

# HINDUISM TODAY

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

HINDUISM  
TODAY

40  
YEARS

1979-2019



## The Royal Temples of Jammu



Brazil . . . . . BRL 14  
Canada . . . . . CAD 10

India . . . . . INR 150  
Malaysia . . . . . MYR 14

Mauritius . . MRU 115  
Singapore . . . SGD 10

Trinidad . . . TTD 48  
UK . . . . . GBP 5



(Cover) The 8-foot-tall Siva Lingam of Ranbireshwar, a Siva temple built in 1883 in Jammu city by the Dogra rulers;  
(above) We interviewed Hindu youth in India about their religious lives. See how they responded on page 54.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2019 • THE HINDU YEAR VILAMBA, 5120

*Bodhinatha Veylanawami*  
[www.gurudeva.org](http://www.gurudeva.org)

### INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** Join Our Roving Reporter for a Temple-Filled Adventure through Jammu 18  
**Conferences:** What Happened at the Recent World Hindu Congress in Chicago? 30  
**Survey:** Hindu Youth in India Speak Out About the Role of Religion in their Lives 54  
**Environment:** Kerala's Sacred Temple Groves Are a Model of Environmental Stewardship 66

**Books:** What Does it Mean to Be a Hindu? Author Hindol Sengupta Has a Book-Length Answer 64

### OPINION

- In My Opinion:** My Religion Encourages Me to Ask Questions Rather than accept Rote Answers 9  
**Publisher's Desk:** Claiming Your Omnipresence 10  
**Letters** 12  
**From the Agamas:** Part Two of a Scriptural Explanation of the Vyoma Vyapine Mantra 16

### LIFESTYLE

- Diet:** A High School Student's Exploration of Why People Are Built to Eat Plants 34  
**Insight:** Discover the Power and Poetry of South India's Bhakti Saints 38

### DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** 6  
**Quotes & Quips** 14  
**Digital Dharma** 86

**USA Contacts:** Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org). HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), January/February/March, 2019, Volume 41, No. 1. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-877-255-1540; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-7032, ext. 103; [subscribe@hindu.org](mailto:subscribe@hindu.org); advertising: 1-888-464-1008, [ads@hindu.org](mailto:ads@hindu.org). HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy, a nonprofit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanawami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. **International Contacts:** In Malaysia: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Kovind Enterprise, No. 17, Jalan Ungu U9/29, Sunway Kayangan, 40150 Shah Alam. Tel: 016-380-2393; E-mail: [silveraj05@yahoo.com](mailto:silveraj05@yahoo.com). In Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Blk 210 #06-326, Pasir Ris Street 21, 510210. Tel: 9664-9001; E-mail: [dsam55@gmail.com](mailto:dsam55@gmail.com). For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org). Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

© 2019 HIMALAYAN ACADEMY, 107 KAHOLALELE ROAD, KAPAA, HAWAII 96746-9304 USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



[www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)

[subscribe.hinduismtoday.com](http://subscribe.hinduismtoday.com)





BACKGROUND: SHUTTERSTOCK

Covers of HINDUISM TODAY from December, 1996



# GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

## Amarnath Yatra Concludes

THIS YEAR'S TWO-MONTH-long Amarnath yatra was peacefully conducted and the traditional prayers were made at the famous cave shrine of Lord Siva, reports *The Tribune* (India). Puja was held when the Chhari Mubarak (holy mace) depicting Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati arrived at the shrine. "We prayed for peace in the state as well as the country," said Mahant Deependra Giri, custodian of the mace, who had led a group of sadhus to the cave shrine. According to Bhupinder Kumar, Additional CEO of the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, over 285,000 yatris performed the pilgrimage this season, compared to 260,000 last year. The yatra begun on June 28, amid security concerns over inclement weather that posed various challenges, causing periodic closures of the route. During the first two weeks, several pilgrims

had to go back from the base camps without completing the yatra. Weather conditions later improved later and the yatra proceeded smoothly.

The Amarnath yatra follows two arduous paths, the Pahalgam and Baltal routes. The shrine itself is nestled in the South Kashmir Himalayas at an altitude of 13,500 feet.

Logistics this year included 40,000 security personnel, of which 15,000 were of the Central Armed Police Force. Ten emergency centers, 30 medical centers and five base camp hospitals were set up along routes, and 110 CCTV cameras with live streaming watched over the two routes.

**A journey of ice and stone:** *Strings of pilgrims travel through frozen mountain pathways to reach the remote Amarnath Cave.*



UNITED KINGDOM

## Ganesha Visits Oxford

THE LOCAL HINDU COMMUNITY was joined by people of various other cultures on September 15, 2018, in celebration of Oxford's first Ganesha Utsav festival, held in Botley, England, a village of about 31,000 just outside the Oxford city limits.

As reported by the *Oxford Mail*, the festival was organized and paid for by husband and wife Sesh and Jyoti Parimi as a way to give back to the community for the warm welcome they received when they moved to here a few years ago.

The celebration, which drew about 400 people, began with the Pranapratishta, "bringing to life" ceremony—the priests invoking of the Deity into the clay murti by chanting traditional Sanskrit mantras. The festival included wonderful performances by traditional Indian dancers, a catered lunch, lots of street food and the enthusiastic singing of bhajans. It all ended with the traditional parade



to a nearby river to immerse the Ganesha murti into the water, symbolizing the eventual return—not only of Ganesha but of all existence—to the Source of all.

Ganesh Utsav, also known as Ganesha Chaturthi, is an annual festival celebrated by Hindus worldwide as the birthday of the elephant-headed God Ganesha. Hindus believe in one Supreme God (called by various names),

who created all that exists—including great inner-plane beings such as Ganesha, who are also known as Gods but not confused with the Supreme God Himself/Herself (though in one tradition Ganesha is Supreme God).

Mrs. Parimi said Oxford, a renowned hub of education and intelligence, seemed a fitting place for this festival, as Ganesha is revered as the lord

**Community worship:** *Priests make offerings to Ganesha at the Chaturthi Celebrations at the Matthew Arnold School*

of intelligence, prosperity and dharma (good conduct and virtuous and moral living). The Parimis want to make this an annual celebration here, and many have already offered to contribute to next year's event.



NEPAL

## Manakamana Temple Rebuilt

ACCORDING TO A SEPTEMBER 15, 2018, article in the *Kathmandu Post*, restoration is now complete on Nepal's beautiful Manakamana Temple, a popular pilgrimage site and tourist

attraction that was badly damaged during the earthquake of April 25, 2015. Perched on a hilltop in the Gorkha district some 60 miles west of Kathmandu, the temple was

**Renewed and energized:** *Manakamana Temple now shines with a golden roof*

damaged by earlier earthquakes in 2001 and 1934 and had long been slated for reconstruction. The 2015 earthquake tilted it some 9–12 inches to the northeast, and cracks had developed in its pagoda-style roofs.

Damaged beyond all hope of repair, the structure was completely removed and is being rebuilt on a new foundation at a cost of US\$1.8m. With permission from the Department of Archaeology, the roofs were plated with 40 pounds of gold, at an additional cost of US\$1.25m.

Renovation work started in June 2015, and the temple is expected to be reopened to the public for this year's 15-day Dashain festival in October, Nepal's largest festival. The site attracts thousands of devotees during that event, which is celebrated

by Hindus and Buddhists as the triumph of good over evil.

The temple Deity, Manakamana, is a popular wish-fulfilling Goddess. According to legend, the 17th-century king Ram Shah of Gorkha learned in a dream that his queen had divine powers. After telling her of his dream, he fell ill and died. Following the custom of the day, the queen committed sati by throwing herself on his funeral pyre. The king's personal secretary, Lakhan Thapa Magar, had begged her not to do so, but she had assured him she would soon return. Some months later a farmer, plowing his field, struck a stone which began to flow with blood and milk. Believing the queen had returned at that spot, Thapa Magar built a temple there. To this day the descendants of Lakhan Thapa Magar, now in their 17th generation, serve as the priests in this temple.



TEXAS, USA

## Diwali in Texas

SKETER STADIUM IN SUGAR LAND, Texas, was the scene of the seventh annual Diwali and Dussehra festival held there by the Shri Sita Ram Foundation, which provides funding to programs that promote Vedic culture. *The Houston Chronicle* reports that the stadium, usually filled with baseball fans, was packed with tens of thousands enjoying myriad programs promoting Indian culture, including plays by children depicting Indian epics. Guests of honor included Governor Greg Abbot as chief guest, and US Representative Pete Olson as parade

marshal. Drums and Indian dance music resounded as the crowd walked under yellow banners reading "Jai Shri Ram," or "Victory to Lord Rama," enjoyed the performances and shopped at dozens of red vendor tents showcasing saris, linens, candles, jewelry and intricate henna "tattoos," (which last about seven days). The celebration concluded with a parade and fireworks.

Sugar Land is located about 22 miles from Houston. Its fast-growing Indian population jumped 83 percent between 2000 and 2012, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

Usually celebrated in the area around November 7th, the Diwali festival, also called the Hindu Festival of Lights, was observed early this year in Sugar Land. Like various other Hindu festivals, it celebrates the victory of good over evil.

**A festival for all:** *Dancers from the Natya Upasana Dance Academy wait their turn to take the stage; young Nitin Surya awaits the announcement of costume contest winners*



## The Statue of Unity

IN LATE OCTOBER THE INDIAN state of Gujarat held the inauguration for what is now the world's tallest statue. The Statue of Unity is a massive, 597-foot-tall monument to Vallabhbhai Patel, commonly known as Sardar Patel, a founding father of the Republic of India. India's first Deputy Prime Minister, Patel was largely responsible for persuading nearly every princely

state to voluntarily accede to India following the Indian Independence Act of 1947.

The statue was modeled on an enlarged 3D image of a 30-foot sculpture crafted by 93-year-old Ram Vanji Sutar. The construction began in December of 2015 and took 33 months to complete. According to the *India Times*, it required 235,000 cubic yards of concrete,

**Iron man of India:** Sardar Patel, immortalized on the Narmada River

20,000 tons of reinforced steel, 1,800 tons of bronze and another 2,000 tons of bronze cladding. The statue is located two miles downstream from the Sardar Sarovar Dam, on Sadhu Hill, in the middle of the Narmada River. It stands both as a symbol of national pride and a tribute to India's engineering prowess.



## Hawaii and Goa Become Sister States

HAWAII GOVERNOR DAVID Y. Ige signed a sister-state agreement with delegates from the Indian state of Goa, on Friday, September 8, 2018, thus creating Hawaii's first sister-state relationship with an Indian state. As reported on Hawaii's "Big Island Now" website, Goa's Director of Art and Culture, Gurudas Pilarnekar, signed the agreement on

behalf of the Goa state government. The agreement is intended to promote trade, tourism, information technology and the exchange of health and wellness, agriculture, culinary art, education and cultural programs between private-sector organizations and universities of the two states. Attendees included the editors of HINDUISM TODAY.



**Bridging cultures:** Governor David Ige holds the signed document for Hawaii while Gurudas, the Director of Art and Culture in Goa, signs for his state.

Helping to initiate this historic agreement were Hawaii's US Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who met with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and political leaders of Goa during her December 2014 visit to India; Dr. Raj Kumar, president of the Hawaii chapter of the Indian-America Friendship Council and Gandhi International Institute for Peace; Hawaii State Sen. Brian Taniguchi; and Hawaii State Rep. Ken Ito.

Rep. Gabbard related, "I shared my vision with the Goa representatives to establish a sister-state relationship between Goa and Hawaii. I am overjoyed that this relationship is coming to fruition, for both Hawaii and Goa are exemplary places of peace and tranquility."

Gov. Ige said, "The US-India partnership is an important one, and the Hawaii-Goa relationship will help strengthen this bond. We welcome people from Goa to invest in Hawaii's economy

and share their traditional and cultural values with us."

Sen. Taniguchi noted, "India is not only the world's largest democracy, but it has one of the fastest-growing economies. Educational and intellectual exchanges between our schools and institutions of higher learning can greatly benefit from this relationship."

Rep. Ito commented, "I look forward to Hawaii developing more business and cultural linkages with Goa, India, for the benefit of both. India's rich heritage fits well in the fabric of Hawaii's rich mix of cultures."

Hawaii's Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Sherry Menor-McNamara added that the new relationship "serves to facilitate greater foreign investment between the two states and increased opportunities for mutual economic, educational, tourism and cultural exchanges."

of the Kumbha Mela and the beauty of Sanatana Dharma. The video features several prominent speakers, including Vamadeva Shastri, Rajiv Malholtra, Maria Worth and Ram Das Lamb. It highlights many aspects of the Kumbha Mela as well as the religion itself. See: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReWiJ4pd6Kc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReWiJ4pd6Kc)

Global Dharma  
news provided by  
**HINDU PRESS  
INTERNATIONAL**

Subscribe to a free daily  
news summary about  
Hinduism worldwide at  
[hinduismtoday.com/hpi](http://hinduismtoday.com/hpi)



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

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



Founder:

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Editor-in-Chief:

Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

*Publisher's Aide:* Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami

*Deputy Editor:* Acharya Kumarnathaswami

*Managing Editor:* Acharya Arumuganathaswami

*Production Manager:* Sannyasin Brahmanathaswami

*Subscription and Distribution Manager:*

Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami

*Advertising Manager:* Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami

*Assistant Editor:* Yogi Jayanatha

*Correspondents:* Rajiv Malik, Delhi; Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru; Lavina Melwani, New York; Sally Acharya, Nepal; Paras Ramoutar, Trinidad.

*Copy Editor:* Chamundi Sabanathan. *HPI Staff:* Chandra Sankara.

*Consultants:* Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar, Sheela Venkatakrishnan. *Photo Contributors:* Thomas L. Kelly,

Dinodia Picture Agency, Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun, Arun Mishra, Mumbai. *Digital Team:* Andre Garzia,

Dharmalingam Siddhan. *Distribution:* USA: Ingram Periodicals, New Leaf, EBSCO Subscription Services,

Ubiquity. Europe: SWETS Subscription Service. Malaysia: Kovind Enterprises. Singapore: Sanathana Dharma

Publications India: Central News Agency Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP. Trinidad: Pandit Narendra & Ash-

winee Ragoonanan. *Printer:* Quad/Graphics, Midland, Michigan.

## IN MY OPINION

# A Search of Self-Inquiry

### How I came to understand what it means to be a Hindu

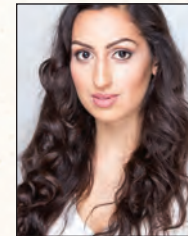
BY SHIVALI BHAMMER

I liken faith to a relationship: it takes investment, discipline, trust, discovery, questioning, and most importantly, devotion. When I first set out to write this short article about what it meant to me to be a Hindu, the words would not come; but weeks later, on a long flight from New York to Maui, they began to flow—interestingly enough, because of this magazine, HINDUISM TODAY. I was reading an article which told a story of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Two paragraphs in and I felt tears falling down my face. I thought to myself, "God I have missed you so much, sorry I abandoned you, I love you." In that one moment I understood what it meant to be a Hindu.

In my experience being Hindu is not to utter the answer, but to ask the question. Our scriptures are based on scientific and metaphysical enquiry of the self. If you want to discover God, you need to discover yourself. If you wish to discover yourself, you will by default discover God. Through the scientific practices of yoga, meditation, ayurveda, and other applications, you can walk the path to enlightenment.

Having studied religion and philosophy extensively in my school and university years, I understood that many religions hold the idea that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Hinduism, however, takes it further by stating that if these qualities are true, then nothing but God can exist.

The most basic analogy is that we are waves, which after collapsing back into the ocean can no longer be seen. Was there ever a wave in the first place? It is *maya*, this illusory world, which gives rise to diversity and duality, which enables you to believe you are separate from the ocean, though you never truly are. Some people ask, "Why does so much diversity and difference exist, and why are there so many religions?" According to the *Yoga Vasistha*, it is because consciousness is ever creative. Observe this world and you can see the magic of this diversity in every organism. Consciousness wishes to experience itself, and the only way to do so



is to create separation so that it can then acknowledge itself, yourself, in a different form. Instead of seeing difference when we look at another, Hinduism teaches you to see yourself.

