation

the thoughts come back, I ask myself again, 'Who am I?' I know I'm not the body, I'm not the mind, I'm just the Self; and while I'm asking myself, the thoughts fall away and I feel peaceful again."

A second later she adds: "I know I talk a lot, but spirituality is a subject I love. Unfortunately, I can't really talk about it at my school in Australia, because my friends don't understand and they're not interested in meditation either, and at school we don't have a meditation class that could teach them what it means. I like Australia, but if I had the choice, I'd prefer to live in India, because I see a lot more people meditating there, in temples, in ashrams, even in the streets, and I really like it!"

Meditation, then, can be practiced regardless of one's age, religion, social background or walk of life. Only the approaches vary, with each person practicing what seems most suited to them. Let's look at more examples of personal testimony from across the religious pantheon.

Chitartha Ellamnee Grube: "My spiritual name is Chitartha EllamNee. I was born 73 years ago in Germany. My name today was given to me several decades ago by our Guruji—Chitartha, *chit* meaning "consciousness," and *artha* meaning "abiding in." I led a mainstream life in the 1950s and '60s in

Europe, but around the age of 30, I wanted to discover the world. I was particularly attracted to Asia, so I flew to Sri Lanka.

"During this trip, another traveler told me about a place one could do a Vipassana retreat. I thought this would be a good opportunity to learn more about meditation. This man made me promise to do the full ten-day retreat and not to leave before the end, no matter what. I promised—but by the end of the third day, I was ready to leave due to terrible body pains caused by sitting cross-legged on the floor for several hours a day. However, I stayed. My body slowly adapted, and it became a deeply peaceful experience. This Vipassana retreat, where I ended up spending three months, changed my life to such an extent that I even considered becoming a Buddhist monk. To this day, I cherish this time in my heart.

"A Vipassana retreat lasts usually 10 days, during which you are asked not to speak, read, write or make eye contact with others. For the first three days, the focus is on the breath, concentrating on the tip of the nose and feeling the air flow in and out, or on the rising and falling abdomen. When thoughts, feelings or bodily sensations appear, you accept them, let go and gently bring your attention back to the breath. After the third day, we open our attention to whatever arises in the body-mind, observing the appearances and cessations of

mind objects, without controlling or judging.

"While meditation began for me as a way of understanding how the body and mind work, I soon realized it actually gave me the wisdom not only to observe my thoughts and moods, but also to understand and manage them, leading to transformation.

"If I had to sum up Vipassana meditation in a few words, I'd say it's a spontaneous, effortless, choiceless awareness. Vipassana is in fact more than just a meditation technique, it's an attitude of mind and a training in mindfulness that can be practiced while eating, walking and in any other everyday task. Ultimately, Vipassana meditation enables us to live in the present, and the ongoing practice of this technique leads to an understanding of *anicca*, a fundamental notion of Buddhism that refers to the impermanence of absolutely everything and the fact that all existence is only temporary."

Geetha Rubingh: "I was born just over 70 years ago in The Netherlands into a loving family who passed on great values to me. My father was a humanist, a true believer in the goodness of people. My mother was a Christian, but she rarely went to church; she preferred the Christian content to the institution itself. This was the context in which I was brought up, but when I left home at 16 to study, I abandoned all religious practice and belief.

"It wasn't until I was 33, after a serious accident and a near-death experience, that I became interested in the spiritual world again. I first became interested in anthropology (Christian-based). Then I joined a

Krishna-based ashram in The Netherlands for 23 years. Today, I live in India, and in my spiritual practice I focus on the all-pervading energy that is the creative life force (Puru-shottama) which I combine with mantra meditation. I learned to meditate over 30 years ago, and mantras have been the basis of my spiritual development. Etymologically in Sanskrit, *mantra* means 'tool for the mind,' a way of focusing and quieting the mind. My guru gave me some mantras, which I have repeated hundred of thousands of times, and I really felt a difference in my energy system.

"My meditation practice very often follows the same pattern. First, I relax my body, then I recite mantras for about 30 minutes. Once my mind is calm and concentrated, I let everything go and remain in silence with my attention totally within. If the attention slackens, I simply go back to reciting the mantras. There are recommended times for meditation (very early morning), and in this period of my life I can afford to meditate from 3am to 6am. But this isn't the case for everyone, so it's a question of finding the time slot that suits you best and then sticking to it. Also, there's no point in forcing yourself to sit still, trying to achieve stillness if you're upset, stressed or confused, as this can increase your restlessness. In the case of what might be called 'monkey mind,' I'd be more in favor of going for a walk in nature, put my awareness in the present moment, and simply being grateful for all there is. The power of gratitude leads to non-frustration, and only then one can fully enjoy a pleasant and peaceful mantra meditation."

Shobha Surendran: "I was born 61 years ago in Kerala, South India. All on my father's side were devout Hindu practitioners; but my mother, although she always helped people in need, didn't believe in God. So when I was a child, the only reason I went to the temple was to play with my friends and get some prasada.

"As I grew up, I followed my mother's beliefs. I became a fervent communist and a science teacher who only believed in what I saw. But eventually, life changes people. My mother, who had health problems, was introduced to kundalini yoga and the power of inner energy.

"While I was teaching in Saudi Arabia, I came home once and my mother told me about her 'spiritual discoveries' and the existence of God. Though highly skeptical, I decided to investigate the subject. Listening to my mother's new insights and reading books such as *Meta Modern Era*, I was literally blown away! I felt as if a rocket had exploded in my head, destroying all my previous agnostic beliefs; I was entering a new dimension. That was about 30 years ago. To deepen my practice, I immersed myself in the teachings of Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi and Sahaja Yoga, a meditation technique and spiritual practice based on the experience of kundalini awakening—Self-Realization.

"While the subtle body is made up of numerous *nadis* (energy channels), Sahaja Yoga focuses primarily on three channels (left, right and center), seven main energy centers (chakras) and the primordial energy of kundalini. In Hinduism, kundalini is a form of divine feminine energy (or shakti),

believed to be dormant in the muladhara chakra located at the base of the spine. Kundalini energy can be awakened through the regular practice of mantras, asanas, pranayama and bandha (internal mudras designed to lock vital energy into the body). Once activated, the kundalini is channeled upwards through the central channel (the sushumna), from the sacrum to the top of the head, progressing from each of the seven chakras to the next in order to harmonize them one by one. This process of 'cleansing' the subtle body is carried out in the central nervous system by vibrations—a cool or warm flow over the hands, over the head and around the body. The mastery and ascension of kundalini energy aims at Self-Realization, with the ultimate goal of becoming one with absolute divine energy.

"Although I felt that meditation to awaken the kundalini was my path, I was very impatient at first. Several times, I felt stuck and wanted to drop everything. Fortunately, each time, something or someone brought me back to my meditation practice; and, over time, I felt a change taking place within me. One day, I finally had that fabulous glimpse of Oneness that changed my life. But this immense insight only strengthened my desire to know more! I desperately wanted to understand better. This is when a sahaja yogi told me about Sri Ramana Maharshi and his very direct teaching. From that moment, my daily meditation became reflection on Ramana's words, 'Who am I?' and 'The Self is the only Truth.' My mind slowly became more quiet, and the ego eventually began to fade away."

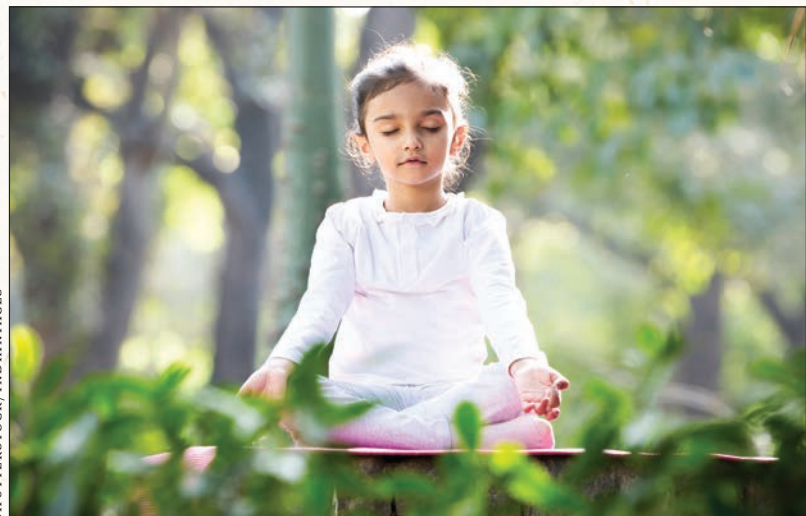


ANNE PETRY

Father Cyril Mathew: “I was born 52 years ago into a Christian family in what was then a small village in Tamil Nadu, India. I’ve been a Christian priest for 20 years and a Zen meditator for even longer. In fact, during my long studies to become a Jesuit priest there came a time when I was assailed by existential questions like, ‘Why am I doing this? Am I taking the right path? Why did I leave my home and family to follow this lifelong commitment?’ During this period, I lost sleep and inner peace; I clearly remember struggling without finding adequate answers to these deep questions.

“One of the chief priests, whom I considered a spiritual master, advised me to do a retreat at a meditation center called Bodhi Zendo, near Kodaikanal in South India. This was my first real encounter with Zen Buddhism, back in 2000. When I got there, I felt like I was home at last, and thought: ‘This is it! This is the place I’ve been looking for.’ With this clearly in mind, I continued to study to become a priest, but I also became deeply involved in the life of Bodhi Zendo by becoming a disciple of Father Amma Samy, the Catholic priest who founded the Bodhi Zendo Meditation Center. This gave me the opportunity to deepen my Zen practice.

“Once I was ordained, my superiors agreed to let me move to Bodhi Zendo to take over from Father Amma Samy, who was growing older. I can’t say everything was easy; I reached a point where I was terribly conflicted between Christianity on the one hand and Zen Buddhism on the other. But over time, a kind of integration took place, and I realized that I needed one as much as the other.



SHUTTERSTOCK/INDIANFACES

Other means to the within: (left) Marta Mattalia became an accomplished Baul singer through which she discovered inner peace; (above) even young children can learn to quiet their minds; (opposite page, left to right) Vijayalakshmi found her gardening to be “movement meditation,” the article’s author, Anne Petry, in deep meditation

“In Christianity, there are different types of meditation. There’s visualization, which consists of taking a scene from the Bible and trying to experience this scene with all the senses as faithfully as possible; reflective meditation, which consists of reading an extract from the holy book and reflecting on the passage in question; there’s the rosary prayer, which is similar to saying mantras; and finally conversational meditation, in which we talk to God, listen to His response and slowly enter into a conversation with Him.