I have experienced rejection in my life because I was not the same religion as another. This made me

return to my religion and ask myself: "What does it mean to be a Hindu?" It means to understand that there is only one Truth, and all of humanity is rooted in it. There is nothing else. If I am to be truly religious, I cannot reject another, I must learn to accept and understand all. In our differences lie the same ribbon of consciousness, and like a ballet slipper, as you wrap this ribbon around your ankle it firmly plants you on point. Within that single-pointedness the entirety of creation exists. As a Hindu, my job is to bow down to this Truth.

To me, being religious has become about breaking the layers of ego and conditioning that are tied around us. It means vanquishing our fears and embracing those we were least likely to embrace. If I wish to be a good Hindu, I need to be able to see this light in everyone. So long as I cannot see it in someone, I have missed the point.

The beauty of being Hindu is that it truly invites you to explore any path that you wish, be that introspection, outer worship, both, or anything in between. In my life, God has taken on a very personal form. As I have faced more challenges, I have been forced to spend more time really questioning the nature of "I," the nature of the world and my relationship to it. Asking questions doesn't mean you are faithless; it means you are expounding your faith.

As the *Vedas* clearly state, you can't experience it through another's words; you have to go in search of the experience itself, because "where words end, truth begins."

SHIVALI BHAMMER is a devotional singer and a kathak and ballet dancer. Born and raised in London, UK, she currently resides in New York. See: [shivali.co.uk](http://shivali.co.uk)

## BRIEFLY...

IN OCTOBER, 2018, HINDUS IN Trinidad enjoyed the celebration of Nau Raatri. This is just one of the Hindu festivals that has become extremely popular across the nation, owing to enthusiastic local Hindus who have kept their tradition

strong over generations of living in the small island nation.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH INDUS University, the India Inspires Foundation recently released an informative video on YouTube about the wonders



# Claiming Your Omnipresence

How to separate your awareness from what you are aware of and enjoy a part of your mind that is always peaceful & all-pervasive

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

**O**MNIPRESENCE IS DEFINED AS THE state of being present everywhere at the same time. In a religious context, omnipresence is generally thought of as an attribute unique to God. God is present everywhere; whereas man is only present in the location of his physical body. Hindu thought differs from this perspective. Not only is God omnipresent, He has graciously shared that attribute with us. Omnipresence is found at the core of our soul. We can compare this to the Internet, which was created by the US Department of Defense for their use but was ultimately given to the world for everyone to freely use. I have coined a word for the omnipresent network that is accessed by experiencing the core of the soul. I call it the "Innernet."

Realized beings have shared their experience of the Innernet. My guru's guru, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, expressed it in this way: "Bliss, bliss, bliss! I am here, I am there, I am everywhere!" To make sure his devotees didn't think that this was an attainment unique to him, he would also state, "I am everywhere. You are everywhere, but you don't believe it." He also made seemingly outlandish statements such as, "Now I am sitting here. I am in England also. I am also in America." Not only was Yogaswami able to experience the Innernet, he was able to utilize it to accomplish tasks at a distance: "We can give initiation by thought to people in Singapore while remaining here [in Sri Lanka]." This interior network has a parallel to the external Internet with which we remotely access digital devices that are thousands of miles away from our computers! In Hindu philosophy, the Sanskrit term most commonly used for the Innernet of omnipresence is *Satchidananda*. Our online lexicon defines this as:

**Satchidananda:** Existence-consciousness-bliss. A synonym for Parashakti. Lord Siva's Divine Mind and simultaneously the pure superconscious mind of each individual soul. Satchidananda is perfect love and omniscient, omnipotent consciousness, the fountainhead of all existence, yet containing and permeating all existence. Also called pure consciousness, pure form, substratum of existence, and more. One of the goals of the meditator or yogi is to experience the natural state of the mind, Satchidananda, holding back the *vrittis* through yogic practices."

Paramaguru Yogaswami had a terse way of stating this: "Sat Chit Ananda. That is one thing—Satchidananda. *Sat* is 'you are.' *Chit* is omnipresence—*prakasha*, light as from the sun, all-knowing. *Ananda* is bliss. They are three; but they are one. That is your nature."

In Hinduism, it is not enough to simply state that omnipresence resides at the core of our soul.



This truth ultimately must be experienced by each of us. We can move toward experiencing omnipresence using a series of progressive practices. The first step is to understand and then identify ourselves as awareness rather than what we are aware of. A clear statement of this idea is found in the first four verses of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*: "Now, the exposition of yoga. Yoga is the restraint of mental activities. Then awareness abides in its essential nature. At other times, awareness takes on the form of the mental activities." Awareness is the soul's

ability to sense, see or know and to be conscious of this knowing. In the *Yoga Sutras*, awareness is termed *drashta*, *drik*, *chit* and *chitshakti*. The state referred to in verse three—"Then awareness abides in its essential nature"—is the result of awareness disuniting with the mental activities and remaining temporarily aware only of itself until thoughts again arise.

## Exercise 1: Identifying Yourself as Awareness

Mentally repeat the question "Who am I?" for one minute while being aware that you are repeating it. During the next minute, cease the repetition and simply be aware of what was aware of repeating it.

An example may be helpful. I hold up a piece of paper and say, "I see the paper." That makes sense, right? I see the paper in my hand.

If I say, "I am the paper," how many would agree? No one. We are trained from childhood that we are not physical objects. We perceive them. We see the paper. We smell the incense. We hear the water flowing. We are different from them. That's the way we think.

But then we say, "I am happy." Think about it: we identify with the happiness we experience, but not with the paper we see. Returning to Patanjali's verses, happiness is the mental activity that awareness has taken the form of. The goal is to distinguish ourself from what is mental in the same way we distinguish ourself from what is physical. We don't want to think: "I am happy." We want to think: "I, awareness, am experiencing the emotion called happiness, but I am not happiness. I am the experiencer of happiness. Happiness isn't who I am, just as I am not the paper I see."

## Exercise 2: Moving Your Awareness

A good second step toward claiming our soul's omnipresence is to



control the state of consciousness that you, as awareness, are currently experiencing. If you are in a slightly depressed state of mind, move awareness into a happier one. If you are jealous of someone, move into a state of being happy for what he or she has achieved. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, compared the states of consciousness an individual experiences to a large city and awareness to the traveler through the city. He wrote: "Generally people take problems too personally by identifying closely with them. When they experience anger, they are angry. When they experience bliss, they are blissful. The mystic

**Deep within:** High in a Himalayan forest, a yogi dives deeply, to the core of his being, there to discover that his awareness, like water, flows through all of existence, inside and out.

identifies with the experiencer instead of the experience. He sees himself as pure awareness that travels in the mind. When he is in San Francisco, he is not San Francisco. Similarly, when he is in anger, he is not anger. He says to himself, 'I am pure energy. I am the spiritual energy that floods through mind and body. I am not the body, the mind or the emotions. I am not the thoughts I think or the experiences I experience.' Thus, he molds a new identity of himself as a free being who can travel anywhere in the mind. Such a person is always at the top of the mountain."

Omnipresent consciousness has other qualities, such as being eternal and changeless. You, as omnipresence, have always existed and have never changed. A charming story told by a former Canadian Ambassador to Sri Lanka illustrates this idea. "My wife and I brought our three children to see Yogaswami. Turning to the children, he asked each of them, 'How old are you?' Our daughter said, 'Nine,' and the boys, 'Eleven' and 'Thirteen.' To each in turn Yogaswami replied solemnly, 'I am the same age as you.' When the children protested that he couldn't be three different ages at once, and that he must be much older than their grandfather, Yogaswami just laughed, and winked at us, to see if we understood. At the time, we took it as his joke with the children, but slowly we came to see that he meant something profound, which was for us to decipher. Now I think this was his way of saying indirectly that although the body may be of very different ages on its way from birth to death, something just as real as the body, and for which the body is only a vehicle, always was and always will be. In that sense, we are in essence all 'the same age.'"

Here are three more exercises in connecting with your inherent omnipresence. Give them a try.

1. When you come home from visiting a temple, imagine you are still in the temple in front of the Deity and feel the spiritual vibration of the temple within you.

2. When you walk down the street, imagine that you are in two places—where you are standing and also ahead of your body at the end of the block.

3. When walking, strive to go deeply enough within to see that you, as awareness, are actually standing still, not moving.

The next time you find yourself in a negative state of consciousness, move awareness out of it into the positive consciousness that you are a spiritual being whose essence is identical with God. Identifying yourself as awareness and learning to move awareness out of negative states into positive ones brings you closer to experiencing yourself as omnipresence, Satchidananda, the most subtle level of existence you can be aware of.





## LETTERS

### Gurudeva's Toolbox

HINDUISM TODAY's, Oct/Nov/Dec 2018, issue has a stunning article called "Gurudeva's Toolbox." It's an amazing summation of the spiritual and psychological methods taught by the founder of the magazine, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. I have used these methods with my clients over the years, but now this article makes them all easily accessible in one place and I can now use them even more efficiently. I studied long and hard to earn my Ph.D., but nothing can compare to what I learned from Gurudeva. I feel blessed that I can receive this great magazine and the huge amount of spiritual information that it always contains.

DR. RICHARD HENRY PRATTI  
HENDERSON, NEVADA, USA

### History of Hindu India

Our son Mahar Sperling has been brought up in a Hindu-Jewish household where my husband and I have consistently shown respect and acceptance of our shared values as well as differences in our religious backgrounds. For his fifth semester at New York University, Gallatin school of independent studies, Mahar chose to study Hindu religion and philosophy. While visiting home for a weekend, he saw the HINDUISM TODAY, Oct/Nov/Dec 2018 issue. What caught his attention in particular was the back cover of the journal, "Mom, this is exactly what I need for my college course. I will recommend this to my classmates and even suggest to the professor who is teaching

us the course on Hindu philosophy and religion" he said, pointing out the article on the YouTube five-part series on Hindu history. As he viewed the program in YouTube, he was further convinced about the objective, deep and accurate narration of something as complicated as Hindu religion.

VATSALA SPERLING  
MASSACHUSETTS, USA

### World Hindu Conference

We attended and supported the WHC and it was carried out without a flaw! We were absolutely delighted to be there. The handling of the huge number of people was impeccable; the registration was quick and very efficient. Each meal was handled without any wait or shortage of food or space.

It is nice for me to read about it in HPI as this is surely a very auspicious time for us Hindus, indigenous and other. The age-old spirituality that has kept Hindus alive even in the face of horrible onslaughts from two very cruel religions of Abrahamic origins is rising again! I pray that this time once more (for a very long span of time) the Hindu philosophy can lead our World towards harmony and peace.

I also commend HINDUISM TODAY for keeping our spirits up and our contacts stronger through all these awful years of abject breakdown of our *sanskriti*. As we all know, for a globalized world to work together the idea of "only one way, one prophet" must change. Of course, it will be a tough time as we

progress—breakdown of empires, religious in this case, is not without a lot of trouble. I am confident of coming out on top and one day forgetting crusades and jihads.

I know it will be a while, but just to be alive to see this turn of events is a blessing!

RENU S. MALHOTRA  
PRESIDENT, SEEDTHEWORLD.ORG

### Correction

On page 20 of the article, "Applying Ancient Principles to our Modern Maladies," in the Oct/Nov/Dec 2018 issue of HINDUISM TODAY, is a reference to "Baba Ramdas' Patanjali line of medicines..." which should read "Baba Ramdev's Patanjali line of medicines..." On page 29 of the same article, in the bottom right hand photo, the doctor sitting with our correspondent Rajiv Malik and his wife Renu, is Dr. Madhavi M. Deval, not Dr. Rajshree Mehta who is operation manager of the Malad center. Our apologies for the errors.

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 faxed to: (808) 822-4351  
or visit: [www.hinduismtoday.com/letters](http://www.hinduismtoday.com/letters)

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

### Annual Statement of Ownership

Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (required by USPS DMM 707.83) of HINDUISM TODAY, published four times a year at 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304, for October 1, 2018. General business offices of the publisher are located at 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of publisher is Swami Bodhinatha Veylan, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of editor is Swami Sadasivanatha Palani, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of managing editor is Swami Arumugam Katir, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Owner is Himalayan Academy, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. There are no known bondholders, mortgagees, or other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities. The average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months is: (a) Total number of copies printed: 11,202; (b) Paid circulation: (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: 3,003; (2) Paid or requested mail subscriptions: 5,481; (c) Total paid and/or requested circulation: 8,484; (d) Free distribution by mail: 662; (e) Free distribution outside the mail: 1,245; (f) Total free distribution: 1,907; (g) Total distribution: 10,391 (h) Copies not distributed: (1) Office use, leftovers, spoiled: 811; (2) Return from news agents: not applicable; (i) Total: 11,202; Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 81.65%. The

actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is: (a) Total number of copies printed: 10,794; (b) Paid circulation: (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: 2,938; (2) Paid or requested mail subscriptions: 5,247; (c) Total paid and/or requested circulation: 8,185; (d) Free distribution by mail: 662; (e) Free distribution outside the mail: 1,112; (f) Total free distribution: 1,774; (g) Total distribution: 9,959; (h) Copies not distributed: (1) Office use, leftovers, spoiled: 835; (2) Return from news agents: not applicable; (i) Total: 10,794; Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 82.19%. I certify that all information furnished above is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this statement or who omits material or information requested on the statement may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties).

Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator



# Hinduism Today Celebrates Our 40th Anniversary

## Our publisher takes stock of our progress, and reflects on the future

**S**atguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva) launched *Hinduism Today* in 1979, as he explained later, "When I realized that Hinduism had no global voice and I received divine orders to fill the void, to strengthen, uplift and inform all Hindus and like-minded souls of the glories of this most ancient religion." He told his mathavasi disciples, "It is your duty to carry forward *Hinduism Today* into the future of futures, whatever the challenges." Gurudeva's successor and publisher of the magazine, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, recently delivered the following message to the monks.

Forty years on, our magazine remains true to its mission, informing and inspiring Hindus everywhere. Gurudeva had amazing foresight. At a time when Hindus avoided the word *Hindu*, Gurudeva championed it—starting with his magazine's very title. Today we still hear Vedic this and Vedanta that, but the trend is definitely toward using the word, boldly and proudly.

In 1979, Hindus isolated in various parts of the world fell victim to unethical conversion practices which HINDUISM TODAY exposed with unrelenting ardor. For decades, it urged the victims to build walls of knowledge and intelligence around themselves while providing them, in every issue, the knowledge and inspiration they needed. Today, the threat is noticeably down.

Since 1979, the major trend has been the Hindu diaspora into all parts of the world. Hindu communities that were isolated became less so. More people came to know Hindus, understanding, respecting, even admiring them. Many have been encouraged by their new countrymen to speak out and share their valuable points of view. In the USA, for example, several Hindus are now serving in Congress.

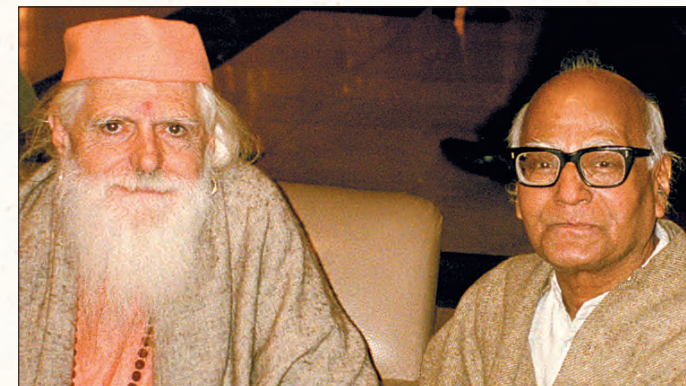
Many began to teach and actively support their faith. Hindu institutions came up and became prominent, something HINDUISM TODAY encouraged and, to some extent, guided. Today, our editors' ideas are enthusiastically sought for. The India Foundation, for example, an NGO think tank in Delhi, is sponsoring our editor-in-chief to attend a conference on soft power in December of this year.