“Zen Buddhism is more down to earth and has two main components of meditation. The first might be called body awareness, in which we concentrate on breathing in and out, or scan our body by consciously reviewing every part of our anatomy. This type of meditation is designed to bring a certain peace of mind, and will help to appreciate the second aspect, called *Shikantaza*. *Shikantaza* is simply sitting with full awareness, welcoming the moment as it is, without judgment, and letting thoughts come and go without focusing on any of them. It’s a meditative practice in which you live 100 percent in the present moment, without forcing or expecting anything.”

Vijayalakshmi

“I come from a small tribal village called Uppuparai, located in the mountains near Kodaikanal. I don’t know my exact age, but I’m probably around 50, and I’ve always lived a simple life, as we all do in this part of India, which is still very rural.

“From an early age, I used to go out and work the land, but I really learned about

gardening around 20 years ago, when I was hired to look after the gardens of a beautiful property. My co-workers and I have developed the habit of twice a week, during our lunch break, sitting down and meditating together. I mostly use this time to pray to my Hindu Gods. My days are long; I’m on my feet from 5am to 10pm, busy with my gardening work and then with my household tasks once I get home. So, I don’t have much time left over to sit and practice any other type of meditation.

“But a Westerner I once met made me realize that I actually meditate perhaps more than any traditional meditator. In fact, as I stand barefoot in the earth, caring for these flowers, vegetables and trees that I’ve learned over time to regard as companions, all my attention is for them, and I put all my dedication into what I do. Whether I’m pruning a rosebush, sowing new plants, watering flowers or covering vegetables with a tarpaulin in case of heavy rain, I’m thinking of absolutely nothing else but the plant I’m taking care of and of what I’m doing at this very moment. My mind is totally focused on each of my actions.

“It’s only when my job is done or when I have a bit of free time that the thoughts come back, making me think of certain health problems I’ve had in the past, hoping I can continue to do this work I love for as long as possible and, above all, hoping that my two sons and their families are doing well. Compared to these moments of worry and anxiety, I appreciate much more the calm and peace of mind I find when I concentrate on my every gesture towards the plants.



ANNE PETRY

“It seems that what I’ve been doing naturally for 20 years or more—focusing 100 percent on my task in the present moment—is considered a meditation technique called ‘movement meditation.’ But in the end, no matter the name given to what I spontaneously do, the only thing I know is that after so many hours spent with the plants, living in the present moment, with a mind free of all thought, I leave work happy and at peace, and at a slow pace, I return to my village, perched higher up in the mountains.”

Marta Mattalia: “I was born in Italy, but for many years now I’ve been what you might call a nomadic musician. My parents traveled a lot; as a child, listening to them talk about their travels was very inspiring. In a way, it may have shaped my own life. So far, I’ve traveled extensively in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia, especially India, where I made my first solo trip six years ago.

“As far back as I can remember, I’ve always played music, but it was at the age of 14 that I started to learn and play music with more awareness. My encounter with Indian music began with *Drhupad* (Indian classical music) when I still was in Italy. But on that trip to India when I was 29, I heard for the first time a *Parvathy* Baul song and instantly fell in love with her voice, her music and, I think, her whole being. It took me a whole year and a one-way train ticket to Kolkata to finally find her and stand in front of her. The meeting was so simple and so beautiful that we both felt it was meant to be, and she agreed to take me on as a student and teach me Baul music.

“Baul is played with several instruments, but the main one is simply a fruit of nature: a calabash. It’s called *ektara*, which literally means ‘one string,’ and the sound it produces is what accompanies my voice. I created my own *ektara*, with a calabash and goatskin

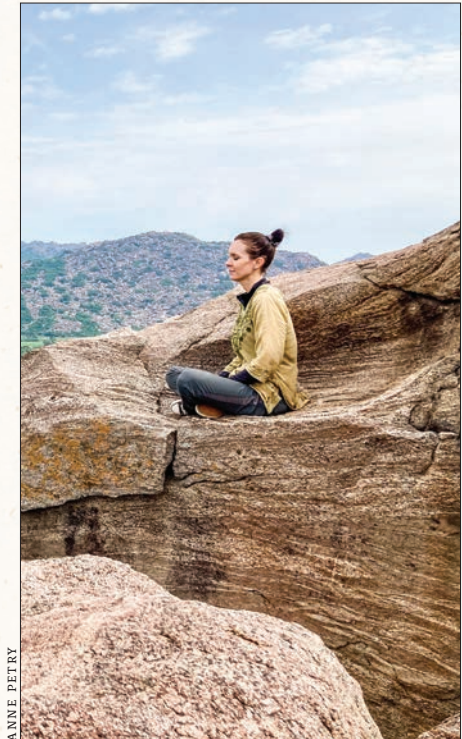
found in Kolkata, bamboo and wood found in Rajasthan. Perhaps because I made it with my own hands, for me the *ektara* is alive. When I talk about my instrument, I always say *she* and never *it*.

“Baul is an ancient form of music that originated in West Bengal, played by itinerant mystics who were something of outsiders, as they didn’t want to belong to any caste and created their own religious movement, a mixture of Vaishnavism, Sufism and Buddhist Tantra. Baul music reflects this religious syncretism and, with its haunting lyrics, celebrates divine love and the yearning for unity with the Supreme.

“With my nomadic lifestyle, I don’t have a specific time to meditate and I don’t want to be a tyrant to myself. Instead, I go for a meditative walk in the forest, sit in lotus position by a waterfall or take my *ektara* out of her box and play. Also, my travels have brought me into contact with many different meditation traditions; so depending on what I feel, I create my own meditation, mixing practices and using what I need.

“I’ve always considered singing and playing music as part of my meditative practice, because as the music progresses, I feel my mind calming and concentrating. When I play Baul, my voice resonates even more deeply, I’m fully aware of the space around me, I feel totally connected to the world and I can say that I’m experiencing Oneness. This devotional music is also an extraordinary tool for communicating with others, for sharing the joy I have within myself and the love I have for life. Most of all, for me it’s an incredible meditative technique that allows me to truly feel the Emptiness that I am.”

Conclusion: In the course of my research I came to understand that all major world religions incorporate forms of meditation, even though many modern followers have



ANNE PETRY

lost touch with these practices. What I also found particularly beautiful was that, despite the fact that these religions have different names for God, their meditation techniques are remarkably similar, all centered on stilling the mind and the divine name.

Later, in my conversations with Geetha, Chitartha, Marta and the other people I approached for this article, I was fascinated by the number of different meditation techniques. Everyone chooses the method that suits them best, explaining that the choice of technique can vary according to their mood but, above all, according to the new insights they have gained over time.

For me, at this stage of my life, meditation simply means sitting quietly. Whether it’s in my veranda, my ashram or a bus station, the most important thing is to be present in the moment, to be aware of what’s going on around me and to accept everything: extraneous noises, flies tickling my arm or people moving next to me. I try to observe all this without judgment, without labeling experiences as pleasant or unpleasant. This is easier said than done, of course, and I’m no different from anyone else: some days my mind is calm, which makes meditation relatively easy, while other days my “monkey mind” jumps from one thought to another. But one thing I learned over the years is to meditate without looking for specific outcomes, accepting both the quiet and chaotic mental states equally.

This approach has become a powerful metaphor for life itself: accepting both the smooth sailing and the challenges, recognizing that it’s all part of the journey!

Balancing Religion and High School

Yes, we teens can make spiritual practices work in our lives

BY SANJEEVANI DEDGE
AND MUGDHA SHINDE

HIGH SCHOOL IS AN EXCITING BUT OFTEN overwhelming time. With a packed schedule full of schoolwork, sports, extracurriculars and social activities, it's easy for students to lose touch with their spiritual practices. As high school juniors, we often find that religious rituals get pushed aside due to academic and personal commitments. But staying connected to our Hindu faith doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing commitment. Through small adjustments and mindful practices, it's possible to nurture our spirituality, even on the busiest days. In this article, we'll explore simple strategies for incorporating Hinduism into your daily routine, helping you maintain a strong spiritual foundation while balancing academics and extracurriculars. From quick mantras when you wake up, to giving volunteer hours to temples, here are practical strategies that students can fit into their schedule.

A. RELIGIOUS RITUALS



1) Mantras: The first tip is to say a mantra in the morning when you wake up, and one at night before going to sleep. This takes less than 30 seconds each, and is easy to make a habit of. We recommend students chant "Karaagre Vasate Lakshmi" or "Samu-

5) Jewelry & Accessories



dra Vasane Devi" once they wake up, and "Ramam Skandham" when they go to sleep.

"Karaagre Vasate Lakshmi" is originally from the *Padma Purana*. In transliteration it is: "kara-agre vasate laksmiih kara-madhye sarasvatii; kara-muule tu govindah prabhaate kara-darshanam." It means, "At the top of the palm dwells Lakshmi, and at the middle of the palm dwells Saraswati, at the bottom of the palm dwells Govinda; therefore one should look at one's palms in the early morning and contemplate on them."

The second morning mantra, "Samudra Vasane Devi," is originally part of a hymn dedicated to Goddess Ganga, which appears in the *Mahabharata*: "Samudra-vasane devi parvata-stana-mandale; vishnu-patni namas-tubhyam paada-sparsham kshamasva-me." It means, "O! Mother Earth, who has the ocean as Her clothes, mountains and forests as Her body, who is the wife of Lord Vishnu, I bow to you. Please, forgive me for stepping on You with my feet." Both poems have beautiful meanings, and by understanding each and saying them first thing in the morning, you can get off to a great start for your day.

Similarly, reciting "Ramam Skandham" before you go to sleep can calm you down since it is a prayer for peaceful sleep without disturbing dreams. This can also be a good time to take just a few moments to express gratitude to God, and for the lessons you have learned.

This verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* reads: "Ramam skandham hanumantam vainateyam vrkodaram; shayane yah smarenityam dusvapna-stasyanashyati." It means, "Whoever remembers Hanuman, Rama, Skanda, Garuda and Bhima every night before sleep will be free of bad dreams and enjoy peaceful sleep."

Ever since fourth grade, I [Mugdha] have strictly said this prayer every single night, because I have told myself that I should do at least one Hindu thing without fail everyday if I am not able to do puja. Even at sleepovers



1) Mantras



2) Lighting a Lamp

Divine devotion: (clockwise from lower left) chanting during a havan ceremony; brother and sister celebrate Rakshabandhan; lamp lighting; author Sanjeevani studying scripture

or school trips, I recite the prayer in my mind before saying, "Shubha ratri, shubha swapna," which in Marathi means "May you have a good night, may you have good dreams." This little tradition has helped me stay connected to my religion for over half a decade now.



2) Lighting a Lamp: An additional morning ritual to expand your connection to Hinduism is lighting a diya, or small oil lamp. This is a relatively quick action, yet it

holds the great significance of bringing light into the world, and positivity for the day ahead. It is not a whole puja, but it is perfect for those of us with only a few minutes to spare in the mornings.

B. PERSONAL PRACTICES



3) Background Music: Putting on music in the background is an easy practice that can have a big impact. I [Sanjeevani] will give a personal example: I really

wanted to learn "Hanuman Chalisa," because when we sang it in our local Hindu organization during bhajan meetings, I never knew the words. Determined to learn, I told my mom, and she suggested playing it in the background while I get ready in the morning. And over a few months, I found myself being able to sing along to parts of the bhajan. I also noticed that just having the music playing in the background improved my mood.



4) Reading During Breaks: Reading is a great way to learn about your religion, but you may feel like you don't have enough time. So,

the fourth tip is to carry a book, such as a modern explanation of the *Gita*, or a *Vedas* for kids, in your backpack, or download an audiobook onto your phone. While finishing a whole book may seem daunting, it's a lot easier if you think of it as five minutes of reading or listening per day. And you can easily find five minutes while being driven anywhere, between classes, while you walk home, while doing chores or even during study breaks.



5) Jewelry & Dress: Jewelry can be a meaningful way to incorporate Hinduism in daily life. One common religious accessory is a necklace with an Om pendant. These

are typically made of gold or silver and can easily be found online. We've also seen many people wearing necklaces with their name in Devanagari or in their mother tongue. Websites such as "Brown Girl Gang" offer these necklaces in a variety of Indian languages, including Assamese, Tamil, Marathi, Kashmiri, Oriya and more. Such necklaces are beautiful ornaments and spiritual reminders. Similarly, tattoos or piercings can provide a permanent reminder of faith and constant guidance. Hindu tattoos are usually of a symbol, mantra or Deity such as Siva's trishul or Ganesha. This past summer in India, I [Sanjeevani] got my first tattoo—an Om on my left hand—which brings me joy every time I see it. Many women in my family including my grandma have religious tattoos called *gondhan* in Marathi. Nose piercings are also very important in many Indian cultures.

A great way to incorporate Hinduism in your daily life is dressing ethnically. Wearing a bindi everyday is a small gesture that shows



4) Reading During Breaks

you are connected to your culture, even when in public. For boys, wearing a rakhi wrist band achieves the same result. In fact, my [Mugdha's] brother, Aaditya Shinde, wears a rakhi for the whole year after Raksha Bandhan. When asked how this helps him feel connected to Hinduism, he said, "It's a good reminder on my arm at all times about my relationship with my sister, without being something out of the ordinary or too showy." Ethnic wear is especially important during the festivals. Aaditya recommends wearing traditional clothes to school or work during big festivals such as Diwali.



6) Diet: Shifting to a vegetarian diet is a wonderful way to practice nonviolence (ahimsa), which is a key principle in Hinduism. To make the transition smooth, you can start by avoiding meat on certain days and gradually increasing your amount of vegetarian meals. You can also find vegetarian alternatives for your favorite dishes and explore new recipes to keep things interesting. I [Sanjeevani again] used to eat meat, but about five years ago, I switched to being vegetarian—and I couldn't be happier with the change.

C. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES



7) Volunteer/Visiting Temples: Our next tip is to volunteer at temples. Not only does it make you feel connected with your community and improve your social skills, but in certain cases you can actually get volunteer credit for the hours. This is especially significant for students, because many high schools, and even clubs, require a certain number of volunteer hours per semester, so this is a great way to meet that criteria. You just have to make sure that the volunteering



Food and music: (left) multi-course South Indian vegetarian meal; (right) Revati on stage

you do benefits the whole community, or else it won't count. For example, if the temple hosts a food drive or is giving out free prasad that benefits everyone, then hours spent setting up, collecting/preparing or serving food would count.

8) Youth Group: Another tip is to join a Hindu youth group. This can mean joining a club at school or an outside Hindu organization. Make sure to be an active member and regularly attend the meetings and events. This can also be a great place to find like-minded friends/peers who share similar values and interests. You will find a supportive environment where you can share experiences, celebrate festivals together and create lasting friendships. We both started a Hindu club at our respective schools this year, and have noticed the positive difference having a Hindu community at school has made in our life.

9) Cultural Activities: A powerful way to maintain your faith, is to enroll in cultural classes that interest you. This can mean classical music like Carnatic singing, learning the tabla, classical dance such as Bharatanatyam or Odissi, or even learning a language, such as Sanskrit or your mother tongue. These classes typically take only one to two hours per week, yet they can teach you a lot about your culture. For example, Revati Tambe, a junior in high school, when asked about her personal religious practice, explains, "While I don't spend time on prayers or puja every day, I stay connected to my reli-

gion and culture through Hindustani classical singing and tabla. Every day, I do about 30-60 minutes of practice, which not only keeps me rooted in my traditions but also helps me relax and clear my mind of stressful thoughts."

This tip is for anyone seeking more time-efficient ways to stay connected to Hinduism beyond daily puja. However, we would stress that these activities are not a replacement for visiting temples or conducting extensive puja when one has enough time. As Revati later mentioned, "I think it is important to visit the temple when I have time, because it helps me feel connected not just to my religion but to my culture as a whole. It's nice seeing other families worshipping at the temple, and there's also this sense of peace I get." Visiting the temple is an irreplaceable experience for Revati and for everyone in general.

10) Performances: If you are talented at singing, as Revati is, or at another cultural activity, such as dance or playing a traditional instrument, school performances are great opportunities to practice and showcase your Hindu culture. At my [Mugdha's] school, we have Multicultural Week, Fall Family Night, and Friday rallies, all great stages for a Hindu performance. In addition to the actual performance, the practice and preparation leading up to it will help you stay close to Hinduism on a daily basis.

11) Mobile App: There is a free mobile app, called "Spiritual Workout," that leads you through a short daily religious check in. It is

11) Performances



REVATI TAMBE

a great tool for Hindus in high school or college who have a busy schedule, as well as for people of all ages who want a place to start with their daily religious activities. It helps you participating in a religious activity for at least ten minutes a day.

Conclusion

Integrating Hinduism and its practices into your life as a high school student is not only possible, but will help you thrive. By following these small tips and tricks you can create a fulfilling balance between your spiritual journey and academic commitments.

THE AUTHORS



Mugdha Shinde, 16, is an 11th-grade student in the San Francisco Bay Area. She plays trombone in her school's band and enjoys cooking and baking. mugdha.shinde29@gmail.com.

Sanjeevani Dedge, 16, lives in San Jose. As an 11th-grade student at Leigh High School, she is president of the Hindu Club and an active member of the student government. In her free time, she enjoys painting and exploring her passion for writing. sanjeevanisedge@gmail.com



HEALTH

Childhood Nutrition

Don't just feed your children good food, teach them how to eat right their whole life

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

CHILDHOOD ILLNESS IS ON THE RISE. MANY KIDS ARE diagnosed with obesity, diabetes, asthma, chronic otitis media (ear damage), ADD, ADHD and more. Research has shown that the standard American diet causes or contributes to many of these diseases. It is imperative that parents know how to feed their children correctly at each stage of their lives and teach them the nutritional knowledge and habits they need for a lifetime of good health.

In ayurveda, a child's nutrition is divided into three stages: *kshirup*, the period of nursing; *kshiranaad*, the feeding of solid food mixed with milk; and *anaad*, solid food. In the *kshirup* stage, lasting six months to a year, the infant's nutrition is his mother's milk. Infant formula was designed to be a medical nutritional tool for babies who are unable to breast feed. Formula does not fully meet the nutritional and immunity needs of infants, leaving their immune systems failing. Babies who are breast fed are less likely to get sick with diarrhea, gastrointestinal illness, urinary-tract infections, respiratory disease or pneumonia and rarely suffer sudden infant death syndrome. They are less likely to have allergies, less likely to have later weight problems, less likely to have ear infections and—according to a study published in *JAMA* issue of May 8, 2002—more likely to be more intelligent.

In the *kshiranaad* stage, from one to two years old, milk is slowly tapered off while side-by-side fruit juices, pulp, syrups, soups of pulses and vegetables are started. Rice, beans (such as mung and lentils), different fruits (especially ripened bananas), nut milk, vegetables and milk products are excellent. Ayurvedic medicine does not recommend introduction of solids before six months of age.

The stage of solid food, *annaad*, begins at two. I highly recommend eating together as a family. It is a comforting ritual for both parents and kids. Children like the predictability of family meals, and parents get a chance to catch up with their kids. Studies have shown that kids who take part in regular family meals are also more likely to eat fruits, vegetables and grains, less likely to snack on unhealthy foods, less likely to smoke, use marijuana or drink alcohol. Involve your children in meal planning and preparation, especially your teens, as it will keep them interested in participating. Keep mealtime calm and congenial. The dinner table is not the place for parental lectures or sibling arguments.

At the main meals, serve good sources of protein, such as beans and nuts. Choose whole-grain breads and cereals so your child gets more fiber. Serve water, milk, freshly squeezed juice or smoothies. By drinking milk, kids boost their intake of calcium, which is important for healthy bones. That means 800 milligrams a day for kids ages six to eight and 1,300 mg a day after age nine. Use only organic dairy products. Kids may develop allergies to milk if they are introduced to cow's milk earlier than six month of age. Consumption of dairy products, especially yogurt, kefir, lassi, butter and ghee, is very helpful. I believe it is better for kids to have whole and non-homogenized milk. Saturated fat is very important for development of a healthy nervous system.



It is important that you don't do battle over food with your children. Let the kids decide if they're hungry, what they will eat from the foods served and when they're full. Establish a predictable schedule of meals and snacks. Kids like knowing what to expect. Don't force kids to clean their plates. Doing so teaches them to override feelings of fullness. Don't bribe or reward them with food. Avoid using dessert as the prize for eating the meal. Don't use food as a way of showing love. When you want to show love, give them a hug, some quality time or praise.

I recommend you stock the pantry and refrigerator with healthy snacks, such as yogurt, peanut butter and celery, whole grained crackers and cheese. This will make it easier for you to limit fast food and other low-nutrient snacks, such as chips and candy. But don't completely ban such snacks from your home. Instead, make them "once-in-a-while" foods, so your child doesn't feel deprived. For an education in junk food, I recommend viewing (after previewing) the documentary "Supersize Me" with your kids. It will be an eye-opener.

Thoughtful parents will limit sugary drinks, such as soda and fruit-flavored drinks. Many

of these are also loaded with caffeine. At lower levels, caffeine can make people feel more alert and like they have more energy. In both kids and adults, too much caffeine can cause jitteriness and nervousness, upset stomach, headaches, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, increased heart rate and increased blood pressure.