The rise of soft power is another trend of increasing significance. Soft power is influence expressed through appeal and attraction (i.e., culture, spirituality, music, yoga, etc.) rather than through coercion, or hard power. "We are heartened by this trend, particularly as the government of India is very much at its forefront. It has, for example, established a new Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy—or AYUSH.

And who could forget the riveting moment at the United Nations on December 2014 when prime minister Modi proclaimed June 21 as the annual International Day of Yoga, or the dynamic response 'round the world every year since? Here was amazingly powerful soft power! This new focus of India's will surely create new knowledge, new points of view, approaches and activities that we will need to report on. This is new, and all-around good news.

Another important trend today is the growing number of young people declaring themselves 'spiritual but not religious,' or SBNR for short. Hinduism is a most apt guide for such souls interested in spirituality, and our magazine will be there to address their needs and concerns.

We have continued all along to follow Gurudeva's directive to remain at the forefront of developing technologies. Today, the magazine has a massive presence on the Internet and exists in several



**The founder:** Gurudeva sits with Ram Swarup, ca. 1985. From the outset, the magazine received enthusiastic support from swamis, pundits, philosophers, scholars, and people from all walks of life.



**Publisher and Chief Editor:** Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami (right) and Paramacharya Sadasivanathaswami (left)

digital editions, including a mobile app.

Another global trend is the decline of print periodicals. As wonderful as digital versions are, they cannot produce the same revenue as print subscriptions. Publishing houses are failing or having to consolidate, and we are feeling the same pressure. Today, we have more readers enjoying our digital versions than the printed one and subscription income is dwindling.

Gurudeva anticipated this possibility and established the Hinduism Today Production Fund to eventually keep the magazine fully funded no matter what might happen. The fund's quarterly subsidies are crucial; we need to cover costs, let alone improve the product and foray into more potent technologies. And so, maintaining and growing the Fund is one of the major things we do.

*Bodhinatha Veylanswami*

Support your Production Fund at [www.hheonline.org/donate/pf](http://www.hheonline.org/donate/pf)  
Contact us at: 1-888-464-1008 or [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)



## QUOTES & QUIPS

How many lives are frittered away, age after age,  
in endless coming and going. Find out who you are!

**Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *Bengali saint*

We may talk and reason all our lives,  
but we shall not understand a word of  
truth, until we experience it ourselves.

**Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

Bondage and Liberation are of the mind  
alone. **Sri Ramakrishna** (1836–1886)

When we contemplate the whole globe as  
one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with  
continents and islands, flying through space  
with other stars all singing and shining  
together as one, the whole universe appears  
as an infinite storm of beauty. **John Muir**  
(1838–1914), *American Environmentalist*

Hinduism stands like a huge banyan tree  
spreading its far-reaching branches over  
hundreds of sects, creeds and denominations

and covering with innumerable leaves  
all forms of worship, the dualistic, the  
qualified non-dualistic and monistic  
worship of the one Supreme God, the  
worship of the Incarnation of God and  
also hero worship, saint worship, ancestor  
worship and the worship of the departed  
spirit. It is based on the grand idea of  
universal receptivity. It receives everything.  
**Swami Abhedananda** (1866–1939),  
*a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna*

An ounce of practice is worth  
more than tons of preaching.  
**Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

Madhva said, “Man is the servant of God,”  
and established his Dvaita philosophy.  
Ramanuja said, “Man is a ray or spark of

God,” and established his Vishishtadvaita  
philosophy. Sankara said, “Man is identical  
with Brahman or the Eternal Soul,” and  
established his Kevala Advaita philosophy.  
**Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963)

Better a diamond with a flaw than  
a pebble without. **Confucius** (551–  
479 bce), *founder of Confucianism*

Success or achievement is not the final  
goal. It is the spirit in which you act  
that puts the seal of beauty upon your  
life. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–  
1993), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

Know yourself and you shall know  
the Gods. *Egyptian Proverb*

If you are always trying to be normal, you  
will never know how amazing you can be.  
**Maya Angelou** (1928–2014), *American poet*

In enjoyment, there is the fear of disease;  
in social position, the fear of losing status;  
in wealth, the fear of kings; in honor, the  
fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of  
enemies; in beauty, the fear of old age; in  
scriptural erudition, the fear of opponents;  
in virtue, the fear of traducers; in body,  
the fear of death. All the things of this  
world pertaining to man are attended  
with fear; renunciation alone stands in  
fearlessness. *Vairagya Shatakam* 31

Be careful when reading health  
books; you may die of a misprint.  
**Mark Twain** (1835–1910)

Our virtues and our failings are inseparable,  
like force and matter. When they separate,  
man is no more. **Nikola Tesla** (1856–1943)

By the erection of a fire altar, Agni is made  
present and communication with the  
world of the Gods is ensured; the space of  
the altar becomes a sacred space. But the  
meaning of the ritual is far more complex;  
and if we consider all of its ramifications,

we shall understand why  
consecrating a territory is  
equivalent to making it a cosmos,  
to cosmicizing it. For, in fact, the  
erection of an altar to Agni is  
nothing but the reproduction—  
on the microcosmic scale—  
of the Creation. **Jordan  
B. Peterson**, *Canadian  
psychologist and author*

The highest possible stage  
in moral culture is when we  
recognize that we ought to control  
our thoughts. **Charles Darwin**  
(1809–1882), *English naturalist*

“Practice makes perfect” applied  
to efforts in our spiritual life  
takes on a different meaning.  
Our inner essence, our soul  
nature, is already perfect. Our  
practice, or self effort, is to bring  
that inner perfection into our  
outer intellectual, emotional and  
instinctive nature. Thus we could modify the  
adage to be “practice manifests perfection.”  
**Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**,  
*publisher of Hinduism Today*



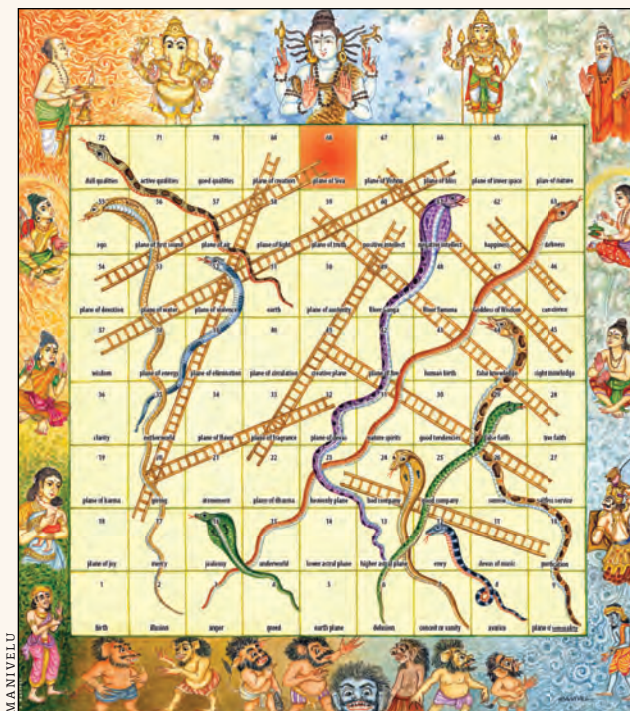
The Hindu fosters humility and shuns  
arrogance, seeks to assist, never to hinder,  
finds good in others and forgets their faults.  
**Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami**  
(1927–2001), *founder of Hinduism Today*

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Snakes and Ladders

**T**HE WESTERN CHILDREN'S GAME SNAKES AND LADDERS, OR CHUTES and Ladders, comes from the Indian game for adults called Gyan Chaupar, the “Game of Knowledge.” Gyan Chaupar teaches the Hindu spiritual path to moksha, which is liberation from reincarnation. There are 72 numbered squares on the board listing various virtues, vices, states of consciousness and planes of existence. The ladders start from squares with virtues, such as devotion, and move the player up the board. Snakes are found on squares of vices, such as jealousy, and take the player back down the board.

Play begins at square one in the lower left corner. In the old days, the player threw six cowrie shells on the floor. The number of shells that landed upright indicated the number of squares to move forward. Nowadays dice are used. If the player lands on a ladder, he jumps to the square at the top of the ladder. If he lands on the head of a snake, he slides back down the snake to a low square. The object of the game is to land exactly on square 68, the center of the top row. This square represents liberation from rebirth and entry into heavenly realms. If he lands past 68, he continues to play until he reaches 72, which takes him back to 51 for another try. The game is an entertaining way to learn about making progress on the spiritual path. By cultivating a virtue, such as devotion, one advances. By falling prey to a vice, such as egotism, one goes backwards.



**Play today:** Download the board and full instructions at  
[www.hinduismtoday.com/resources/snakesandladders](http://www.hinduismtoday.com/resources/snakesandladders).

## BASICS

### The Possession of Self-Control

Verses from the *Tirukural*, by Saint Tiruvalluvar

**Verse 121:** Self-control will place  
one among the Gods, while lack of  
it will lead to deepest darkness.

**122:** Guard your self-control as a  
precious treasure, for there is no  
greater wealth in life than this.

**123:** Comprehending and acquiring  
self-control confers upon one  
the esteem of wise men.

**124:** More imposing than a mountain is  
the greatness of a man who, steadfast in  
domestic life, has mastered self-control.

**125:** Humility is a precious quality in all  
people, but it has a rare richness in the rich.

**126:** Like a tortoise withdrawing

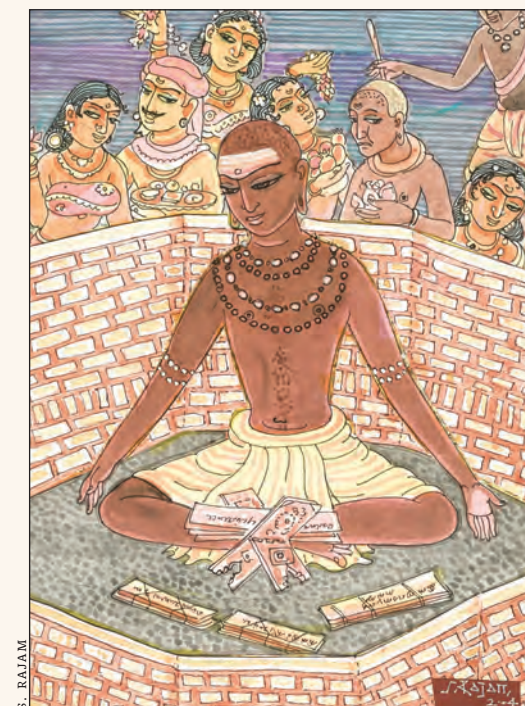
five limbs into its shell, those who  
restrain the five senses in one life  
will find safe shelter for seven.

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

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

**129:** The wound caused by fire heals  
in its time; the burn inflicted by an  
inflamed tongue never heals.

**130:** Virtue will wait in the streets to  
meet a man possessed of learning and  
self-discipline, his anger subdued.







FROM THE AGAMAS

## A Universe Unfurling from Within

A condensed translation from the *Agamas* revealing the holy names of Siva and varied qualities of existence in the higher realms of existence

The following is Part Two of a lucid translation of *Vyoma Vyapine*, a long mantra often chanted by priests during temple puja. This mantra is found in Chapter 10 of the Raurava Agama.

**Sarva Vidyādhīpāya.** Supreme Lord Siva is the ultimate Authority. **Jyotirūpāya.** Being self-manifest light.

**Paramesvaraparāya.** Mahesvara, being superior to all Rudras, is the God of Gods.

**Achetana Achetana.** He is untouched by pleasure and pain.

**Vyoma Vyoma.** Since Lord Bhagavan is associated with the qualities and attributes of space, He is called *Vyoma*. In this *Agama*, *vyoma* is stated to be of two kinds: supreme and non-supreme. In the supreme space, Lord Siva exists eternally. The non-supreme space is within the limits of *maya*. Lord Shankara (Siva) presides over this space and regulates its functions through the rays of His Shakti. Since Sadasiva pervades all throughout

the supreme and non-supreme spaces, He is invoked with the repetition of the term *vyapi*.

**Arūpi Arūpi.** Granting all form yet being formless.

**Prathama Prathama.** The supreme yogi and knower of all.

**Tejastejah.** Since He is the primal source of illumination for the souls living in the realms of pure *maya* and impure *maya*, Lord Siva is revered as Tejastejah.

**Jyotirjyotih.** As the primal source of light needed to illumine objects within pure *maya* and impure *maya*, He is called Jyotirjyotih.

**Arūpa Anagni.** The self-manifest fire, not produced by an external source. The unborn one.

**Adhūma Abhasma.** Fiery resplendence that gives brightness to all visible objects.

**Anāde.** Being one with beginningless and endless knowledge.

**Nā Nā Nā Nā.** The first three syllables denote three Deities—Rudra (Parameshvara), Vishnu (Kshetrajna) and Brahma (Pitamaha).

The fourth *Na* denotes Purusha.

**Dhū Dhū Dhū Dhū.** The first three syllables denote destruction occurring at three levels—*prakriti* level, *maya* level and *bindu* level. The fourth *dhu* denotes the Supreme Lord who directs the concerned Deities to perform such destruction.

**Om Bhūh.** The core meaning of these two syllables is *satya*—eternal existence. As such, they denote the three eternal categories—*Pati*, *pasu* and *pasha*.

**Om Bhuvah.** All the worlds, existing in all through the *tattvas* in a systematic order, are collectively denoted by this mantra.

**Om Suvah.** Lord Siva who appears with a form fit for meditation and worship, to be meditated upon constantly by yogis.

**Anidhana Nidhana.** Eternal existence of Lord Siva.

**Nidhanodbhava.** Dissolving into their causal source everything that has been created and again creating it from the same source.

**Śiva Śarva.** Lacking even a taint of imperfection and inauspiciousness.

**Paramātman.** Occupying the body and soul of highly enlightened yogis and sages and shining forth as the Great Self in all of them.

**Maheśvara.** Lord Siva is in the exalted state of being—Ishvara—to be worshiped by all the Deities.

**Mahādeva.** Siva as the highest position of authority in the space of supreme consciousness.

**Sadbhāveśvara.** Those Beings who are in deep communion with Siva as Ishvara (who are called *Isvara*, but are not the highest form of *Ishvara*).

**Mahātejah.** Siva's effulgence as superior to the brightness of even the greatest luminous objects.

**Yogādhipate.** Siva as the perfect, disciplined yogi, Master of the path of supreme yoga.

**Muñcha Muñcha.** After binding souls in *maya* to experience their karmic fruits, Bhagavan releases them through initiation.

**Prathama Prathama.** He scatters abundantly the *bhogas* (objects of enjoyment) for the sake of bound souls. It is only through traversing the experiences afforded by the *bhogas* that the soul can eventually become free from the bondage of karma.

**Śarva Śarva.** The protector of all souls which take refuge in Him. Provider of shelter and protection, relieving the fear born of transigratory phenomenon.

**Bhavodbhava.** Siva assumes various forms according to His own disposition in any given context (*bhava*), while He also assumes forms as conceived by yogis and devotees (*udbhava*).

**Sarvabhūta Sukhaprada.** The Lord of supreme consciousness grants all embodied souls total liberation from the repeating phenomenon of birth and death. In this liberated state, they enjoy infinite, incomparable bliss that is unknown to the mundane world.

**Sarvasānnidhyakara.** At the very instant of the *sadhaka*'s contemplation upon Siva's form, the Lord readily offers His vibrant presence in the *Sivalinga*.

**Brahma Vishnu Rudra Para.** Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra are respectively responsible for the creation, maintenance and reabsorption of all the worlds. Superior to them is Paramasiva, their guiding Lord.

**Anarchita Anarchita.** He is within all subtle things. In all that changes, He is present within those changes without losing His immutability. He is present within all that is concealed. He is within all that is incomprehensible and inconceivable. He remains reachable exclusively to all those who have gained perfection through the path of wisdom. Because of these characteristics, the Lord of Consciousness remains unreachable through exterior worship alone (*anarchita*).

**Asamstuta Asamstuta.** By remaining unseen by Brahma and other Gods in His essential state, there is no hymn in praise of His

essence, for it is beyond the grasp of word and mind.

**Pūrvasthita Pūrvasthita.** He who is eternally established in the supreme space of consciousness, the originating source for all meditation and worship.

**Sākhin Sākhin.** He directly sees the positive and negative actions of all embodied souls, for all eyes are His eyes and He sees everywhere.

**Turu turu.** The Supreme Lord of all the Gods grants the state of oneness in identity between Himself and the competent *Sadhaka* quickly and without hesitation. He grants this exalted state through proper initiations. *Turu, turu* refers to the quickness of time in which this supreme state is granted.

**Patanga Patanga.** In the treatise dealing with the characteristics of mantras, it is said that the specific name for effulgent form is "Patanga." In view of His exceeding resplendence, Siva is thusly named.

**Pinga Pinga.** Those who know well the mantras and the *Agamas* state that the nucleus within the cosmic luminosity is denoted by the term *pinga*. Since Siva is identical with this core substance, He is praised as Pinga Pinga.

**Jñāna Jñāna.** Supreme knowledge is that which leads to the essential state of Sivaness. This knowledge is of two kinds, *para* and *apara*. It is not explained in scriptures other than the *Agamas*. It remains untold because of its incomprehensible, subtle and vast nature. It is all-inclusive, extending in and through all systems of thought.

**Śabda Śabda.** The master of the transcendental sound which is subtle and inaudible to the ears. This sound is related to a deeper understanding of letters and to the rules of conjunction and separation of words.

**Sūkshma Sūkshma.** This term in praise of Paramasiva denotes subtle form which cannot be conceived by the mind.

**Śiva Śarva.** He is described as the knower of all, superior to all other Deities, the absolute controller of all, doer of all, absolutely independent. He resides within the heart of all souls, the performer of cosmic functions such as creation and maintenance for the benefit of all beings. He is with unsullied purity and everlasting bliss. He is supreme.

**Sarvada.** The term *sarva* denotes perfect wholeness in which all things exist in their totality. It also denotes *para* (knowledge) and *apara* (the highest, secret knowledge). Through this knowledge He grants liberation from the bonds of *maya* and others. Therefore, He is praised as Sarvada: one who reveals all-inclusive knowledge and grants liberation through such knowledge.

**Śivāya Namō Namaḥ.** Lord Ishvara, equally disposed to all beings, possesses everlasting calmness. Because of such qualities, He is called Siva. The term *namo* indicates absolute Lordship. In the functions of the Lord, two states are observed—cause and effect, referred to by *namo namaḥ*. In the causal state, there is the totality of all the objects in their subtle state. In the effected state, the objects get variegated. Such variegations are provided as realms of experience for souls, to relieve them from karmic bonds.

**Namo Namaḥ Namaḥ.** The two intonations of *namaḥ* denote the bifurcation of cause and effect. Such bifurcation ultimately cuts asunder all bonds evolved out of *maya*. A third *namaḥ* denotes the unification of cause and effect, addressing the Supreme Deva.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his translation of the *Raurava Agama*.





*Priests of the Sri Ragunath Temple in traditional Dogra dress make their daily rounds through the huge complex, stopping to worship at each of the seven major and dozens of minor shrines*

HINDUISM TODAY

SPECIAL FEATURE

# Discover the Royal Temples of Jammu

Since ancient times the royal families of Jammu have built and maintained temples and seen to the training of priests and scholars of Sanskrit to preserve a high level of worship. In our feature story we visit several of the city's major temples, including Ragunath, until recently the largest temple in North India, and Ranbireshwar, the North's largest Siva temple. The Dharmath Trust established by the kings is key to the temples' continued well-being.



BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI

**N**ESTLED IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE Himalayas beside the river Tawi is the temple city of Jammu. It is the winter capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the heavily militarized northwest corner of India occupied in part by Pakistan and China. The district of Jammu is bordered by the Kashmir valley to the north, Ladakh to the east, Himachal Pradesh to the south and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to the west.

The local people say Jammu, the city, was founded by King Jamboolochan in the 14th century bce. The story goes that he was hunting along the River Tawi and came upon a goat and lion drinking water together from the river. When they went their separate ways, he took this as a sign that he had entered a peaceful, divine place. He built a palace here, and the city of Jammu grew up around it.

Excavations at Akhnoor, less than 20 miles away, provide evidence the area was once part of the Harappan Civilization. The city is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, and the Pandavas are said to have stayed here briefly. The area was militarily powerful during Muslim times and enjoyed considerable independence all the way to the modern era.

Many temples in Jammu city were built or expanded by the Dogra dynasty rulers in the 18th century. The Dogra rule came to an end in 1947 when Maharaj Hari Singh formally joined his kingdom to independent India.

In some other Indian states, such as Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the state government has taken over management of the Hindu temples within its borders (while not similarly interfering with the religious institutions of any other faith). In those states,

the results have been problematic: temple funds have been diverted into state treasuries, temple assets unaccounted for and lands usurped. Jammu's temples have escaped that fate. Most of these temples were in the hands of the Dharmarth Trust, created by in 1846 by Maharaja Gulab Singh and expanded by his successors. While the royal family controlled this trust, it was independent of the



COURTESY DR. KARAN SINGH

state government and remained so after Jammu and Kashmir's incorporation into India in 1947.

Remarkably, the trust's 120 temples—with the notable exceptions of Amarnath and Vaishno Devi Temple which were taken over—have continued to remain free from state control. The credit for this goes to Dr. Karan Singh, who today is the sole trustee. Dr. Singh is the son of the last Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and great-great grandson of Gulab Singh. He is an esteemed Hindu scholar, politician and diplomat who has served

as a minister in India's Central government, a member of the Rajya Sabha (India's upper house of parliament), and ambassador to the United States.

In July of 2018, with the help of Dharmarth Trust council president B. R. Kundal, *HINDUISM TODAY* was able to cover the trust's major temples in and near Jammu, as well as a few independent temples.

#### Shri Raghunath Temple

The star attraction of Jammu is the Shri Raghunath Temple, one of the largest and most opulent in the world. Many pilgrims only come here and visit no other temple. Until the recent creation of Akshardham Temple in Delhi, this was the largest temple in North India. It's not a single temple, but a cluster of 25 to 30 temples and shrines on eight acres. All 330 million Gods and Goddesses are claimed to reside here in the hundreds of thousands of enshrined saligrams set in *ahatas*, or galleries. [YouTube: [bit.ly/ragunath](https://bit.ly/ragunath) (in Hindi)]. Normal visitor traffic is one thousand a day; as many as ten thousand visit daily when the Amarnath Yatra is in full swing, as this is a required stop on the pilgrimage.

Raghunath Temple was built in 1857 by Maharaja Ranbir Singh. The central Deity

**Raghunath Temple:** (clockwise from right) Lord Rama, wife Janaki and brother Lakshman reside in the central sanctum, surrounded by an abundance of gold; Siva Nataraja shrine with lead crystal Sivaligam in front; devotees ring the temple bells; a view of the shrines from the temple courtyard; Dr. Karan Singh



## Lord Rama's Jammu Home



ALL PHOTOS HINDUISM TODAY





is Lord Rama, eighth incarnation of Vishnu. Rama, patron Deity of the Dogra kings, belonged to the Raghuवंशा dynasty of kings, hence the temple is named Raghunath.

Guiding us during one of our several visits here were Shri Kundal of the Dharmarth Trust and Pandit Darshan Kumar Sharma, the temple's senior priest. Dr. Karan Singh had told us how dear to his heart this temple is, how he frequently participates in the major festivals, and about the various additions he has made to the temple, including the installation of Siva Nataraja, Goddess Bagulamukhi, Goddess Maha Kali and Lord Karttikeya. As well, he has installed a large, lead-crystal glass Sivalingam of remarkable clarity, made in Germany. He also provided the parade murtis of the main Deities for festivals.

The central murti of Lord Rama is of black marble—unusual in India—while the accompanying images of Sita and Lakshman are of white marble. The most attention-grabbing aspect of the central sanctum might be the ornate gold columns, gold panels on the altar, and sheets and sheets of gold on the walls and ceilings around the sanctum. More gold adorns the temple towers. It is one of the few places in North India where you can experience the opulent wealth bestowed upon the temples by the Hindu kings—the wealth that inspired centuries of invaders.

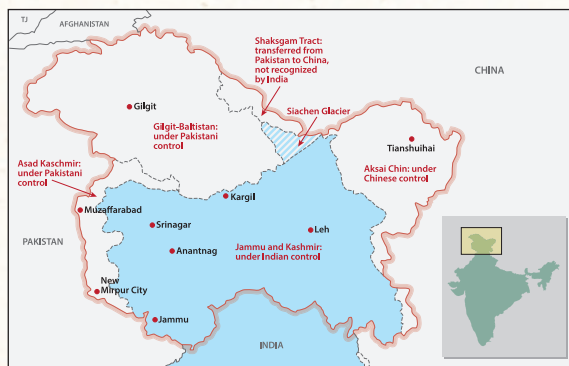
Raghunath Temple, built in British times,

was never plundered. However, it was attacked twice in 2002 by fedayeen fighters of the Laskar-e-Toiba, a terrorist group based in Pakistan (and supported by its government), infamous for the 2008 attack on Mumbai that left 164 dead. The first attack on Raghunath

our cameras and freely take photos. The intense security has dampened the enthusiasm of local residents to come for worship, but visitors from outside continue to flock here despite the inconvenience.

The temple is a warren of shrines, halls and courtyards divided between an inner and an outer parikrama or circumambulation route. On the left as one enters are small shrines to Gayatri, Hanuman and Siva, then shrines to Dattatreya, Nataraja and Bagulamukhi. Also near the entrance are crypts holding the ashes of the kings Ranbir Singh, Gulab Singh and Raja Amar Singh.

There are a total of 20 shikharas, ornate towers, in the complex, with the largest being over the main Raghunath shrine. There are shrines dedicated to Krishna, Vishnu and His incarnations, Mata Vaishno Devi, another Hanuman and various sages and rishis including Shankaracharya, Dharmaraja, Narada and Yamadoota. Dr. Karan Singh and his wife added the



nath Temple, made by two suicide bombers on March 30, 2002, killed 11 and injured 20. Temple security was massively fortified, but on November 24, 2002, two more terrorists attacked, killing 14 and injuring 45.

Today the Jammu-Kashmir police maintain a full-time post within the temple grounds. Devotees are thoroughly searched and must check their bags, phones and even pens before being allowed in. By benefit of being there at the personal invitation of Dr. Singh—whom many local people still refer to as “Maharaja”—we were allowed to bring in

.....  
**Ragunath, the city's premier temple:**  
*(clockwise from above left) Jammu and Kashmir State lies in one of the most disputed regions of the world; Raghunath Temple in downtown Jammu; shops surrounding the temple complex; devotees at worship; dried fruit and nuts are a favorite gift to bring home from Jammu*



## Ragunath Temple Environs





temples to Vaishno Devi, Siva Nataraj, Mahakali, Karttikeya and several saints.

Eight halls in the inner route house the temple's 125,000 saligrams. A saligram, a fossilized shell from the Gandaki River in Nepal, represents Vishnu as the Universal Principle. Like the Sivalingam, this aniconic image is intended to convey the abstract aspect of God.

Visitors often spend many hours exploring the large temple. Their highlight is attending one of the major aratis, or worship services, done by the priests of all two-dozen-plus main shrines. Attired in colorful Dogra dress, they move rapidly as a group from shrine to shrine, worshipping all the Gods, Goddesses, and saligrams with Vedic mantras, gongs, cymbals, conch and drums.

At the rear of the Raghunath complex is the Ranbir Sanskrit Research Centre and Library, which houses rare manuscripts in Sanskrit and other languages. The librarian, Dr. Renu Gupta, explains that research scholars and academics utilize the facility. A staff of four is systematically digitizing the collection.

During the reign of Ranbir Singh, the temple was a center of Sanskrit teaching. Later the school was moved to Beerpur on the outskirts of Jammu. The temple also housed a translation center where books on philosophy and history in Arabic and Persian languages were translated by Muslim scholars into Sanskrit. Similarly, Hindu pandits have translated many scriptures into Hindi and Dogri languages. This initiative has

contributed to communal harmony among the Hindu, Muslim and Christian Dogra.

After visiting the temple, nearly everyone stops at the Raghunath Bazaar outside the temple. The Bazaar's 200 shops do a roaring business in dry fruits—the expected gift for relatives and friends when returning home from Jammu. Also available here are woolens and the normal products of any general market. Many of the shops are owned by the Dharmarth Trust, and their rents are a significant source of income.

#### Shri Ranbireshwar Temple

Said to be the biggest Siva temple in North India, Shri Ranbireshwar is very popular with pilgrims and Jammu residents alike. Located on a hillock about half a mile from Raghunath, it was begun in 1863 and completed in 1878 by Maharaja Ranbir Singh. [bit.ly/ranbireshwar (in Hindi)]. It, too, is owned by the Dharmarth Trust, whose headquarters is nearby. It is also close to the Jammu and Kashmir state government offices.

The security here is relatively light compared to Raghunath Temple. One walks up a large number of stairs to reach the temple. In front of the complex is a huge statue of Maharaja Ranbir Singh atop a tall multi-pillar base. To the left and right of the temple's central sanctum are large halls with shrines to Ganesha and Karttikeya. An exquisite one-ton brass Nandi in a glass enclosure faces the central sanctum, where one encounters

an eight-foot-tall black Sivalingam [see this issue's cover] along with murtis of Siva and Parvati. Immediately in front of the Siva/Parvati is a 15-inch natural crystal Sivalingam surrounded by 11 smaller crystal Lingams. As with Raghunath, gold is everywhere in abundance. Visiting several galleries in the complex, one can see 125,000 Sivalingams, brought here from the Narmada River and worshiped daily. Nearby is the samadhi shrine of Mahant Shri Naad Giri, the saint who inspired the king to build this temple.

Attending the morning Rudrabhishekam is quite an experience. The devotees are allowed to touch the Sivalingams and make offerings over them while the priests are chanting Vedic mantras. Our visit is during the Hindu month of Shravan, when this worship is performed every morning for forty days, attracting a large number of devotees, including many from Jammu itself.

#### Purmandal Temple

This ancient temple, built by Raja Avantivarman, who ruled Kashmir from 855 to

.....  
**Ranbireshwar Temple:** (clockwise from right) Central sanctum with Siva and Parvati; natural crystal Sivalingams in front of the Siva/Parvati shrine; temple entrance with statue of Maharaj Ranbir Singh, who built this temple; a devotee prays to Nandi, Siva's vahana, as she enters the temple



## Shri Ranbireshwar Siva Temple





883, lies on the banks of the Devika River about 35km southeast of Jammu city. The area is known today as Little Kashi. It serves the same purpose as the sacred city of Kashi (Banaras) on the Ganga. The ashes of those who have passed on are immersed in the Devika River and the various rituals for one's ancestors are performed.

In addition to Purmandal and other temples, there are a large number of old *sarais* (rest houses, the roadside inns of their day), *dharamshalas* (pilgrim accommodation) and *havelis* (mansions) built by the kings preceding the Dogras. Some of these remain in good condition. A cremation ground is nearby. At one point in time, this was a great center for devotion, religion and Sanskrit learning. A YouTube video by Dharmarth Trust, who manage Purmandal, has some stunning aerial footage of the temple and river [[bit.ly/puramandal](http://bit.ly/puramandal)].

During our visit, the river is flowing strongly; even so, the locals waded across to reach the temple. The riverbed is dry during the summer; but for immersion of ashes, people need only dig down a foot or so to reach water. We city dwellers opted to drive to a nearby bridge to cross the river and then walk to the temple.

The chief priest, Anil Goswami, performed puja for us and told us about the complex. It is a Siva temple, but has no Sivalingam as such. There is a base for a Sivalingam, but the Lingam itself is said to have been absorbed into the altar, leaving a hole into which devotees pour water. Goddess Parvati here is represented by a pindi, a natural rock formation something like a Lingam, but shorter and

rounded. Water offered to the Lingam base simply disappears. Maharaja Ranjit Singh took an interest in this mystery but was unable to solve it even after having his army men offer water continuously. A flame kept lit on the altar continuously is also a focus of worship. There are a dozens of smaller temples within this complex, including 121 small Siva temples enshrining a total of 1,337 natural Sivalingams.