In 1996, researchers made discoveries about diet with important implications for childhood nutrition. They found that boys with lower levels of omega-3 fatty acids in their blood showed more problems with behavior, learning and health than those with higher levels of total omega-3 fatty acids. The omega-3 fats and its derivative, DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), are so essential to a child's development that if a mother and infant are deficient in it, the child's nervous system and immune system may never fully develop, and it can cause a lifetime of unexplained emotional, learning and immune system disorders. Rich sources of omega-3 fatty acids are nuts and seeds. Include one or two handfuls of raw, unroasted fresh nuts and seeds in your diet. Another way to incorporate nuts and seeds is to soak them in water and make nut milk.

The vegetarian family needs to be sure they get these nutrients in their diet: vitamin B12 from dairy products and vitamin-fortified products, such as cereals, breads and soy (limit soy to once or twice a week) and rice drinks; vitamin D from dairy products, calcium-fortified orange juice and vitamin-fortified products; calcium from dairy products, dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli, chickpeas and calcium-fortified products, including orange juice, soy and rice drinks and cereals; protein from dairy products, tofu, dried beans and nuts; iron from dried beans, dried fruits, whole grains, leafy green vegetables and iron-fortified cereals and bread; and zinc from wheat germ, nuts, fortified cereal and legumes.

If you can, be a dietary role model yourself and follow the advice given here. You will not only raise healthy children, you'll give them a life-long gift of wise eating habits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Virender Sodhi holds an M.D. (Ayurveda) from India and a N.D. from Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine, USA. E-mail: drv@sodhi.com ayurvedicscience.com. Web: www.ayurvedicscience.com.



COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Mahadevas & Archangels

Are the same divine beings part of more than one religion? Comparing Christian Archangel Michael and Hindu God Murugan

BY GAYATRI RAJAN

I HAVE LONG BEEN FASCINATED BY THE ENORMOUS PANTHEON of celestial beings across all religions. I have wondered if they might in fact be the same beings under different names. Even casual research supports this possibility.

As one such example, the Judeo-Christian Archangel Michael bears an almost uncanny resemblance to the Hindu Mahadeva Murugan. To start with, the words *archangel* and *mahadeva* actually have the same meaning. The prefix *arch-*, from the Greek, means “chief or principal,” “highest in rank or authority or office,” “to govern, rule” or “individuals... directing or having authority over others of their class.” *Maha-*, from the Sanskrit, means great, mighty, strong, very important. *Mahadeva* means a great, important or mighty deva, or a great, mighty shining being. Eastern Orthodox Christians refer to Michael as the Taxiarch (“Commander”). The Catholic Church designates him a “saint,” even though most saints are humans who performed miracles during their lifetime, and not angelic beings.

Both Michael and Murugan are thought of as spiritual warriors. In fact, there are identical situations in which they appear as such. The *Book of Revelations*, the final book of the *New Testament*, describes a battle in heaven at the beginning of time, in which Michael led his army of angels against Lucifer, whom he defeated and cast out of heaven. In the Hindu tradition, Lord Murugan led His army of devas to victory against the demon Surapadman and his army of savage asuras, demonic spirits, who had embarked on a wild frenzy of devastation, wreaking havoc on the universe and terrorizing the devas.

Many Hindus, myself included, believe these stories to be allegorical: the real battle is ongoing and takes place within each of us—not necessarily as dramatic as a cosmic war between good and evil, but a daily battle by striving souls to overcome the lower tendencies of anger, fear, laziness, etc., and to mobilize the willpower needed to

progress on the spiritual path.

We find numerous other parallels in the details of these majestic beings. The color associated with each is red, and both are associated with fire—the kundalini fire in the case of Lord Murugan, and the flaming sword often pictured with Michael in Christian art. Both are often depicted with wings—in Murugan’s case, those of His peacock mount. Michael is typically depicted wearing medieval-style armor or chain mail, as in the modern painting above copied from 16th-century art. Murugan is likewise depicted with some kind of body armor.

They bear similar weapons: Michael the flaming sword, and Murugan a lance, called the Vel. It is understood by Hindus that the Vel is a weapon of grace, destroying ignorance and illusion, and its sharp point gives us discrimination—*viveka*. It will always be true of weapons and other implements in the hands of a Hindu Deity that they are figurative rather than literal, as all Deities are ultimately benign, even the ferocious-seeming Kali.

Both Michael and Murugan are fiery, forceful, exceedingly dynamic and charismatic. Both are resplendently beautiful; one of the names for Lord Murugan in the Tamil language of South India is Alahan, the beautiful. Beyond the *Bible*, legends about Michael abound. He is described in one text as “young, strong and handsome; huge and militant; eyes looking like pools of fire, with firm, chiseled facial features.” His skin is described as the “color of copper which radiates and glows from being in the Presence of God.” This is exactly the concept of Murugan: one of his names is “Ceyon,” meaning the “coppery red one.”

In addition to being a warrior, Murugan presides over the heads of nations and helps to guide them on a dharmic path; He is the God of religion; the Lord of yoga and renunciation, to whom serious



(clockwise from far left) A modern painting of Archangel Michael patterned after 16th century depictions; Murugan with His vel riding on a peacock; Michael in his triumphant battle with Satan as described in the Book of Revelations; The battle between Murugan and Surapadman depicted on a temple gopuram in Malaysia; artist S. Rajam’s depiction of the same battle; statue of Michael conquering Lucifer located in the Basilica Sacre Coeur church, Paris

aspirants on the spiritual path supplicate for success. Murugan’s *vahana*, his mount, is the peacock, symbolizing His conquest of vanity and pride. Murugan as Shanmuga, or Arumugam, has six faces, symbolizing His origin in the Pleiades, as well as the fact that He sees everything in all directions and has six main functions, or qualities.

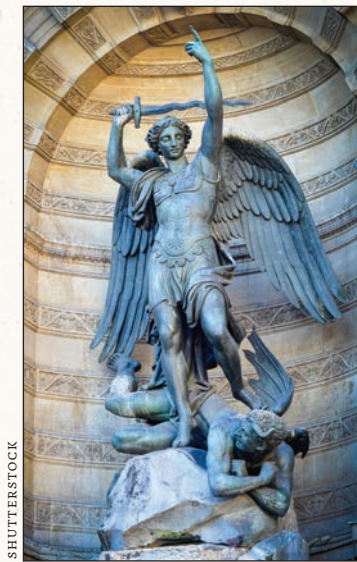
Archangel Michael is thought of as a healer by some. Lord Murugan is a healing Mahadeva as well. There is a temple in South India dedicated to Him as Lord Palani, the renunciate, to which many people go for healing. The icon there is made of nine special minerals, poisonous in their natural state, which become medicinal when water is poured over them, as during the ceremonies conducted there. This water is then distributed to the devotees and is considered an efficacious medicine.

Just as Michael is considered the guardian of the Jewish people, Lord Murugan is the overseer of the ancient Dravidian Tamil people of South India. He is known as the God of the Tamils and is said to have given them the beautiful Tamil language.

Michael is thought to be the angel of repentance, righteousness, mercy and sanctification. Although many Mahadevas in the Hindu pantheon could be considered to fulfill this function, in the Saivite denomination it is Lord Murugan to whom one turns in moments of contrition, confusion or darkness.

In one controversial concept of Archangel Michael, he is identical with Jesus—he is the son of God. Although considered as a serious heresy by most Christians, this view is held by Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Similarly, Hindus think of Lord Murugan as one of the two sons of Siva, the other son being Ganesha. In this case, the idea of sons of God is not literal, implying physicality, but a way of emphasizing the importance and preeminence of these two Mahadevas in the Saiva pantheon and understanding their proximity to the Supreme, having been created as Mahadevas rather than souls subject to reincarnation.

Another tradition with parallels to the worship of Murugan is



the Yazidi, an Iranic pre-Zoroastrian religion. Their name for this Mahadeva is Melek Taus, the Peacock Angel, considered to be the leader of the archangels, an emanation of God Himself and the first and foremost of seven archangels created to administer the universe. Melek Taus is thus a tangible, denser form of the infinite Supreme God. In order to assist Melek Taus in this important role, the Supreme Creator also created six other Great Angels, who are, like the Peacock Angel, emanations of the Supreme God and not separate from Him. This idea of emanation is identical to Hindu thought.

There are examples of divine beings in other religions which have close resemblances to some in the Hindu pantheon, leading one to consider if the division of religions we see in our world is of our own making and not the reality of the higher worlds.

(with editing input from Fred Stella)



THE AUTHOR

Gayatri Rajan (1947-2024) was a long-time devotee of Hinduism Today’s founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. She wrote this article shortly before she passed away after a long illness. Gayatri is survived by her husband Deva, (at right in photo) daughter Shivani and son Kailas.



ARAVINDRAJ CHANDRASEKARAN

PILGRIMAGE

Awesome Kedarnath

A Malaysian survives a monsoon-pelted yatra to Siva's Himalayan home

ARAVINDRAJ CHANDRASEKARAN,
KUALA LUMPUR

GROWING UP IN MALAYSIA, I WATCHED hundreds of pilgrims head for North India, eager but trepidatious about making the arduous trek to Siva's abode at Kedarnath. From afar, I always admired those brave souls and hoped in my heart to one day feel the thrill of completing this famous, penance-filled journey to the top of the world. My time came at last to visit the holy dhams, or divine dwellings.

A *yatra*, or pilgrimage, to Kedarnath and Badrinath (popularly known as the *dho dham yatra*) counts as one of India's most auspicious and demanding pilgrimages. This is because these two holy destinations are so remote, nestled in the high Himalayas, with

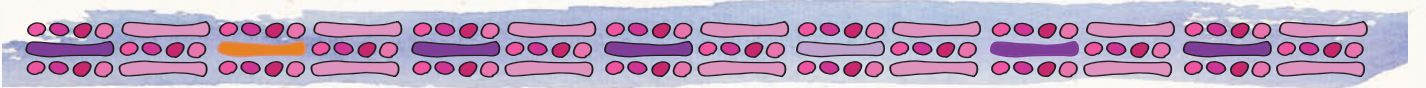
Kedarnath located at 3,583 meters (11,755 feet) and Badrinath at 3,300 meters (10,827 feet) above sea level.

The Yatra Begins

On June 23, 2023, our group of pilgrims boarded a five-hour AirAsia flight from KLIA airport to New Delhi. Upon landing, we were delighted to see that Indira Gandhi International Airport had managed to reincarnate its facilities with art, engineering and people-friendly efficiencies. We could have been entering any modern international city. I recalled a frustratingly long wait to pass through immigration checkpoints 20 years ago at the same airport. This time, the wait was much shorter and I enjoyed the eye-catching works of meaningful art. As I

exited the air conditioned airport, the sweltering heat hit hard, giving us pause to reflect on the challenges ahead as we waited for our driver to take us to our hotel for the night.