Purmandal was visited by the 15th-century founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, who interacted with the kings and historical figures of the area. Nanak was born in Lahore, 110 miles southwest of Jammu. Later Sikh gurus also traveled through Jammu and Kashmir, and there has been a small population of Sikhs in both parts of the state ever since.

We met a group of pilgrims who had come from Gurdaspur in Punjab to perform rites for their ancestors. They told us many people from Punjab and other states of North India pilgrimage here.

#### Bawey Wali Mata Temple

The most important Shakti temple in Jammu region honors Goddess Bawey Wali Mata. Overlooking the Tawi River, it was built within the Bahu Fort by Maharaja Gulab Singh shortly after his coronation in 1822, as part of a general restoration of the ancient fortress. Bawey Wali Mata, or Mahakali, is the reigning Deity of Jammu, and the *kuladevi*, family Goddess, of the Dogra rulers. The fort is said to have been built 3,000 years ago by Raja Bahulochan. It was rebuilt in 1585 by Autar Dev and renovated multiple times since—a testament to its once strategic

location opposite old Jammu city. It is still well maintained with adjacent gardens and is a major area attraction.

This is a small temple, built in white marble on a raised platform of about four feet. It can accommodate only a few worshipers at a time. When we visited on a Tuesday evening, hundreds of devotees are waiting in long lines to have darshan of the Goddess. Order is maintained by police and temple volunteers.

The murti of the Goddess, made of black stone, has a powerful spiritual vibration. The priests accept offerings and return prasadam at lightning speed. The common offerings are sweets, pudding, puffed rice, flowers and cash. Earlier, animal sacrifice took place here, but the practice was prohibited by Maharaja Pratap Singh (reign: 1885–1925) upon the recommendation of a local saint.

Nearby halls house other small temples where people are worshiping and singing bhajans. Elsewhere on the temple's huge campus, people wait for the free meal being distributed.

It is a custom here to tie a red *dupatta*, a women's scarf-like shawl, on the railings along each side of the path to the main temple in thanks for wishes fulfilled by the Goddess. The colorful sight is testimony to the devotion of those who come, and to the efficacy of their prayers.

The twice-yearly Navaratri festivals, called Bahu Melas, are major events here. Another feature of the temple is the largest band of Rhesus monkeys in Jammu and Kashmir state. These are offered sweets—and are not above snatching what they want if it is not readily handed over voluntarily.

#### Panjvaktra Mahadev Temple

Located in the heart of Jammu City just a kilometer from Raghunath, this popular and ancient Siva temple was rebuilt in the 17th century by Raja Guje Singh (1687–1703). The central murti is a *swayambhu*, self-manifested Sivalingam, with five faces representing Siva's five aspects: Sadjyojata, Aghora, Vamadeva, Tatpurusha and Ishana. Devotees can personally perform abhishekam to this Lingam. In one area, silver coins are embedded in the stone floor slabs; one name for the temple is "Ruppee Temple."

This temple was visited by Guru Nanak sometime around 1514. He is said to have been consulted by the local king, Raja Khokhar Dev, for guidance on how to rule according to dharma. The two are said to have spoken under an jujube tree, which remains to this day. It is always blooming and is highly revered by devotees.

#### Peer Kho Temple

One of the more unusual temples in Jammu is Peer Kho, the Saint's Cave, so named in honor of Yogi Guru Garib Nath, a sadhu of the Natha Sampradaya who once lived here.

.....  
**Jammu's divine temples:** (clockwise from above right) Central sanctum of Akhnoor Temple; red dupattas (scarves) are tied to a tree as offerings at Kol Kandoli Temple, in thanks to the Goddess for granting a wish; a family poses inside a cave passageway at the Peer Kho Temple; father and daughter worship at the Bawey Wali Mata Temple; devotees offer water to the invisible Sivalingam of Purmandal Temple



The cave lies east of Jammu in a dense forest near the Tawi River, a few kilometers from Raghunath. It was built in its present form by Raja Biram Deva (1454–1495) and continues to be managed by Natha sadhus, who maintain a *dhuna*, or sacred fire, here around the clock. Thousands of devotees come each year to celebrate Mahasivaratri.

This temple is also called Jambavan Gufa, or Bear Cave, so named after the Bear God Jambava, who figures in the *Ramayana* as well as in the life of Krishna. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva and is regarded as one of the seven immortal living beings—Hanuman being another—mentioned in the *Puranas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

We spoke with the priest, Ashok Kumar Sharma, who was seated beside the naturally formed black Sivalingam in the small

five-sided cave. Only a few devotees can enter at a time—but at twelve feet high, it is reasonably comfortable. An adjacent cave less than six feet high leads to an area with shrines to many Gods and Goddesses. We spoke with one of the Natha yogis here and had darshan of the main mahant, who was in a contemplative mood and blessed us without speaking. We also encountered a group of pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh who had just returned from Vaishno Devi and were headed home.

#### Kameshwar Temple, Akhnoor

We were directed to this temple by a prominent saint of Jammu, Mahant Rameshwar Das of Shri Ramji temple. Akhnoor town, 40km from Jammu, is believed to be the ancient city of Virat Nagar mentioned in the

## The City's More Ancient Temples





**Mahabharata.** Archeological excavations have revealed the site to be one of the last bastions of the Harappan Civilization.

The temple is dedicated to Lord Siva in the form of a self-manifested pindi. The priest, Sadhu Brij Mohan Das told us Kameshwar is a wish-fulfilling temple, especially popular with couples seeking children.

Nearby is the Jio Pota Ghat, on the banks of the Chenab River. Here, on June 17, 1822, Gulab Singh was proclaimed king through the raj tilak, or coronation ceremony. This was the beginning of the Dogra dynasty and ultimately the modern state of Jammu and Kashmir. A commemorative tablet depicts that scene.

#### Kol Kandoli Temple, Nagrota

In the old days, when pilgrims reached Vaishno Devi on foot, their first glimpse of the mountainside temple was from Kol Kandoli, where they would make a night halt. Today many pilgrims visit here on their way to Vaishno Devi or on their return. Home to an Indian army base, the town is a high security area just a few miles from the Pakistan border. Seven soldiers were killed here in a 2016 attack by militants, and one must pass through a military checkpoint to reach the temple.

As in many temples in Jammu, the Goddess is worshiped here in the form of a

naturally occurring pindi rock. It is said Mata Vaishno Devi Herself graced this place as a five-year-old girl and performed penance for twelve years. In another story, the Pandavas encamped here during their exile and were blessed by a vision of the Goddess, who directed them to build this temple. One shrine in the Kol Kandoli complex is maintained by the army; the priest is a soldier, though most visitors would be unaware of this.

One can judge the temple's popularity not only by the fact the temple is overflowing with devotees, but by the large adjacent market doing a thriving business in all the required items for worship at the temple. The vibhuti, sacred ash, sold here is made from the flowers offered to the Goddess and famed for curing skin problems.

#### The Kashmir Pandit Temple

Over half-a-million Hindus fled Kashmir in 1989-90 following attacks by Muslim insurgents, with tens of thousands landing in refugee camps in Jammu. Life was severely difficult for them in the early years, but as they became better settled, they built the Mata Kheer Bhawani Temple in the residential colony of Janipur. A huge multistory well-maintained building on a hillock, it is intended as a replica of the famed Kheer Bhawani Temple in Tullamulla, Kashmir, which was rebuilt by Dogra King Pratap Singh in

1920 and is managed by the Dharmarth Trust. This Jammu temple, however, belongs to a trust founded by the Pandits.

Trust president R. L. Dhar told us Kashmiri Pandits come from all over India and even abroad to worship here if they cannot go to the original in Kashmir. The temple is also popular with the local Hindus. It has two full-time priests, a huge kitchen that serves hundreds of devotees at a time and a well-stocked shop where devotees can buy offerings and puja supplies. It serves as a kind of central clearing house for Pandit families seeking suitable matrimonial alliances for their children.

#### Educational and Cultural Institutions

In addition to its temples, the Dharmarth Trust owns schools, museums and libraries in Jammu, all founded by the Dogra dynasty. We first visit **Shri Raghunath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya**, a large complex with two temples on the outskirts of Jammu. A group

.....  
**Going forward:** (left to right) shrine at the recently built Kashmir Pandits' Mata Kheer Bhawani Temple; students chant mantras at the Siva shrine of Shri Raghunath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya; Amar Mahal Museum and Library; (inset) the Dogra Dynasty's hefty gold throne

of about 70 students welcome us with Vedic chants. School principal Praveen Khajuria tells us the school was first established in 1858 by Ranbir Singh on the premises of the Raghunath Temple. Until 1938 it functioned as a government institute, and then was transferred to the Dharmarth Trust. The school became widely known for the brilliant Sanskrit priests, scholars and teachers it produced. The school's present large facility was built in 1896 by Pratap Singh, and taken over for the school in 1986. Praveen says the school now provides a blend of modern and Sanskrit education to its students. With the support of the Trust, and Dr. Karan Singh personally, education, room and board remain free of charge for all students.

The **Amar Mahal Museum and Library**, originally the Amar Mahal Palace, is an internationally known institution with a collection of some 31,000 rare books, art works, photographs and artifacts connected to the Dogra dynasty. The palace, designed by a French architect along the lines of a French chateau, was built in the 1860s by Raja Amar Singh on a bluff overlooking the River Tawi, with a clear view of Vaishno Devi Temple on the mountains far to the north. It is adjacent to the Hari Niwas palace, now a hotel, the last official residence of the Dogra rulers. The entire area is beautifully landscaped with vast lawns. The museum and library are run by

the Hari Tara Charitable Trust, created by Hari and Tara Devi in 1970 for educational, cultural, literary and philanthropic activities. The building was donated to the trust by their son, Dr. Karan Singh.

The manager, R. S. Pathania, gave us a tour of the historic building. There is the Darbar Hall, filled with imposing portraits of the Dogra rulers and featuring the 230-pound gold throne of the Maharaja. Along the walls are a large set of paintings in Kangra Miniature style. One can even visit the private quarters of Maharani Tara Devi, which has been preserved as it was in her lifetime with various personal memorabilia and garments.

The palace's dining room has been converted into a Nepal room in memory of Dr. Karan Singh's late wife, Yasho Rajya Lakshmi, a Nepali princess, who took an active interest in developing the museum. Another area displays photographs from Dr. Karan Singh's life and political involvement, from being the state's last prince to associating with Nehru, the Indira Gandhi family and various world leaders including Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, serving as India's ambassador to the United States and lastly as a member of India's upper house, the Rajya Sabha, from which he recently retired.

The **Dogra Art Museum** is in the old Mubarak Mandi palace, a former royal residence of the Dogra kings, a mile from Amar

Mahal. The palace, dating back to 1824, incorporates elements of Rajasthani and Mughal architecture. The museum, begun in 1954, is located in the palace's Pink Hall. It was expanded in 1991 and presently houses more than 7000 historical objects. These include paintings from the Basholi, Kangra and Jammu schools of art, a stunning collection of 18th-century Krishna and Sudama paintings, and a large set of beautiful handwritten Persian manuscripts. In addition to the artworks are collections of Dogra arms and armory, jewelry, metalware, musical instruments and historical documents.

#### Conclusion

During our six days in Jammu, we learned much about the Dogra community and its rulers. We came to appreciate their valor, love for Sanatana Dharma, and role as prolific temple builders. I was impressed that Dr. Karan Singh, while holding multiple public offices, was at the same time serving the temples of Jammu as head of the Dharmarth Trust. A few other scions of India's royal families have been of similar value to their former kingdoms. Others, however, have become businessmen or even opted for a life of ease, living off the family's fortune. In Jammu, we see the proper fulfillment of the royal kshatriya dharma in the protection and promotion of Hindu religion and culture. 🇮🇳

## Cultural and Educational Institutions







CHICAGO

# World Hindu Congress 2018

In the city where Swami Vivekananda became famous, thousands gather to celebrate and debate the role of Hindus and Hinduism in today's world

**T**HE THEME OF THE SECOND WORLD Hindu Congress (September 7-9, 2018) was *Sumantrite Suvikrante*—"think collectively and achieve valiantly." This inspired and pervaded the stirring inaugural speech by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat from India, the eloquent concluding remarks by India's Vice President, Venkaiah Naidu, and the spirited speeches by a galaxy of speakers at the various sessions during the three-day event. The WHC, held at the Westin Hotel in the Chicago suburb of Lombard, commemorated the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's historic speech at Chicago's 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions.

The venue wore a festive look, with the hustle and bustle of men and women from far and near—2,500 delegates and another 250 distinguished speakers from 60 countries. Hundreds of participants served as volunteers to help make it all go smoothly.

The inaugural session began with the

blowing of conch by Swami Vigyananand and lighting of traditional oil lamps by the invited dignitaries. Among those on the dais were Bhagwat; Prof. S.P. Kothari of MIT, chairperson of the organizing committee; Ashwin Adhin, Vice President of Republic of Suriname; Acharya Lokesh Muni, founder of Ahimsa Vishwa Bharti; and Ashok Chowgule, Working President (External) of the Vishva Hindu Parishad. The Ekatmata Mantra was recited by Chandrika Tandon, chairperson of Tandon Capital Associates, and an imposing larger-than-life-size statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled as the backdrop of the podium.

Bhagwat delivered his rousing keynote address to a standing ovation, remarking that the organizers had appropriately chosen the theme for the WHC because the time had come for Hindus to think and act collectively.

"India," Bhagwat said, "is no longer a slave country. We are not a weak society. We all have to rise and follow our ancient wisdom.

Our Hindu values emphasize welfare of every individual, the collective community called society, nature and even the environment. When we rise, the nation also rises. The duty of Hindus is to impart these universal values to the world, but we have forgotten these values. Though the Hindu society has meritorious people, they have forgotten to work together. If a lion moves alone, a pack of dogs can overpower it. We have the capacity to work together. Our thoughts are not modern. Over-idealism is good. I am pro-future. We are ancient and also pro-modern. Without harming others, we must protect ourselves."

He said that earning more money was not bad, but one should learn to help others. "Every act of life must be surcharged with spirituality. Whenever your mind is disturbed, you will do wrong things. Acquire strength, but use it in unity. You have to control your ego, but if you have absence of ego you will be defeated. So controlled ego is needed. No one can win single-handedly," he

concluded, "but together we will win."

Popular actor Anupam Kher received an appreciative welcome at the plenary session. He remarked, "Hinduism is a way of life, and one becomes a Hindu by living like one. Tolerance was the centerpiece of Vivekananda's message. My roots are steeped in Hinduism. As a Hindu, it pains me deeply to see how ignorance and half knowledge are trying to destroy one of the oldest and world's most peaceful religion."

During the three days of deliberations, a total of 50 sessions were conducted in seven tracts—the Hindu Economic Forum with the theme, "Making Society Prosperous;" Hindu Educational Conference with the theme, "Quality Education for All;" Hindu Women Conference with the theme, "Highest Respect for Women;" Hindu Organizational Conference with the theme, "Unity is Power in the Kali Yuga;" Hindu Youth Conference with the theme, "Rise, Organize, Lead, Emerge;" Hindu Media Conference with the theme, "Truth Is Supreme;" and Hindu Political Conference with the theme, "Responsible Democracy for All."

The panelists, speakers, coordinators and chairs shared their views and experiences, making many suggestions for creating a better Hindu identity, sustainable eternal dharma practices, protection of nature, fair and frank dissemination of information, meaningful education without historic distortions, justice for all, equality of genders, governance on fair democratic principles, and universal unity for peace and prosperity for all mankind.