Early next morning, Deshraj, our driver, drove us to Rishikesh. It was a challenging 10-hour trip, as driving in India is not for the faint-hearted and even the most experienced drivers are bound to get into at least a bump or a scrape. That is exactly what happened. We were wading through a traffic jam when a car suddenly rear-ended us. As the car we used was new, Deshraj was visibly upset. You can imagine his not-so-gentle conversation with the man who rammed us. Luckily, no one was hurt and the damage was minor. The journey could continue and the dent tended to later.



ARAVINDRAJ CHANDRASEKARAN

Siva's homes: Left, the south-facing Kedarnath Temple built to withstand seismic activity and extreme weather, with the Himalayas looming above; right, Dhari Devi Temple located in the middle of the Alaknanda River, with the *vimanam* (circular dome) open to the sky.

I enjoyed the long drive on the well-maintained highways. It was a joy to watch the panorama change from the city hustle and bustle to the bucolic greenery of farms. Occasionally, we passed through small towns that dotted the countryside. India is indeed a land of contrasts. Along with open-air roadside *dhabas*, or food stalls, there was a surprising selection of restaurants to choose from, well-maintained, clean and air-conditioned. Deshraj knew exactly where to stop for the best meals. Even with all the improvements, clean toilets were a rarity.

Omkarananda Ashram, Rishikesh

We reached a bustling Rishikesh in the late afternoon. The weather was great and there were tourists and pilgrims aplenty, which made for a terrific traffic jam on the narrow roads. Our destination was Omkarananda Ashram which we had pre-booked. It was my first trip to Rishikesh and I was spellbound by the beauty and serenity of the Ganga River as I walked along Omkarananda Ghat, just meters away from the noisy, bustling street. Here I found a deep feeling of peace in the lap of the holy Ganga. It was a stark contrast. Yet, this mosaic of harmoni-

ous and colorful contrasts is what makes India so amazing.

It was an unexpected blessing to find a Sivalingam in the Ganga River at Omkarananda Ghat. I couldn't see one anywhere else along the river. I eagerly performed a simple Ganga abhishekam, or ritual bathing, of the Deity while chanting a mantra and performed arati with some simple offerings I had bought from a local lady walking along the ghats. I felt so happy to be able to do this. It's not often one gets a chance to perform abhishekam to God Siva with actual Ganga water taken straight from the river!

In the evening, we could hear the chanting and see the massive oil lamps of the daily Ganga arati performed at Parmarth Niketan on the opposite bank of the river. It was a beautiful sight to behold. Early next morning, we were back on the road for the three-hour journey to Dhari Devi Temple.

Kali's Quarters

Dhari Devi, a form of Kali, is considered by many to be the guardian deity of Uttarakhand and also the protector of the Char (Four) Dhams. This temple is one of the 108 Shakti Pithams—abodes of the Goddess

Shakti. On June 16, 2013, the Dhari Devi Deity had been abruptly shifted to another location due to construction work related to a hydroelectric dam being built on the Alaknanda River. The work submerged the rock upon which Her murti was located. Locals can never forget that a few hours later a cloudburst triggered a deluge of historic proportions that wiped out the town surrounding Kedarnath and dozens of places in Uttarakhand. By divine intervention, only the Kedarnath Jyothirlinga Temple was spared. The floods destroyed much of the state and killed thousands of people. Local residents attributed this disaster to the unceremonious way the Deity was moved. Ten years later, on January 22, 2023, the murti was properly re-consecrated with much fanfare, placing Her in the original location after temple renovations. Traditionally, according to local lore, Her blessings should be sought before embarking on the Kedarnath yatra to ensure a safe journey.

The Dhari Devi Temple is unusual for many reasons. Her murti's upper body is located in a temple near Kaliyasaur, Rudraprayag, while Her lower body is worshiped in Kalimath. We reached the temple near Kaliyasaur village at about 8am. The small *rajagopuram* was built following South Indian temple architecture.

As I walked down the steps toward the temple, I could see that the structure was



Glacial river Alaknanda: (clockwise from above) view of the spectacular landscape from the river steps of the Koteswar Mahadev Temple, Rudraprayag, en route from Kedarnath; pilgrims hire ponies and porters to save time and energy; trekking route map

built around a large rock that protrudes from the middle of the Alaknanda River at 600 meters above sea level. Unlike in most temples, here there is no fully covering dome, or *vimanam*, directly above the main sanctum. Apparently, this is the way the Goddess likes it. I had to walk across a bridge to reach the temple. The darshan was strong as I looked upon Her divine form beautifully draped in a rich red silk sari and adorned with a golden crown. It reminded me of the Goddess Mariamman widely worshiped in Tamil Nadu. In some temples there, only Her head is worshiped. As I was enjoying the darshan, I noticed a fog rolling over the river after the heavy rain. For a while, it felt like the temple was floating on the clouds. It was a heavenly sight that I will never forget.

Our Rough Trek to Kedarnath

We continued our journey by car through the winding roads, occasionally stopping to deal with car-sickness or to have a meal. I was surprised to see a few solitary sadhus braving the elements, walking on foot towards Kedarnath. The scenic views of the hills and mountains were magnificent as we made our way to Sonprayag to put up for the night on June 25. However, a landslide forced us to change plans and put up in a small town called Phata 16 km away from Sonprayag.

This was fortunate, as the Phata Resort offers a spectacular view of the Himalayas and Kedarnath Valley. Looking above the valley, I was astonished that there were no clouds directly above the Kedarnath Valley where the Jyothirlinga is situated. It was as though the divine energies created a circular shield that prevented clouds from closing in. Other pilgrims made the same observation.

The landslide was cleared by 2am the next morning. On June 26, we were back on the road at 5am eager to catch up for lost time. Because of heavy traffic at 6am in Sonprayag, we had to walk about two kilometers to the verification checkpoint with our heavy bags and backpacks. It was tiring. Then we trekked another kilometer to board a jeep to Gaurikund because only four-wheel drive vehicles could climb beyond that point. Here the chaos caught us totally unprepared. There was no systematic way to get on the transport vehicles. No tickets. No queues. Like everyone else, we made a mad dash for any available vehicle. It was utterly chaotic, with about 15 people squeezed in or hanging on for dear life at the back. I had a stranger sitting on my lap for 20 minutes on a five km drive with my cheek pressed onto the seat. I was thankful I could still walk when we arrived at Gaurikund.

At Gaurikund, we arranged for porters with

sling-carriers to haul our heavy bags. Our group preferred to avoid using ponies on humane grounds as we saw how badly these animals were being treated. We still carried a backpack to hold some water, snacks and clothing as we trekked up. It was essential to use a walking stick that could be bought from the locals at the trail entrance. After a short prayer to Lord Ganesha, Goddess Gauri and God Siva at a shrine nearby, we started our trek at 8:30am. After the devastating floods of 2013, the new altered route is at least 18 km long when you consider the walking that you do before entering Gaurikund.

The view as we hiked was spectacular—pristine snow-capped mountains, forests, glaciers and tiny streams flowing across our path. The sacred Mandakini River, cascading in the opposite direction, kept us company throughout the day. However, seeing litter strewn on the cliff side along many parts of the path, I found myself wishing for better trash management. Pilgrims, businesses and authorities have a responsibility to keep this

sacred place clean, right?

It was tough to keep pace with the porters, as they are accustomed to moving briskly, even with our burden of bags on their backs. So, our group broke into two teams. One team kept pace with the porters, while the other moved at a moderate speed. I was with the latter team, needing to avoid altitude sickness which was threatening my body. We thought we could communicate by phone with the other team even though separated, but this proved difficult as we had challenges getting a clear signal.

As we moved higher and higher, the air turned colder and thinner, making it difficult to walk. Some people resorted to portable oxygen canisters to alleviate breathing difficulties. These were available at pharmacies in Sonprayag and Gaurikund. Medical relief camps with oxygen supplies are also available along the path during pilgrimage season. After Bheembali, the halfway point, the climb grew noticeably steeper. The steps there are made of cobblestones that are often uneven. We were thankful we brought proper trekking shoes.

We faced the ever-present risk of being pushed to the side by ponies or their handlers as they sped along the narrow path with little regard for those of us on foot. The overwhelming smell of horse manure and urine was also difficult to deal with. It was quite impossible to avoid getting these on your shoes. I felt nauseated and was forced to halt a few times to rest. Thankfully, the per-



ARAVINDRAJ CHANDRASEKARAN

son following me had some medicated eucalyptus oil that contained menthol and camphor. Sniffing that oil greatly helped with the nausea.

Beyond Bheembali I was weakening and was advised to alternate taking ten steps forward with short pauses, taking deep breaths during the pauses to avoid altitude sickness. I was wearing a light vest with many big zipped pockets to hold a few 500 ml water bottles. Whenever I ran short of water, I would buy the one-liter water bottles and refill the smaller bottles to distribute the weight. Water is crucial, as you can get dehydrated easily and thus exacerbate altitude sickness. I also had to use Oral-Rehydration Salt (ORS) sachets mixed in the water.

In that remote location, there is not much variety in the stalls when it comes to food. Chapatis with dal and hot instant noodles were the norm. However, in the increasingly cold weather, a hot cup of chai tasted heavenly and helped keep my face and hands warm for a few restful minutes. Additionally, I had my own supply of dried raisins and nuts to maintain my energy level. We quickly learned that it's never a good idea to take heavy meals while trekking.

It also tends to rain all of a sudden here, and the downpours can be quite heavy. Typical winter-wear, though somewhat waterproof, can't handle heavy rains. This is where raincoats and waterproofed trekking shoes came

in handy. Somewhere along the journey, I had left my backpack at one of the food-stalls and was forced to walk back two km to retrieve it. All this slowed us down considerably. By sunset, we passed Lincholi and still had about five km to complete the journey. At this altitude, the cold winds grew harsher as darkness approached. I was freezing, with no idea how long it would take to reach the temple

and we could finally see the well-lit temple.

A great feeling of joy engulfed me as I raised my cold hands gratefully in namaskar. We had reached the awe-inspiring Himalayan citadel of God Siva known as Kedarnath. I stopped for a moment in the silence and reflected on the amazing fact that over 300,000 brave souls make this journey each year. This year, I was one among them.



COURTESY DEV DHAM YATRA



सा विद्या या विमुक्तये
KNOWLEDGE IS THAT WHICH LIBERATES

Vedic Wisdom - Online

Mission

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You Can Help Fulfill the Tradition of Feeding

A traditional practice in any aadheenam—a monastery and temple complex in the South Indian Saiva Siddhanta tradition—is the ceremonial feeding of close, usually initiated, followers of the center, both lay and monastic. This is referred to as Maheshvarapuja. Maheshvara is a term for a Saiva ascetic, as well as for God Siva. And when Maheshvarapuja is held during a major aadheenam festival, such as the founder's annual Mahasamadhi, visiting Saiva ascetics in attendance are traditionally honored with gifts, such as dakshina and kavi robes.



On special days, the lunch fare at the monastery—brown rice with veggie curries, dal and yogurt—is augmented with additional delicacies.

The importance of Maheshvarapuja is mentioned in the ancient Saiva scripture *Tirumantiram*, with several passages ranking this rite above other forms of dana: “Maheshvaras will besmear their bodies with the sacred ash; those who consider them as Siva and worship them will get all benefits; to feed them in the daytime is more beneficial than building a thousand temples, and giving daily food to Maheshvaras will yield more benefits than granting a thousand dwelling places of Brahmins” (7.13).

To provide funds for an aadheenam's Maheshvarapujas, separate endowments were often established and documented in temple wall inscriptions. In chapter seven of her doctoral thesis, *The Sacred Presence of the Guru*, Kathleen Koppedrayar describes this tradition: “The numerous temple inscriptions that describe endowments made for the feeding in mathas of maheshvaras, sivayogis, tapasvis, paradasis (mendicants) and other types of ascetics and devotees thus appear to be examples of the ritual gesture which the *Tirumantiram* calls Maheshvarapuja.

“This act of feeding ascetics and others on both festival and ordinary occasions within the temple complex appears to have been highly significant; otherwise, it would not have merited the public announcement of a temple inscription. In fact, many, if not most, of the temple records we have that make reference to mathas are concerned with this ritual gesture. In other words, it appears that mathas were precisely the places where such religious acts could be carried out. Put another way, mathas housed the ‘religious institution’ of making gifts—mainly of food, but sometimes of more substantial things—to ascetics and other individuals. Highly ritualized, this gifting was both purposeful and transactional.... The statements found in the *Tirumantiram* coupled with the frequency of inscriptional reference to the feeding of ascetics, as well as the centrality of this rite in the present-day ritual cycle of the Saiva mathas suggests a formal significance to this act.”

Kauai Aadheenam has its own endowment for Maheshvarapuja called the Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund. (*Yagam*, a Tamil word, refers to religious feeding.) This endowment was established to provide meals for the monks and devotees on holy days, such as Gurudeva's annual Mahasamadhi observance, temple festivals and other special events at the Aadheenam.

If you would like to help the monks abundantly fulfill the aadheenam tradition of Maheshvarapuja, you can do so by donating to the Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund at www.hheonline.org/funds/fund_61.html. The endowment allows the monastery to use your funds as an investment and draw on the grant income. This is a way to donate and see your impact last in perpetuity.

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

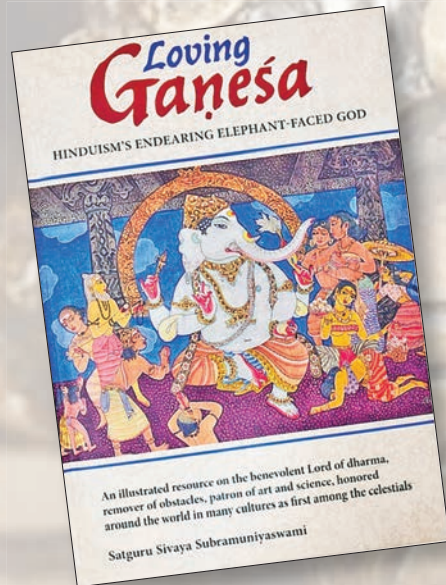
Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment			Kalpana & Muralikumar		
Schwab Charitable Fund	US\$2,000.00		Krishnamurthi	101.00	
Ambika Alagere	6.22		Vidyul L. Krishnan	501.00	
Peshanidevi Dandapani	108.00		Veeraswamy Krishnaraj	101.00	
Rajendra Giri	153.00		Vel Mahalingum	186.72	
Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.09		Umasankaran Mohambourame	153.00	
Vel Mahalingum	2,000.00		Gowri Nadason	121.97	
Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.43		Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	31.22	
Gowri Nadason	121.97		Thomas J. Rowe	200.00	
Thomas J. Rowe	200.00		Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75		Kitri Waterman	100.00	
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00		Anonymous	1,217.00	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00		Total	4,326.91	
Tirunilayi S. Seshadri	201.00		Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund		
Connie Sodt	100.00		Heather Cantamessa	108.00	
Anonymous	5,201.00		Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00	
Total	10,426.25		Total	609.00	
Iraivan Temple Endowment			Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	101.00		Akshat Jaganmohan	100.00	
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	303.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Frank Burkhardt	30.00		Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	300.00	
Umapathi & Geetha Cattamanchi	1,001.00		Anonymous	56.00	
Omkar Kodambari Chavan	42.00		Total	564.00	
Mitech Gohil	251.00		Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund		
Tamnash J. Gupta	108.00		Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	6,000.00	
Kunchitha & Girija Gurumurthy	500.00		Tejasinha Sivalingam	21.00	
Alan & Celia Jorgensen	30.00		Total	6,021.00	
Ashwani Kaul	125.00		Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		
Rajagopal Krishnan	324.00		Thomas J. Rowe	100.00	
Vasaant Krishnan	90.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Ram Kumar	101.00		Anonymous	6,030.00	
Inna Linnyk	108.00		Total	6,238.00	
Ravinder Mittal	1,001.00		Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		
Easvan Param	303.00		Mano Navaratnarajah	50.00	
Thomas J. Rowe	250.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Mohan & Rajalakshmi Sabapathy	600.00		Anonymous	158.00	
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	75.00		Hinduism Today Production Fund		
Elijah Sidon	180.00		Ambika Alagere	12.43	
Tejasinha Sivalingam	23.37		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.83	
Devadasen Vythelingum	108.00		David Heitz	51.00	
Anonymous	344.00		Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.09	
Total	5,998.77		Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	6,000.00	
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.43	
Malvi Gandhi	75.00		Silvarajoo Muniandy	47.10	
Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.16		Bill Muster Foundation	400.00	
Jogendra Moorooogen	8.28		Ravindra Nana	108.00	
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	8.28		Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	
Anandani Nellan	6.17		Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	31.22	
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98		C V Sundar-Raj	50.00	
Thomas J. Rowe	200.00		Anonymous	63.00	
Manishankar Sagum	12.43		Total	6,864.11	
Nandi Deva Sundaram	300.00		Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		
Anonymous	33.00		Benevity	400.00	
Total	724.30		Schwab Charitable Fund	3,000.00	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			Benevity	162.00	
Thirujinanam Amassalon	12.43		Joel Estevez	11.11	
Kamya Auriti	249.00		Tamnash J. Gupta	540.00	
Thangam Chandrasekaran	249.00		Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	3,000.00	
Rajan Chaudhry	249.00		Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	
Balaji & Radha Iyer	249.00		Hitesvara Saravan	36.00	
Bhagarath Joshi	249.00		Manish & Archana Verma	101.00	
Nadia & Neisha Kalyan	249.00		Matthew Wiczork	200.00	
Juhivaasana Koothan	4.11		Anonymous	234.00	
Prabhakaran Krishnamurthy	299.00		Total	7,762.86	
Tejwantee Meetoo	62.23		Hindu Education Endowment		
Bhaveshan Moorghen	16.58		Fidelity Charitable	50.00	
Logathanas Murugasu	66.96		Schwab Charitable Fund	3,000.00	
Padmini Pareatumbee	70.75		Subbia G. Jagannathan	100.00	
Baiju Patel	249.00		Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00	
Mamta Patel	299.00		Total	3,225.00	
Sukumar Rajasekhar	249.00		Positive Discipline Endowment		
S S	249.00		Schwab Charitable Fund	1,909.00	
Neelam & Bal Krishan Sahajpal	249.00		American Funds	1,000.00	
Chidambaram Sendan	110.02		The Blackbaud Giving Fund		
Subramanian & Sudha Sharma	108.00		—YourCause	34.71	
Nithya Sivaram	249.00		Harjinder Bhangu	1,000.00	
Aadithya Udupa	249.00		Anonymous	10,001.00	
Lakshmi Vasist	249.00		Total	13,944.71	
Anonymous	747.00		Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund		
Total	5,033.08		Rick Harter	108.00	
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund		
Sanyasi Ganta	501.00		Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	3,000.00	
Akash Katir	20.00		Tara & Arvind Patel	55.00	
Kalyana Kavuri	1,000.00		Total	3,055.00	
			Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund		
			The Blackbaud Giving Fund		
			—YourCause	17.97	
			Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund		
			Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	
			Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		
			Ambika Alagere	20.57	
			Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00	
			Michael Doyle	324.00	
			Debashis Ghosh	300.00	
			Vivek & Avni Iyer	1,008.00	
			Kamila Jagambrum	20.83	
			Brijianand Jugurnauth	41.40	
			Haran Kandadas	108.00	
			Inna Linnyk	108.00	
			Eric Mackow	17.50	
			Vel Mahalingum	61.72	
			Kulagan Moonesawmy	20.57	
			Seedha Lutchmee Moonesawmy	20.57	
			Souria Koomaren Moorghen	205.74	
			Dayavati Murugan	50.00	
			Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00	
			Mano Navaratnarajah	100.00	
			Cassan Pancham	1,500.00	
			Janaka Param	300.00	
			Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	31.22	
			Suresh Ramamurthi	108.00	
			Puvaneswary Roberts	500.00	
			Chamundi Sabanathan	1,008.00	
			Aran Sendan	108.00	
			Egambrum Sinsamy	61.72	
			Logavalli Sinsamy	61.72	
			Nandi Devi Sivanathan	67.61	
			Adi Srikantha	108.00	
			Petchai Subramanian	4.11	
			Soma Sundaram	100.00	
			Ravi Thaker	66.00	
			Devadasen Vythelingum	108.00	
			Anonymous	5,531.00	
			Total	12,820.54	
			Udayan Care Endowment Fund		
			Prashanth Yadagiri	200.00	
			Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment		
			Shyamal Chandra Debnath	100.00	
			Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		
			Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	
			Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		
			Anil Ananda Badhwar	10.00	
			Aran Sendan	108.00	
			Jeeva Velusaami	33.00	
			Total	151.00	
			Tiptur Shiva Temple & Youth Hostel Fund		
			Rao V. Remala	250.00	
			Kerala Temple Trust		
			Anonymous	21.00	
			Taos Hanuman Fund		
			Anonymous	123.00	
			Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		
			Rajiv Verma	150.00	
			Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		
			Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00	
			Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment		
			Vel Mahalingum	8.28	
			Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00	
			Dharmalingam Siddhan	20.00	
			Maya & Anand Yadav	51.00	
			Anonymous	54.00	
			Total	283.28	