The brief remarks of Prof. Arvind Sharma of McGill University, who introduced the education conference panel, "Responding to Western Academic Challenges," give an example of the profound insights offered by various panelists: "Who are the people telling us what we Hindus are or should be at the moment? From whom comes the challenge to who we are?" He identifies three groups, all Western. First, Indologists who "attack Hinduism because Hindu self-understanding challenges Western understanding of Indian history and culture, and undermines their three-centuries-old hegemony. Hindu civilization is the only example of a major civilization the reconstruction of whose past and culture, in modern times, is *not* the world of its own scholars but of Western scholars."

The second group are liberals whose vision of India is a Macaulayan one in which the legacy of British rule "continued in the form of the English language, Western political and legal institutions and, this is important, the conversion of India to Christianity. All the elements of this vision have been realized, except conversion to Christianity."

And finally, Sharma said, there are the



**Hindus meet in style:** (clockwise from opposite page) a plenary session; Mohan Bhagwat (at left) lights the lamp; the main organizer, Swami Vigyanananda, greets the Vice President of India, Venkaiah Naidu, for the WHC's last session; a dance presentation by Pavithra Srinivasan of Chennai

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY WORLD HINDU CONFERENCE





Marxists, who want India divided along class lines. But “such a vertical division of society is prevented by cultural loyalties of language, religion and so on, which cut across such divisions horizontally.” Thus, he concluded, “The Western Indologists, the liberals and the Marxists pose a joint challenge to Hinduism.”

Vamadeva Shastri, a fellow panelist with Dr. Sharma, told the *India Post* after the event, “The reality is that India has been the dominant civilization in the world, spiritually and culturally. India has preserved and conserved the science of consciousness, and no one can deny that. We need a higher awakening of ancient traditions.”

The Youth Conference, organized by the Hindu Students Council, Hindu Yuva and the UK National Hindu Students Foundation, focused on how the youth can contribute to a stronger future for Hindus and Hinduism. The Hindu Students Council’s report on this meeting praised the first panel session, on strengthening Hindu identity, saying the panelists from the UK, New Zealand and Trinidad conducted an insightful examination into how young people can contribute to changing the narrative of Hindu identity. Their report commended a second panel that dealt with proactive engagement with the

media—how to correct the media’s underrepresentation of Hinduism and counter false narratives of Hinduism as they appear.

Parth Parihar of the HSC explained in more depth in the *Indo American News*: “One important issue was ‘Strengthening Hindu Identity.’ As speaker Murali Magesan of New Zealand put it, ‘We see the vast achievements of Hindu society and would expect that people would identify as Hindu very proudly. But, it’s not happening.... so we must ask, why?’ As the conference would elaborate, ‘not knowing’ how to represent Hindu dharma has led to voices outside the community speaking for our traditions and in the process misrepresenting them at times. The goal before the current generation of young Hindus is to build a positive, modern vision of Hindu identity and present this vision confidently in all walks of life.”

Addressing the concluding session on September 9, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu invoked the message of Vedanta philosophy, as had Swami Vivekananda, saying, “The story of *Ramayana* continues to be popular and inspires the world. That is why India is known as Vishwa Guru (‘world guru’). India has taught the world tolerance and universal acceptance of all religions, and itself practices

**Breakout sessions:** (top) participants in the youth conference gathered for a group photo; (below) the colorful banners created for six of the WHC’s parallel sessions

both. India’s vision is very broad—India considers the whole world is a family, Vasudaika Kutumbakam. The world is the manifestation of the Divine—God.”

He went on to say that Swami Vivekananda’s timeless message of tolerance, charity, gender equality and protection of nature was still relevant even today. “Ideal behavior is more important than ideology. That is the spirit of Hinduism.”

Dinanatha Bodhiswami flew from Moscow to attend the event and introduced the Russian edition of *HINDUISM TODAY*, of which he is the editor. He was pleased with the event, and said, “I felt light-hearted, full of strength and confident in the future. My teachers and mentors, the wise rishis of old, a billion devotees around the globe and the best religion that has ever existed in the history of humanity are always with me.”

Karolina Goswami of the popular “Indian in Details” YouTube channel, offered these observations from her participation: “There

are many ideologies that have had their entire focus on conquering the world, which has given us violence and hate and encouraged the vilification of many native traditions. But India’s dharmic religions encourage us to focus on conquering our minds, an inward goal by which we should be able to reduce wrongdoings globally. I felt that the WHC helped many Hindus to work together for the common objectives of serving humanity, preserving their golden heritage and encouraging a fairer representation of their traditions and cultures in the global media.”

Vamadeva Shastri commented to *HINDUISM TODAY*, “The WHC was a pivotal event for the entire global Hindu community. It indicated a paradigm shift in the Hindu mind, with a new self-confidence and clarity of self-articulation. Old anti-Hindu prejudices and stereotypes will no longer be tolerated or silently endured. At the same time, the event revealed how entrenched anti-Hindu forces, particularly of the radical left, are afraid of the Hindu community asserting itself in the West, but the WHC shows that they can no longer control the agenda.”

There’s a YouTube interview, [bit.ly/WHC-Elst](https://bit.ly/WHC-Elst), with Koenraad Elst, part of the education panel, with some insightful analysis.

There were many compliments and few complaints about the well-run event. Some observed that the frequent use of Hindi—during plenary session speeches, in particular—annoyed the South Indians and second generation listeners who did not speak the language. Others complained about the wall-to-wall speeches (12 hours some days), saying more time should have been allowed for delegates to interact with each other. We at *HINDUISM TODAY* noted that the media coverage and YouTube broadcasting could have been much more extensive.

In a note sent out to all the volunteers who ran the event, organizer Abhaya Ashtana captured the magic: “With Ishwara’s grace, things came together nicely for WHC 2018. As they say, when folks join sincerely in a cause bigger than themselves, Daivam (God) ensures the rest. The three days went by like a breeze, but left faces, images and words engraved in our mind for a lifetime. We all felt touched, humbled and delighted by the presentations, talks and personal conversations. Delegates were extremely appreciative of the quality and caliber of the conference; they enjoyed the food, the hospitality and departed with a smile and promise to meet again in Bangkok 2022.”

The theme for the Third World Hindu Congress, to be held in Thailand from November 4 to 6, 2022, was announced as “Victory of Dharma, Not Adharma.”

With reporting by J. V. Lakshmana Rao, Chicago

## VIEWPOINT A Grand Success

BY FRANÇOIS GAUTIER

AT THE CHENNAI AIRPORT THE night of September 5, hundreds of Hindus, some with orange banners, were boarding flights for Chicago via Europe. Soon enough we were all at the conference site outside Chicago. I have never seen so many Hindus together, except in melas and kumbhs—and talking so loudly and happily!

Many famous faces greet us as well: Rajiv Malhotra, already busy conducting interviews to promote and defend Hinduism; Vivek Agnihotri, one of the most remarkable defenders of the Hindus; Mohandas Pai, chairperson of Manipal Global; Subhash Kak, a quiet and brilliant scholar of Hindu dharma; and a few Western ones, too: David Frawley, a wonderful Vedic scholar; and Koenraad Elst, one of the first to defend Hinduism in the West.

On the morning of the 7th, the speeches are long, but the energy is good; the huge hall is packed and each speech is cheered wildly, including the opening by Shri Mohan Bhagwat and a short but strong talk by actor Anupam Kher. A few big names are missing, apparently impacted by the adverse publicity by fringe groups against this conference. But believe me, you could not find anything milder than a Hindu, and this WHC was anything but fundamentalist. It sometimes enrages me that the most peaceful, most tolerant religion of this planet, that accepts that God takes many names and faces, is attacked and vilified so much.

There were many parallel conferences—women, youth, education, media, writers, etc. The youth conference, featuring young NRIs as well as India-based youth, had a packed audience. The economic conference was also fascinating, with a passionate expose from many, including Mohandas Pai, showing the astonishing economic progress accomplished over the last several years in India along with a strong message for the numerous NRI’s present: “Work happens in India; this is where you need to reinvest your energies and contribute to the economic growth.”

In the writers’ session, which had been renamed “Hindu Identity in the Modern World,” Amish Tripathi spoke brilliantly about this Hindu identity. Sree Iyer, the founder of the *PGurus* magazine, spoke eloquently about his task to tackle corruption in the media, while R. Jagannathan, editorial director of *Swarajya* magazine, highlighted the need to think Hindu.



I spoke about Kashmir, which I have covered extensively for 12 years and just came out with a new book *In Defense of a Billion Hindus*, which has an entire chapter devoted to the region. I commiserated with the exodus of 400,000 Hindus becoming

refugees in their own land, a phenomenon I witnessed firsthand.

This conference made us feel that in spite of so much Hinduphobia in the media and academic circles, it is wonderful to be a Hindu today—that Hindu identity remains strong even after centuries of genocide on Hindus. Some of us spoke about the five-pronged attacks that we see on Hindus today: from the media, from the Marxists, from the Christian missionaries and their unabated conversion via financial incentives (as witnessed recently during the Kerala flood); from Islamic fundamentalism, which stems from so many Indian Muslims going to work in the Gulf countries and coming back radicalized; and from the rampant Westernization of rural India, mostly through TV channels, which convinces innocent women that a cheap cream will make them fairer, or innocent boys that wearing a suit will turn them into real men.

As emphasized by the Vice President of India in his closing speech, the message of this conference was very clear: Hindus need to forget their differences, unite and stand up for their bothers and sisters, whenever they are attacked. Hindus are one billion worldwide, one in seven persons on this earth, and they hold the last of the knowledge which once roamed the world, from Greece to Mesopotamia, from Egypt to the Celts: “Who am I, what is dharma, what is karma, what are the tools to become a better human being (meditation, etc.), why am I reborn again and again?”

Lastly we should thank the organizers for having brought 2500 Hindus together, not a mean task. See you then in Bangkok, in 2022!

FRANÇOIS GAUTIER is the editor-in-chief of the Paris-based *La Revue de l’Inde*, and has written several books on India. Follow him on: [facebook.com/francoisgautierofficial](https://facebook.com/francoisgautierofficial)



# Are Humans Natural Herbivores?

Our teenage correspondent offers evidence supporting a vegetarian diet, including human and animal anatomy, biochemistry and more

By MAYURESH VISSWANATHAN,  
CARLSBAD, CALIFORNIA

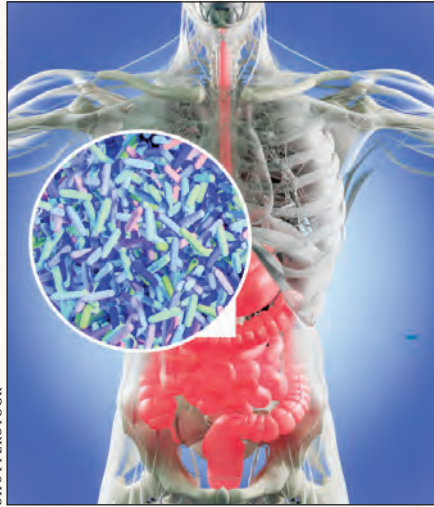
**H**UMAN SOCIETIES ALL ACROSS THE globe have consumed meat for thousands of years. Their cuisine has included traditional farm animals, such as cows, pigs, chickens, and goats, as well as seafood, including fish and crustaceans. Some may argue that meat eating has been an essential part of human history and evolution and is an intrinsic part of our culture today.

However, there are a few societies on Earth today that follow herbivorous diets rather than omnivorous diets. These vegetarian or vegan societies can be found throughout the subcontinent of India, where hundreds of millions of people have abstained from eating meat for the last few thousand years.

The meat-eating debate has been long and drawn out. Many oppose meat eating because it causes himsa, or violence, to other beings on this planet. Those who support meat eating claim that it is needed for a complete diet and is simply a natural cycle that we must fulfill in order to survive.

Compelling evidence has risen within the past decade or so that sheds new light on this topic. Ground-breaking studies show not only that we do not need meat for our survival, but in fact it is harming those who consume it. Herbivorous diets are the perfect diets for humans because our anatomy is specifically tailored to vegetarian/vegan diets. Our anatomical features and health benefits prove it.

To understand why a herbivorous diet is the best for our anatomy, it is first important to identify the unique features of the digestive system of a carnivore, herbivore, and finally an omnivore. Carnivores are organisms that eat exclusively meat and do not need plant matter for their bodies to function. All carnivores have sharp teeth for tearing meat. They do not possess flat molars in the back of their mouth for chewing plant matter. When they tear off a piece of meat, they do not chew it; they tend to swallow the chunks of it whole. This is because carnivores do not secrete amylase in their saliva, unlike herbivores. Amylase, an enzyme that pre-digests carbohydrates in the mouth, is only found in multicellular organisms that consume plants. Also, the digestive tract of a carnivore is nor-



**Gut impressions:** Biologists are discovering the importance of the microbiome, the colonies of bacteria and other microbial organisms that live within the body and contribute to health or illness

mally five to six times the length of its torso and is relatively linear, rather than intricately coiled up or folded over. This digestive tract allows for the fast digestion of meat, assuring that the flesh does not putrefy within the intestines.

Also, because they eat their meat raw, and uncooked, all carnivores have a stomach pH of less than 2.0. Such an extremely acidic pH allows for the destruction of bacteria and parasites that dwell on the flesh of rotting carcasses. Even true omnivores can consume raw meat, as their stomach pH can effectively handle the harmful parasites on the meat.

Herbivores are organisms that eat solely plant matter for their bodies to function. All herbivores have flat teeth, including flat molars in the back of their mouths to allow them to mash and grind up tough plant material. Unlike carnivores, herbivores can also move their mouth from side to side, instead of just up and down like a carnivore. This process further aids the herbivore in chewing plant matter. Another key characteristic of the herbivore is their unique digestive tract. All herbivores have intestinal tracts that are folded up and extremely long, usually multiple times the length of their body.

This arrangement allows for a thorough breakdown of plants for optimal nutrient absorption. Digestion in an herbivore starts in the mouth, unlike a carnivore. Herbivores must chew their food before swallowing it. This helps to pre-digest it before it reaches the stomach, and then the intestines. Unlike a carnivore, the saliva of an herbivore contains amylase, which is useful for breaking down carbohydrates in the mouth. Not many parasites or harmful bacteria grow on plants, so herbivores do not need an extremely low stomach pH. Their stomach pH tends to be more basic (alkaline) than that of a carnivore.

Omnivores are organisms that eat both plants and animals. Humans are widely considered to be omnivores, but this is quite incorrect. To correctly explain the anatomy of an omnivore, it is best to use an ideal example, such as a bear.

Bears are truly omnivorous creatures; over half their diet consists of plant matter and a moderate portion consists of meat. For omnivores to be successful, it is vital that they have sharp teeth and claws. The digestive system must be well suited to digesting meat, even if the diet is mostly herbivorous, because raw meat has the potential to inflict serious illness or death on the creature.

Accordingly, bears have sharp teeth and sharp claws, and their digestive tract is similar to that of a carnivore—short and highly acidic. To help consume herbivorous food, they have flat molars in the back of their mouth, and they chew their food instead of swallowing it whole. These traits can be observed in other omnivorous creatures such as domesticated canines (dogs), and raccoons.

The anatomy of a human is strikingly similar to that of an herbivore. Our teeth are designed to grind and chew plant matter. In fact, we have additional molars, called wisdom teeth, in the back of our mouth to further help us chew hard-to-digest foods such as roots, tubers, and foliage. Our jaws can move not only up and down, but also side to side, unlike carnivores. The most striking thing, however, is our digestive system. It is long and coiled, just like a herbivore; and our saliva contains amylase, which helps to break down starches or carbohydrates in our food. Our stomach pH also is similar to that of an herbivore—around 4-5 when consuming food, much less acid than that of a carnivore.



**Eskimos:** Indigenous tribes of the North eat mostly meat ten months out of the year, and their health suffers from the lack of plants in their diet

Humans are anatomically not omnivores. Our digestive tract is not like that of carnivores, we do not have sharp teeth or nails, and we normally do NOT eat raw meat. Humans are the only animals that cook their food, and the food that *must* be cooked before it is consumed is meat. Plant matter doesn't have to be cooked to be safe to consume, although it is advised that you cook most of the food you consume.