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Partha Ayalasomayajula		251.00	Abhirami Balasubramanian		100.00
Rajendra Giri	153.00	Shanthini Dharmakulaseelan		25.00	Charles Close		216.00
Anonymous	44.00	Meghan Ganser		100.00	Shyamal Das		101.00
Total	197.00	Sanyasi Ganta		501.00	Iryna Doroshen Wo		216.00
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn		7.83	Rajul & Heidi Gandhi		540.00
Nirmala Balasingam	200.00	Rajendra Giri		153.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn		7.83
Shanthini Dharmakulaseelan	25.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth		31.09	Rajendra Giri		153.00
Vel Mahalingum	2,000.00	Srinivas R. Madaboosi		375.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth		31.09
Vimala Muniandy	90.00	Natraj Narayanswami		45.00	Shivaram & Kiran Kalugotla		27.00
Parul & Kumud Patel	125.00	Parul & Kumud Patel		125.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta		6,000.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Varalakshmi Ramamoorthy		324.00	Murali Kotte		100.00
Aran Sendan	108.00	Padmini Samuthiran		162.00	Ganesh Krishnan		300.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	800.00	Rajeshkumar Shah		250.00	Velika Lawrence		9.99
Anonymous	932.00	Rodney & Ilene Standen		30.00	Ioana-Gabriela Manoliu		116.00
Total	4,330.44	Arunasalam Vathavooran		75.00	Roma Maraj		1,000.00
Siva Poomi School Trust		Anonymous		548.00	Mihir Meghani		2,501.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	500.00	Total		4,087.07	Umasankaran Mohambourame		153.00
Anonymous	26.00	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment			Kulagan Moonesawmy		6.34
Total	526.00	Rick Harter		108.00	Sridhar & Krithika Ramadas		108.00
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Anonymous		108.00	Meenakshi & Jayant Ramakrishnan		108.00
Anonymous	75.00	Total		216.36	Padmini Samuthiran		162.00
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund			Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar		25.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	Anonymous		5.00	Meenakshi Sethu		100.00
Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment			Pramod & Anjana Sinha		300.00
Amrit & Sanjivani Bakare	501.00	N. Balasubramanian		110,000.00	Tarangadeva Sinhaputra		63.00
N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00	Panchangam Endowment Fund			Nandi Devi Sivanathan		78.96
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	300.00	Audrey Fowler		10.00	Venkateswara R. Sola		25.00
Venkateswara R. Sola	25.00	Digital Dharma Endowment			Gomathy Subramaniam		151.00
Nalayini Tharmarajah	200.00	Chellappa Deva		50.00	Vibha Sundaram		202.00
Anonymous	108.00	Rajendra Giri		153.00	Ravi Thaker		18.00
Total	6,134.36	Chandraleela Hoezoo		108.00	Saravan Veylan		324.00
Hindu American Foundation Endowment		Vivek & Avni Iyer		108.00	Anonymous		1,555.00
Ravi & Vaishnavi Ramakrishnan	200.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta		3,000.00	Total		19,841.93
Prashanth Yadagiri	100.00	Amravadee Kownden		103.79	Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund		
Total	300.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy		12.43	Ram Kumar		101.00
The Endowment for Global Hindu Rights		J. S. M. & Radha Sarma		200.00	Anonymous		108.00
Amrit & Sanjivani Bakare	501.00	Shama Vinayaga		219.87	Total		209.36
Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Anonymous		1,331.00	Antyodoy Anatha Ashram Orphanage Endowment		
Merrill Lynch	401.00	Total		5,286.15	Parul & Kumud Patel		100.00
CyberGrants	601.50	Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund			Veena & Venkat Raman		300.00
Arun Aarooren	75.00	Merrill Lynch		400.00	Total		400.00
Ambika Alagere	6.22	Schwab Charitable Fund		2,000.00			
Merrill Lynch		CyberGrants		400.50	Total Contributions		\$242,255.54
CyberGrants		Ambika Alagere		6.22	Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2024		
Arun Aarooren		Isani Alahan		1,008.00			
Ambika Alagere		Yuvaraj Athur		153.00	Grand Total		\$25,113,041.47
		Anandkumar Ayyachamy		75.00			
		Amrit & Sanjivani Bakare		1,001.00			

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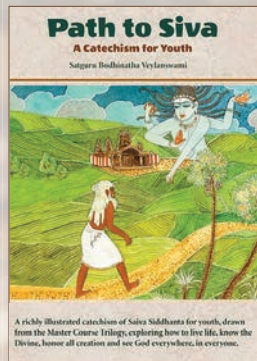
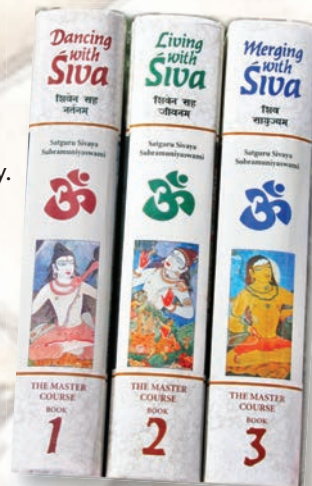
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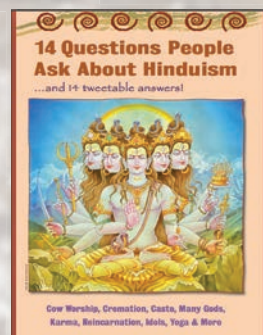
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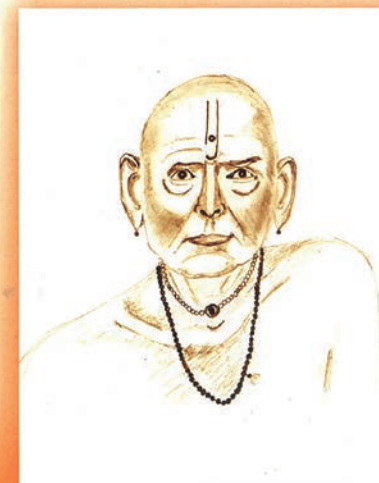


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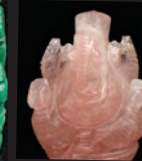
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- | | |
|---|--|
| Mar 3-Apr 3 Four-Week Vedanta Course (in person) • Swami Muktatmananda: <i>Īśāvāsya Kathopanishad w/bhāsyam</i> | Jyotirbrāhmaṇa • Swami Muktatmananda, <i>Kena Upanisad with bhāsyam</i> |
| Apr 18-20 Easter Weekend Family Vedanta Course • Swami Muktatmananda, <i>Vedanta and Emotional Maturity</i> | Jul 26-Aug 1 Family Vedanta Course I (Sat-Fri) Swami Sakshatkritananda, <i>What is happiness?</i> • Swami Muktatmananda, <i>Aparoksānubhūti</i> , verses 126-144 |
| May 3-10 Vedanta Camp • Sri Vijay Kapoor <i>Fulfillment through Bhagavad Gita</i> | Aug 2-8 Family Vedanta Course II (Sat-Fri) Swami Sakshatkritananda, <i>Sadhana Dvayam</i> • Swami Muktatmananda, <i>Vedānta-sāra</i> , top.1-8 |
| May 9-18 Ten-Day Vedanta Course (Fri-Sun) Swamini Svatmavidyananda: <i>Pañcadaśī Chapter 10: Nātaka-dīpa</i> | Aug 9-15 Family Vedanta Course III • Swami Sakshatkritananda, <i>Sādhana Pañcakam</i> , Swami Muktatmananda– <i>Vedānta-sāra</i> , topics 9-15 |
| May 23-26 Memorial Day Family Vedanta Course • Swamini Paraprajnananda: <i>Bhagavad Gītā</i> , verse 9.29 | Aug 15 Pujya Swamiji's Jayanti Day (Fri) |
| May 29-Jun 1 Spring Weekend Vedanta Course • Swami Sachidananda: <i>Selected verses from Astāvakra Gītā</i> | Aug 17 Gurukulam's 39th Anniversary (Sun) Topic TBA |
| Jun 3-Aug 24 In-depth Vedanta Course for Adults • Swami Tattvavidananda: <i>Tattvamasi and Gītā-sāra</i> by Ramana Maharishi | Aug 29-Sep 1 Patrons' Complimentary Course (Fri-Mon) Swami Tattvavidananda: <i>Drg-D-Viveka</i> Swami Muktatmananda: <i>Shraddha</i> |
| Jun 6-8 Meditation Course (Fri-Sun) Swami Sachidananda • <i>Meditation, Reflection & Introspection</i> | Sep 4-18 Two-Week Vedanta Course for Adults • Swami Tattvavidananda <i>Aparoksānubhūti & Visnusahasranāma</i> |
| Jun 12-15 Long Weekend Vedanta Course for Adults • Swamini Paraprajnananda: <i>Drg-Drśya-Viveka</i> | Sep 23 Pujya Swamiji's 10th āraḍhana, Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji's 5th āraḍhana |
| Jun 19-22 Arsha Vidya NextGen retreat (Thu-Sun) | Oct 1-5 Five-day Vedanta Course , Swami Advayatmananda, <i>Hastāmalakīyam</i> |
| Jun 26-29 Arsha Vidya Bala Gurukulam Family Course (Thu-Sun) | Nov 27-30 Thanksgiving Family Vedanta Camp • Swami Muktatmananda, <i>Hinduism & Religious Life</i> • Swami Sachidananda, <i>Vivekacūdāmani</i> , <i>Towards Freedom</i> |
| Jul 3-6 Independence Day Weekend Vedanta Course • Swamini Paraprajnananda, <i>Īśā Upanisad</i> , verse 1 | Dec 24-31 Year-End Family Vedanta Course (Wed-Wed) Swami Muktatmananda, <i>Significance of OM in Vedanta</i> • Swami Sachidananda, <i>Meditation / Dhyāna - Discovering the Inner Sanctuary</i> |
| Jul 9-23 Two-week Bhasyam Course for Adults • Swami Sakshatkritananda —> | |

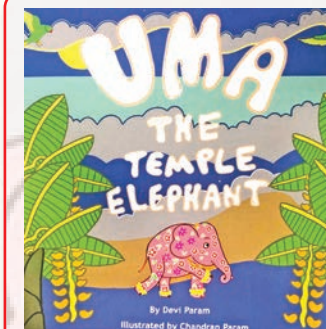
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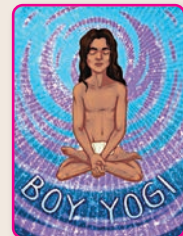
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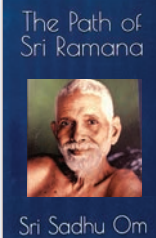