If we were true omnivores, we would have the capability of eating raw meat. Our stomach pH does not support the consumption of raw meat. Moreover, if we were designed as omnivores, we would have the capability of eating raw meat without even chewing it. We would be able to tear off chunks of meat and swallow them whole, with no issue whatsoever. Researchers from Harvard University have concluded that humans do not have the necessary gut flora to properly digest meat, even if it is cooked. In this study, researchers

had two groups of subjects. For five days, one group could only eat meat and dairy for all three meals. The other group was restricted to a herbivorous diet which included fruits, vegetables, leafy greens, tubers, and legumes.

Their results were astonishing, even though the experiment lasted for only five days. The meat group had an explosion of the bacteria *Bilophila*. This Harvard study, published in the reputed scientific journal *Nature*, demonstrated that, "increases in the abundance and activity of *Bilophila wadsworthia* on the animal-based diet support a link between dietary fat, bile acids, and the outgrowth of microorganisms capable of triggering inflammatory bowel disease." Their entire intestine became filled with it within just a day or two. While this bacteria has the ability to digest stomach fats, it does not have the ability to digest meat particles. The worst part is that *Bilophila* has been shown to cause intestinal inflammation and

colitis, which has been verified through trials on mice. A meat-rich diet would actually promote the destruction of our own intestines, as our intestinal walls would become severely inflamed.

Even when given scientific data, many people are adamant that humans are truly meant to eat meat. They argue that some societies have lived on meat-dominant diets for thousands of years and have not had many health problems. They offer examples such as the Eskimos, an Arctic-dwelling people who mainly live on whale, caribou and fish throughout the entire year, only eating grasses, roots and tubers during the two summer months.

Furthermore, meat-eating proponents correctly claim that many vegetarians and vegans suffer from B12 vitamin deficiencies. They also argue that the purpose of our canine teeth is for tearing meat, which therefore justifies the consumption of meat. Their biggest argument is that meat was actually needed by our ancestors to evolve into modern-day humans. There are many issues with these arguments, although each contains elements of truth.

Firstly, it is true that people have been eating meat for thousands of years. However, it is







SHUTTERSTOCK

## Are We Designed to Just Eat Veggies?

not true that they have had few health problems. The Eskimo are a prime example of a modern-day people that still live a lifestyle that was prevalent hundreds of years ago. Experts and scientists have long marveled at this lifestyle because the Eskimo eat meat at every single meal, without much or any plant matter, and still look healthy and happy. But looks can be deceiving. The average lifespan of an Eskimo is in the 60s, while the average lifespan of others today is 80. They suffer from many ailments common to heavy meat eaters, such as atherosclerosis, a condition in which the arteries harden due to the deposition of fat and plaque on the walls of the arteries. Twelve percent of the Eskimo population suffers from internal parasites due to the consumption of meat, including raw meat.

Vitamin B12 is essential to the human digestive system. Although it is true that vegans and vegetarians may suffer from B12 deficiencies, it does not mean that meat is essential to the human diet. It is a common misunderstanding that the only natural source of vitamin B12 is meat. Vitamin B12 comes from bacteria that reside in the soil. Meat is rich in B12 because the animal, most likely an herbivore, ate food directly from the soil such as grass, or seed. Back in the day, our ancestors were able to consume adequate amounts of B12 through the consumption of plants straight from the soil.

Nowadays, however, our food is so clean and free of dirt that we cannot benefit from

the B12 supplementation that soil provides. It is still recommended, however, that you continue to wash your foods in order to get rid of any pesticides that may be on the produce. The only way that it would be safe to eat "unclean" produce would be to grow it yourself in an environment without pesticides, such as a home garden. Luckily, vegetarians can also obtain B12 from yogurt, since it is rich in beneficial bacteria.

**"Eat food. Not too much.  
Mostly plants."** Michael Pollan

Another false argument that people use is the classic canine teeth argument. "If we weren't meant to eat meat, why do I have these sharp, meat eating teeth in my mouth?" What do gorillas and hippos have in common? They both have intimidatingly large canines that are quite sharp. Both happen to be herbivores. Why do herbivores have canine teeth? Scientists have noticed that gorillas and hippos do not use their canine teeth for food consumption, but rather for defensive tactics. When threatened by a predator, or another member of their own species, they will often display their sharp canines to intimidate the aggressor. If the fight escalates, they can use them to good advantage. Scientists theorize that early humans used their canines in the same way, but these teeth have become a vestigial body part now; we do not

**Food as medicine:** Four friends enjoy a rich array of veggies. More and more restaurants and stores are providing fresh, organic, plant-based foods, giving vegetarians more choices than ever.

display our teeth as a sign of aggression or defense.

The final and most prevalent argument that people use to defend their meat-eating habits is that humanity's early ancestors needed meat to gradually develop and sustain the larger brain that is found in humans of today. This is entirely false. It has been proven by various studies that it was not meat that made us humans. In fact, it was cooked starches that allowed us to evolve with bigger brains. Carbohydrates are without doubt the best source of immediate energy, and carbohydrates are fully capable of supporting a human brain alone. Protein and fat are far less efficient. Further, it has been proven that protein and fat alone cannot support an enlarged brain because the brain needs so much energy. It is a common misunderstanding that meat is a great source of energy. That is not true. Carbohydrates are typically found in starchy foods such as yams, beets, and potatoes.

In a 2016 study published by the scientific journal, *Quaternary International*, researchers asserted that, "Starchy plant foods provide the energy needed to support an enlarged brain..."

We started to develop the bigger brain once we learned how to cook. Cooked, starches such as potatoes are 20 times easier to digest than in their raw form. This huge advancement allowed us to expend less energy digesting food, which in turn allowed more energy for the brain to use.

The benefits of a herbivorous diet are vast, which further proves that the human diet was simply not meant to include meat. Vegetarians and vegans suffer less from atherosclerosis, colon cancer, heart disease, and high cholesterol levels, because they do not eat meat.

If humans were true omnivores anatomically, none of these diseases would affect us. Carnivores and omnivores do not get clogged arteries from meat, nor do they get cholesterol-related heart diseases. Vegetarians and vegans also have a longer lifespan on average and tend to be less obese.

A peer-reviewed 2003 Oxford University study of 37,875 healthy men and women aged 20-97 showed that 3% of vegetarians suffered from obesity versus 5.4% of meat eaters suffered from obesity. Followers of a diet that included meat also had an average Body Mass Index (BMI) that was 8.3% higher than vegetarians. To further support this finding, a 2006 meta-study comprised from data gathered from 87 studies found that vegetarian diets are associated with reduced body weight. A reduced BMI proves that not only are vegetarians lighter, but that they will generally be healthier as well because many diseases are a by-product of obesity, such as coronary artery disease and hypertension. The lighter weight of vegetarians is attributed to the fact that the diet is nutrient rich, yet low in calories. Many meat consumers are obese because the amount of calories in a portion of meat a lot more than compared to the same portion of vegetables. In this way, followers of a herbivorous can lose weight because they still become full, but without the unnecessary calories. Additionally, meat eating can increase your chances of getting colon cancer.

According to a peer-reviewed 1994 study by Harvard researchers, consuming meats such as beef, pork, or lamb at least 5 times a week can drastically increase chances of developing colon cancer. Eating processed meats such as bacon or sausage can further increase the chance of colon cancer, as discovered by The World Cancer Research Fund. Many people are concerned that plant based proteins aren't up to par with their animal based counterparts. However, a 2014 study found people who got their protein from animal products were four times more likely to die of cancer than people who obtained their protein from plant based sources. Lastly, vegetarians and vegans usually have lower cholesterol levels than meat-eaters, which is good for preventing cholesterol-related heart diseases. The lower cholesterol levels can be attributed to the fact that plants don't contain cholesterol, whereas animal products do. The health benefits of vegetarian and vegan diets are plentiful, and it has been shown that a plant based lifestyle could prove to be more healthy than one based on meat.

After learning how destructive the consumption of meat can be to one's digestive system, it is natural to wonder, "Why have humans been consuming meat for the past few thousand years if it was so bad for us this entire time?" A few thousand years ago, meat was a rare commodity. It is a common misunderstanding that most ancient people ate meat every day. Most of their diet consisted of seeds, nuts, berries, roots, tubers, vegetables, and fruits. Hunting took a lot of time and energy, and hunting technology was quite basic compared to the hunting gear of today. Meat was not easy to come by. When people did have meat, they would often split one animal among many people and would only get a few bites in a meal. Diets in which meat made up a small portion were prevalent throughout almost all societies on Earth, with few exceptions, like the Eskimo and other pastoral peoples, who mainly lived off animal products. Most societies did not suf-

fer from diabetes, heart disease, and atherosclerosis, which are all common ailments of heavy meat eaters.

With the swift increase in globalization, the demand for meat has skyrocketed, especially in Eastern countries that in the past consumed lower meat quantities. Now, meat makes up a big portion of people's diet around the world. Fruits and vegetables are now the rarer commodity in most households. This unhealthy overconsumption of meat has caused the health problems we now see today.

Humans went from a mostly vegetarian diet to a mostly carnivorous diet within the last hundred or so years. Our bodies would need more time to evolve to adapt to a diet filled with meat and processed foods; we, as a species, have not yet adapted to this burden. Hence, we are now facing the consequences of a quick, but major dietary shift.

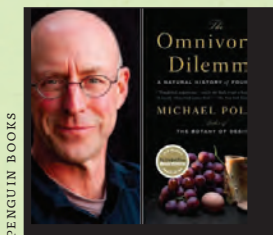
In summary, humans were not created to consume meat. Our anatomy is not similar to that of a carnivore or an omnivore, and we suffer from many diseases that are linked to meat consumption. There are endless benefits to a herbivorous diet, which anyone can experience for themselves if they try it. Though it may be hard to say goodbye to fried chicken and the monthly neighborhood barbecue, your body will thank you in the long run. 🍽️

[bit.ly/HumanStomachAcids](http://bit.ly/HumanStomachAcids)  
[bit.ly/eskimo-diet](http://bit.ly/eskimo-diet)  
[bit.ly/Meat-Brain](http://bit.ly/Meat-Brain)



.....  
*Mayuresh Visswanathan is a junior at San Marcos High School near San Diego, CA. He is a vegetarian varsity athlete with a passion for raising freshwater fish and aquatic plants.*

## A Healthy Relationship with Food



IF YOU ARE NOT ALREADY CONCERNED WITH THE DIRECTION THAT MAINSTREAM FOOD HAS TAKEN, Professors Peter Singer and Michael Pollan think you should be. In *The Ethics of What We Eat, Why Our Food Choices Matter*, Dr. Singer and animal rights activist Jim Mason show how eating meat, poultry, fish and factory-farmed dairy products not only contributes to animal abuse, but also environmental degradation, social injustice and climate change. For further insights and earthy alternatives, we refer to Michael Pollan's 2010 bestseller, *Food Rules*. He's been compared to Mark Twain in his literary genius. Skipping his recommendations on eating flesh, you will, as we did, find his 64 rules for better eating remarkably sensible, and funny as well. Explore Pollan's impressive set of food books, they will make you stop and think before buying factory raised flesh or processed foods.



# South India's Bhakti Saints



## How a handful of God-adoring devotees changed the history of a nation

BY LAKSHMI CHANDRASHEKAR SUBRAMANIAN

**S**INGING THEIR HEART AND SOUL TO THE DIVINE, dedicating every verse as an offering, visiting the most auspicious of temples, recounting their personal encounters with the Lord, and living a life of faith, surrender and utmost devotion characterizes all the bhakti saints of India. Belonging to diverse communities, regions, historical periods and composing in different languages, styles and contexts, these poet-saints are bound together through time by their steadfast love of God.

The widespread devotional tradition of India is referred to as the Bhakti Movement. From around the 6th century onwards, as far as historians can tell, regional bhakti poetry has been flourishing in the Indian subcontinent in various local languages. The early Vaishnava and Saiva bhakti saints composed hymns at a time when Jainism and Buddhism were gaining major popularity. In the early seventh and eighth centuries, the Hindu Pallava and Chola kingdoms of southern India were at the height of their power. This, coupled with the burgeoning popularity of the divine songsters, kept Hinduism strong as it faced threats from other faiths. The bhakti environment created by these poet-saints influenced people from all walks of life, royalty and laymen, who were inspired by the pristine devotion of the saints and subsequently redefined their own lives as service to God.

Vast bhakti saint networks contributed not only to the religious landscape of the past, but also to today's living tradition of devotion. Indian philosophy, music, dance, literature, history, visual art, architecture, film and popular media are all influenced by these poet-saints. Their compelling and lyrical songs permeate every major form of Indian classical dance and music. It is no surprise, then, that all

Carnatic and Bharatanatyam dance compositions are devotional in nature. Every composition exudes intense and emotive bhakti rasa, which artists strive to express. Lakshmi Jayachandran of Singapore shares her love of the Tamil Saivite saints: "The most inspiring aspect of the Nalvars' poetry is their intense love and devotion expressed in exquisite language that touches the heart so directly. An outstanding example of such melting devotion is the *Thiruvachakam* by Manikkavasagar."

In the social sphere, the poet-saints' inspiring lives form the basis for the stories that mothers and grandmothers tell their children, generation after generation. Their poignant verses still enter everyday contexts. Certain temples are regarded as uniquely sacred due to the saints' presence in those spaces where they composed and sang their hymns.

The 12 Alvars and 63 Nayanars of South India are hailed as the earliest groups of bhakti saints. Ardent devotees of Vishnu and Siva respectively, these 75 poet-saints composed soul-stirring verses in Tamil that set the groundwork for centuries of bhakti tradition. Of the Siva devotees, the Nalvar (Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar), as well as female poet-saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar, had a great impact on Saiva Siddhanta philosophy as they sang about Siva as Personal Lord and Supreme Reality. Around 300 years later, in the 12th century, Basavanna and Mahadevi Akka carried the message of Virasaivism (heroic Saivism) in Karnataka through their vachanas in Kannada language. This poetry has a different flavor, a

trenchant immediacy and radicalism, while expressing unflinching devotion to God Siva. Fast-forwarding to 16th century Vishnu-bhakti, Haridasa saint Kanakadasa composed Carnatic kirtanas in Kannada, while Poonthanam Namboodiri sang his praises in Malayalam to Lord Guruvayurappan, who is enshrined in Kerala.

Together, these poet-saints form an extended bhakti family that India has nurtured through the ages. The saints offer a universal path to liberation available to one and all. Every Indian region, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, has played a major role in building this tradition of devotional religiosity. Bhakti transcends geographical boundaries and languages, uniting devotees in its universal message. It is an affirmation of India's remarkable spirituality that saints, not soldiers, are history's most lauded heroes.

In this Educational Insight, we focus on poet-saints

*In the 1980s Saroja Nagarathnam of Chennai created this remarkable art in which she depicts the four Samaya Acharyas of Saivism surrounded by the other Nayanars, with Madurai Meenakshi Temple in the background. Amazingly, this art is done entirely with bija mantras, hundreds of thousands of sacred words penned almost microscopically. No lines, no painting, just lettering. Many months were required to produce this image.*

with devotional poetry in the South Indian languages of Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. In the future we will devote an entire feature to Telugu, another beautiful South Indian language, which is the vehicle of expression for most Carnatic composer-saints. In this Insight we feature 21 South Indian bhaktas who lived over a span of 1,000 years, between the 6th and the 16th centuries.



SAROJA NAGARATHNAM





BAANI SEKHON

**Sacred fellowship:** Artist Baani Sekhon depicts 12 famed Vaishnava Alvar saints encircling a pink lotus holding the sacred namam, the symbol of Lord Vishnu, whom they all worshiped and offered hymns to; (right) statues of the Alvars at the Adhinatha Perumal Temple of Alvar Thirunagari, Tamil Nadu.

Nayanars—Appar, Sundarar and Sambandar—Nammalvar’s soul-stirring Tamil poetry had a deep impact on the South Indian Pallava kings. At a time when Buddhism and Jainism played a major role in society and threatened to displace Hinduism, these saints inspired royalty and common people alike to hold firmly to the Hindu path and tradition.