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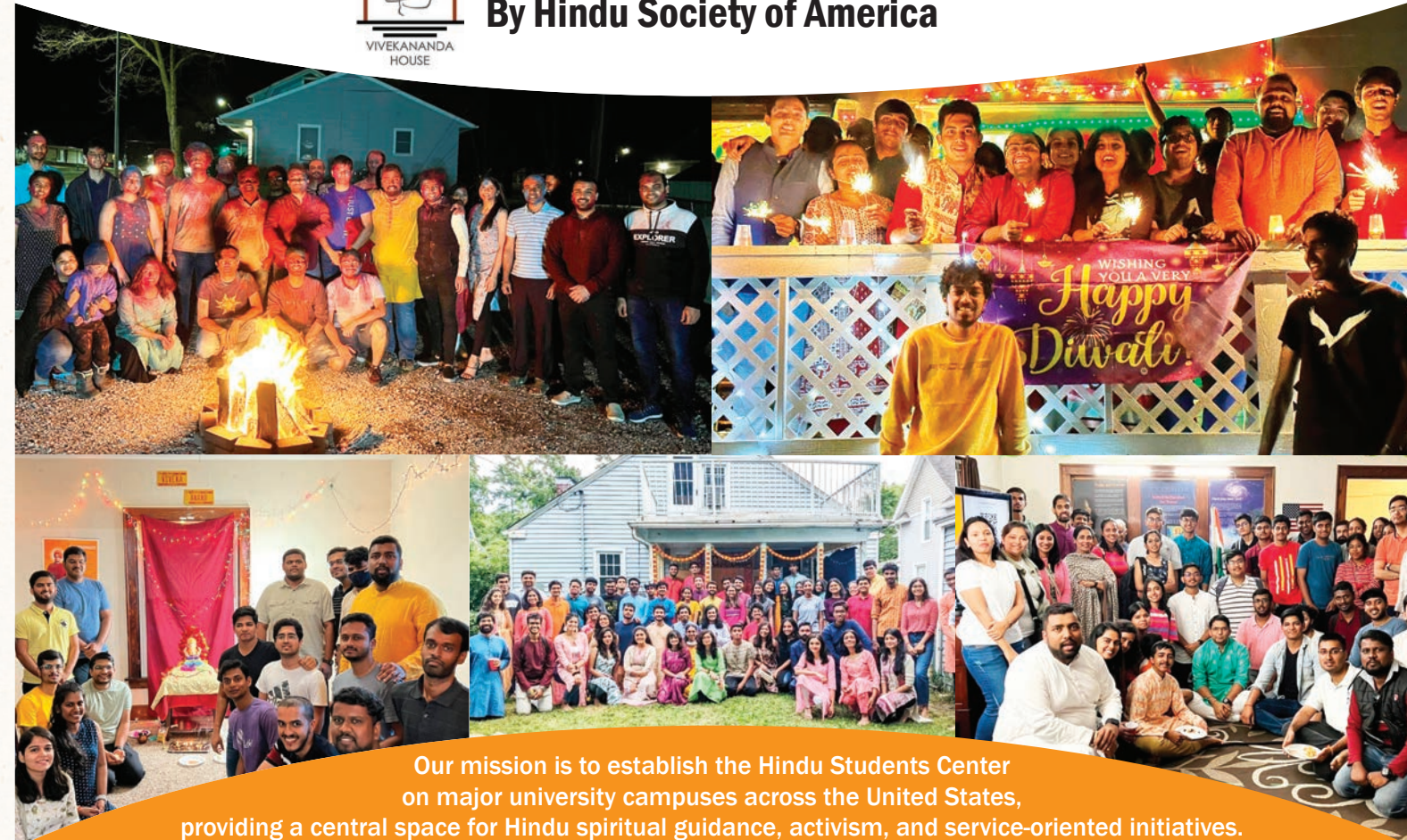
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VIVEKANANDA HOUSE By Hindu Society of America



Our mission is to establish the Hindu Students Center on major university campuses across the United States, providing a central space for Hindu spiritual guidance, activism, and service-oriented initiatives. Currently we have 8 Vivekananda Houses across the United States.

The center's main floor will host a variety of activities, including gatherings, yoga-meditation sessions, and a library dedicated to Hindu texts & resources. The top floor will be designated for student housing, offering affordable accommodation to Hindu students, with the rental income helping to support the center's financial sustainability.

WE ARE VERY EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THAT WE HAVE FOUND ANOTHER PERFECT HOUSE TO PURCHASE NEAR THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY!

We are looking forward to your help & support to raise \$300,000 this month towards the down payment.

Fundraising Goal: \$300,000



To buy property for VH @ Texas A&M University!

To Donate: www.vivekanandahouseus.org/donate

Zelle Donation can be done at: hindusocietyofamerica@gmail.com

www.vivekanandahouseus.org • www.facebook.com/pg/VivekanandaHouseUS

For more information: Call Darshan S. (317) 556-0866 • darshan@hindusocietyofamerica.org

Hindu Society of America is a 501(C)3 Tax Exempt non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible.

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- Empowerment workshops & events
- Curated resources: articles, videos, books, & infographics
- Join a community of like-minded Hindu parents and experts



SCHOOL ADVOCACY

- Addressing bullying & prejudice
- Textbook accuracy: correcting distortions in portrayal of Hinduism
- Supplementary classroom-ready teaching resources



CONFIDENT YOUNG MINDS

- Beautiful Tree Program & Camps: fostering a positive Hindu identity
- Empowerment: helping Hindu youth understand & articulate their heritage
- Workshops dispelling misconceptions

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HELP SAVE INDIA'S ANCIENT TEMPLES & TRADITIONS



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to Poor Temples



Annadanam

Practicing Hindus Preserving Our Past

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

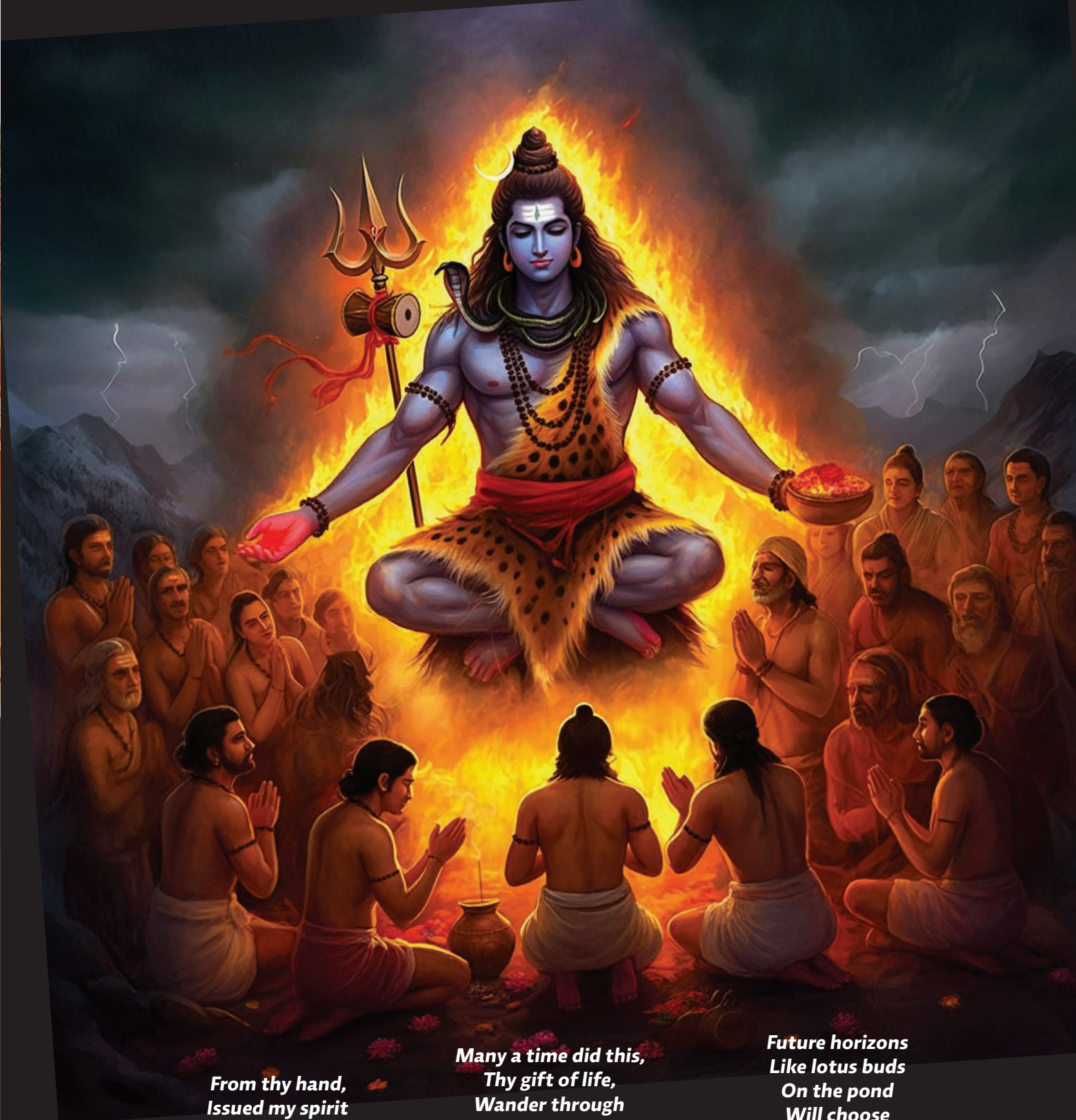
For Hindus, dana (giving) is an integral part of one's dharma, so we invite everyone to help participate in these noble projects and help keep India's temples and traditions alive



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



SCAN ME



*From thy hand,
Issued my spirit
Immortal—
In a timeless moment
Long, long ago.*

*Many a time did this,
Thy gift of life,
Wander through
Worlds of matter,
Time and space.*

*On that journey
Towards thee,
Didst thou chase phantoms
And open my way.*

*Future horizons
Like lotus buds
On the pond
Will choose
Their time
To bloom*

*i am the child inseparable
From its Mother.
Thy Love flames
Eternal.*

Past, Present, Future, by Dr. Arjunvan Subramaniam, 6-7 am, 14.07.20, Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Kriya Yoga's Three Primary Sadhanas



Ardhanarishvara, Siva/Shakti, soaring gracefully in the Sivaloka, witnesses the three major yoga practices described by Rishi Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*—austerity, self-knowledge and worship. On the left, three yogis are meditating and performing pranayamas in high Himalayan caves, their bodies covered with ice in a severe yoga tapas. Rabbits, small foxes and cobras find warmth in their laps. In the middle, two yogis are engaged in *svadhyaya*, which includes scriptural study with a guru. Attentive parrots listen to the guru's *upadesha*. On the right, in the third practice, known as *Ishvarapranidhana*, a man and his wife perform puja to a Sivalinga beneath a bilva tree, offering devotional love and bilva leaves to God Siva.

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