#### Divya Desam

To the Alvars, the Lord is not a mere idea but a concrete presence. Through their magnificent hymns in the *Divya Prabandham*, the saints sang about Lord Vishnu presiding in 108 temples. Each of these temples is celebrated as a Divya Desam, “divine precinct,” and together form a map of sacred geography and pilgrimage for the Sri Vaishnava community. India is home to 105 of these sanctuaries, spread across Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. One Divya Desam is in Nepal, and two are in celestial realms—Thiruparkadal (ocean of milk upon which Vishnu reclines), and Paramapadam (Vishnu’s heavenly abode, Vaikuntha).

#### Inspired by Andal

“Andal offers a garland after trying it on herself, showing us that the Lord accepts what is offered with pure, unadulterated love. On a deeper level, there is an Andal in every young girl who dreams of a life partner worthy of worship, love and respect. A dancer can easily tap into that sentiment when we depict *Tiruppavai* and *Varanam Ayiram*.”

SHOBHA SUBRAMANIAN, BHARATANATYAM DANCER & JAYAMANGALA DANCE DIRECTOR, MARYLAND, USA

#### Did You Know?

The beautiful Srirangam Temple, glorified in the *Divya Prabandham*, is the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world, drawing a million devotees during the annual 21-day Markali festival in December–January. Tiruvankata Divya Desam, one of the two kshetrams in Andhra Pradesh, is a cluster of three temples, one of which is the hugely celebrated Tirumala Venkateswara Temple at Tirupati. The term *Sri Vaishnava* can be found in 10th-century inscriptions in this temple.

#### LEARN MORE

- **Visit** the 105 Divya Desams in India, and one in Nepal
- **Listen** to the *Divya Prabandham* on YouTube or in Vishnu temples
- **Read** Vasudha Narayanan’s *Weaving Garlands in Tamil: The Poetry of the Alvars*

## The Alvars: Tamil Nadu, ca 500–900

As torchbearers of the Sri Vaishnava tradition of South India from the sixth through ninth centuries, the 12 Alvars of Tamil Nadu spread the message of fervent love, devotion and spiritual surrender unto the Divine. *Alvar* means one who is “immersed deeply in” the love of God. These poet-saints, all great devotees of Maha Vishnu, came from diverse communities in the Tamil South. They traveled to temples far and wide, collectively composing 4,000 hymns (*pasurams*) in praise of Vishnu and Krishna. In the 10th century, theologian Nathamuni compiled their works as the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* (Divine Collection of 4,000 Hymns) and set them to music for singing in temples. The *Divya Prabandham* is hailed as the “*Vedas* of the Dravidians,” as they convey the message of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* in accessible Tamil. The Alvars propound a personal and emotional approach as they dote on and chide Perumal/Vishnu through their passionate bhakti poetry, which devotees memorize, recite, sing, listen and dance to. The songs of the *Prabandham* are regularly sung in South Indian Vishnu temples and homes, especially during festivals.

#### Avatars

Traditional accounts portray each Alvar as an incarnation of a divine aspect of the Supreme Maha Vishnu, as follows:

Poigai Alvar: Panchajanya (Vishnu’s conch)  
 Bhoothath Alvar: Kaumodaki (Vishnu’s mace)  
 Pey Alvar: Nandaka (Vishnu’s sword)  
 Thirumazhisai Alvar: Sudarshana Chakra (Vishnu’s discus)  
 Nammalvar: Vishvakshena (Vishnu’s army commander)

Madhurakavi Alvar: Vainathey (Vishnu’s eagle Garuda)  
 Kulasekhara Alvar: Kaustubha (Vishnu’s divine gem)  
 Periyalvar: Garuda (Vishnu’s vahana/vehicle)  
 Sri Andal: Bhudevi (Vishnu’s wife, Lakshmi)  
 Thondaradippodi Alvar: Vanamalai (Vishnu’s garland)  
 Thiruppan Alvar: Srivatsa (auspicious mark on Vishnu’s chest)  
 Thirumangai Alvar: Saranga (Vishnu’s bow)

Poigai Alvar, Bhoothath Alvar, and Pey Alvar, three contemporaries, are considered the Mudal Alvars (first Alvars). Here we feature two other Alvars who were highly renowned.

#### Andal

Born in Srivilliputhur and brought up by Periyar (also an alvar), the maiden named Kothai maintained that she would marry only Lord Ranganatha of Thiruvarangam. Her devotion and surrender earned her the name *Andal*, the girl who “ruled” over the Lord. Her ardent wish was to merge with her divine beloved Perumal, which happened when she was only 15 years old. Andal, the only female poet-saint among the Alvars, composed the great *Thiruppavai* and *Nachiar Thirumozhi* as offerings to her darling Kannan (an endearing name of Ranganatha). These hymns are recited whenever bhaktas celebrate her inspiring devotional legacy, especially during the annual Markali festival.

#### Nammalvar

Nammalvar (“our Alvar”) is one of the most famous and prolific of the group. His poetry contributed greatly to philosophy and theology of Tamil Vaishnavism. Along with the hymns of the Saiva



TEMPLE PAGES.COM

## Alvar Pasurams

TRANSLATED BY VASUDHA NARAYANAN

#### By Poigai Alvar

With the earth as the lamp, the sweeping oceans as the ghee,  
 and the sun with its fiery rays as the flame,  
 I have woven a garland of words for the feet of the Lord  
 who bears the red flaming wheel, so I can cross the ocean of grief.

#### By Nammalvar

O wondrous one who was born!  
 O wondrous one who fought the Bharata war!  
 Great one who became all things,  
 starting with primal elements:  
 wind, fire, water, sky and earth.  
 Great one, wondrous one, you are in all things,  
 as butter lies hidden in fresh milk; you stand in all things  
 and yet transcend them. Where can I see you?

#### By Andal

A prankster who knows no dharma,  
 He whose eyebrows arch  
 like the bow Saranga in his hand,  
 handsome one without equal,  
 have you seen him? He whose form is dark,  
 whose face glows bright like the sun that fans  
 on the peaks of the rising hills,  
 we have seen him here, in Vrindavanam.

#### By Periyalvar

Like the king of the serpents opening his many hoods  
 and supporting the vast worlds on it,  
 The five fingers of Damodara’s hand opened  
 like the petals of a flower and held aloft Govardhana.  
 This is the hill where the monkeys carry their babies  
 and sing in praise of Hanuman,  
 who caused such havoc in Lanka,  
 and lull their little ones to sleep.





## The Nalvars: Tamil Nadu, ca 600–900

During the 6th through 9th centuries, South India was home to 63 fervent devotees of Lord Siva who became known as the Nayanars (or Nayanars). Several among these pious souls, coming from all segments of society—potter, fisherman, farmer, merchant, priest, hunter, washerman—composed devotional hymns that are sung to this day by devotees worldwide. A festival dedicated to the 63 Nayanmars, the Arupathu Moovar Thiruvila, is held annually at Kapaleswarar Temple in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Three of the most prominent Nayanars—Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar (composers of Thevaram hymns)—along with Manikkavasagar are called the Samayacharyas (teachers of the faith) referred to in Tamil as Nalvar, “The Four.” They promoted Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and culture, countering the incursion of Jainism and Buddhism. They taught that Siva is Love and that love (for all beings—indeed, for all existence) is the key to reaching Siva, the Supreme Being.

### Sambandar

Thirugnana Sambandar was born to a pious Brahmin couple in Sirkali in the 7th century after the father had prayed to Lord Siva for a worthy son who would reestablish the glory of Saivism. When he was three, his parents took him to Sattainathar Siva Temple and told him to wait near the pond. Soon the child started crying, and Goddess Parvati, along with Lord Siva as Thoniappar, came to console and nurse him. When the parents returned, they saw milk on his mouth and asked who had fed him. Sambandar pointed heavenward, spontaneously singing his first hymn about Siva, “Thodudaiya Seviyan.” The milk is regarded as Sivajnanam, milk of divine wisdom or knowledge of Siva, and the child became known as Thirugnana Sambandar

(the saint related to God by knowledge), and as Aludaiya Pillayar (the Lord’s child).

Sambandar is glorified in the *Periappuranam* as Tala Vendan, the unparalleled king of rhythm. The prodigy starting singing about the Vedas at age seven, eventually composing a body of hymns that comprise volumes 1–3 of the *Thirumurai*, the 12-volume compendium of hymns and writings by South Indian Saivite saints. In his short life Sambandar bested Jain monks in debate and brought the hunchbacked king Koon Pandyan (later Sundara Pandyan) back into the Saivite tradition.

When a wedding was arranged for him at age 16, Sambandar sang to Siva seeking liberation. Legend tells us that there appeared a great blaze of light—Siva Jyoti, the light of Siva. Then, as Sambandar composed the “Panchakshara Padigam,” everyone present attained union with Lord Siva, the source and final destination of all.

### Thirunavukkarasar, or Appar

The 7th-century poet-saint Thirunavukkarasar pilgrimaged on foot to at least 125 Tamil Nadu temples, humbly sweeping the temple paths, worshiping and composing hymns praising Siva. When he met child-saint Sambandar, he prostrated at the boy’s feet. Sambandar reciprocated and respectfully addressed him as Appar (father), the name by which he is commonly known.

Born as Marunekkkiyar in a Vellalar family of Saivites in Tiruvamur village, the saint lost his parents as a child and was mothered by his sister Tilakavathiyar. The transience of life stimulated in him a yearning for everlasting truth. He joined a Jain monastery, and his sister prayed to Siva to bring him back to Saivism. The boy fell severely ill

**Samayacharyar:** The four Saiva saints encircle God Siva, offering their Tamil songs in worship; (right) the golden roof of Chidambaram Temple’s central sanctum in Tamil Nadu.

and returned home. Brother and sister prayed at Thiruvadigai Temple, and Marunekkkiyar was cured. Becoming a fervent Siva devotee, he composed many Siva hymns (*Thirumurai* volumes 4–6) and was named Thirunavukkarasar, “king of divine speech.” At 81, Appar attained mukti at Agnipureswarar Siva Temple in Thirupugalur.

### Sundarar

Sundaramurti Nayanar, uniquely, was born to parents who are also Nayanars, around 800ce. His hymns comprise the seventh *Thirumurai* volume. When he was about to get married, an old ascetic covered in sacred ash and rudraksha beads interrupted the wedding, claiming that Sundarar was his slave, citing a palm-leaf manuscript. Sundarar called him a *pitthan* (lunatic).

But the palm leaf proved valid, and Sundarar followed the man to the Thiruvonnainallur Siva temple, where the ascetic disappeared into the sanctum. Lord Siva asked Sundarar to compose a hymn with the word *pitthan* per his initial address. Sundarar sang this first hymn, “Pittha pirai choodi” (O crazy one wearing the crescent moon), venerating the Lord at Tiru Arul Turai Temple (today’s Kripapureswarar Perumal Temple), one of 82 Siva temples he visited in his life. Sundarar lived only 18 years but became one of the foremost saints of Tamil Saiva poetry.

### Manikkavasagar

Manikkavasagar was born as Vadavurar in a Saivite priest family in 9th-century Thiruvadavur, near Madurai, and rose to become prime minister to the Pandyan king. According to later accounts, one day the king gave him a large sum of money to purchase war horses. On the way, the minister was drawn to an ascetic (who was in fact Lord Siva) sitting with disciples under a tree. Vadavurar, taking the sage as his guru, sat at his feet in meditation and received enlightenment. Totally forgetting the king’s assignment, he renounced the world and used the royal funds to build the Athmanathaswami Temple (Avudaiyarkoil).

The hymns of Manikkavasagar (“he of ruby-like utterances”), comprising *Thirumurai* volume 8, express his aspirations, trials and yogic realizations, praise the Namasivaya mantra, and stress cultivating love for Siva. The king, too, was blessed by Lord Siva and gave up his throne to pursue spiritual life. Sculptures illustrating the poet-saint’s life can be found in the Madurai Meenakshi Sundaresvara Temple and in the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple, where he spent his final days.

### LEARN MORE

- **Read** *Sixty-Three Nayanar Saints* by Swami Sivananda
- **Listen** to Tevaram
- **Visit** the Padal Petra Sthalams in South India, 275 temples revered in *Tevaram*



## Nalvar’s Padiqams

### By Appar

Wherever His devotees are born, into whatever form or birth, to bless them with His grace in that very form is the nature of Shankara, my bull-riding Lord with body bright as the white conch, who lives in Piramapuram, cool with groves of fragrant flowers.

He is drum and drumbeat, the measure of all speech.  
The ash-smeared God, the supreme Light,  
destroyer of our sin, is our one path to release.  
The Lord who kicked at terrible Death  
firmly eludes evil men—they can’t see Him.  
My Father in Karukavur is my eye.

### By Sundarar

You have many temples. Honoring them, singing their praise,  
I have been cured of confusion and karma,  
O master of the path that the Gods do not know!  
O Lord, you sat under the spreading banyan tree  
and taught the sacred law at the beautiful temple,  
the auspicious temple, the Alakkoyil temple  
in the northern part of cool Punkachur town!

TRANSLATED BY INDIRA VISWANATHAN PETERSON

### By Manikkavasagar

Spheres of heavens pervading the cosmos,  
Limitless, uberous and in multitudinous forms,  
Excelling each other in beauty and comeliness,  
Exceeding in number a thousand million...  
The Primordial One transcending words and meaning,  
The One whom the thoughts fail to reach,  
The One whom the net of devotion can catch,  
The One, indeed the only One,  
Expands He as the expanding magnificence of all existence.  
Indwells He as the infinitely small essence of the atom.

BY JATAAYU, SWARAJYAMAG.COM  
BASED ON THE TRANSLATION BY DR. TN RAMACHANDRAN





## Karaikkal Ammaiyar: Tamil Nadu, ca 500

Hailing from the coastal town of Karaikkal in present-day Tamil Nadu, Karaikkal Ammaiyar (the “revered mother of Karaikkal”) is one of the most renowned female devotees of Lord Siva. She lived around the 6th century and was a significant contributor to early Tamil bhakti literature during the “Saiva Age” (ca 5th–13th century), when the worship of Lord Siva was predominant across India. Karaikkal Ammaiyar is known as the first Siva-bhakti poet-saint in Tamil language literature, and one of only three female Nayanars, along with Isaijnaniyar and Mangayarkarasiyar. Karaikkal Ammaiyar was born as Punitavati, “the pure one,” in a prosperous merchant family in the Nattukottai Chettiar community. The little girl was profoundly devoted to Lord Siva. As soon as she came of age, beautiful Punitavati was married to Paramadattan, a wealthy merchant.

### Punitavati Becomes Karaikkal Ammaiyar

Punitavati and Paramadattan were a happily married couple. One day Paramadattan sent home two mangoes from work, which his wife saved for him. That same day, a holy man visited her house seeking alms. With nothing else to offer, she gave him one mango with cooked rice. The Siva devotee ate the food, blessed her and left. When Paramadattan returned home, Punitavati served him the remaining mango. Enjoying the fruit, he asked for the second. Punitavati was in a fix; she did not want to tell her husband she had given the mango away. Eyes closed, palms open in prayer, she prayed to Lord Siva. Miraculously, a mango appeared in her hands! She thanked the Lord and joyfully took the mango to her husband. Tasting the fruit, however, he noticed a difference. When he probed further, Punitavati told him that mango was from Lord Siva. Paramadattan was incredulous and

challenged her to get one more mango from the Lord. Due to her unshakable faith and prayers, Siva materialized another mango in her hands, but when Paramadattan reached for it, the fruit disappeared. This moment changed Punitavati’s life, laying the bricks for her transformation into the poet-saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar. Paramadattan left his wife and the town, and eventually remarried. Many years later, he returned with his new wife and daughter (whom they had named Punitavati) to seek the blessings of Karaikkal Ammaiyar, whom he now considered a goddess.

Realizing that her young, beautiful form would only be a source of unwanted complications in her life, she prayed to Siva to grant her the appearance of a *pey*, meaning ghoul in Tamil. Lord Siva granted her wish by freeing her from all worldly hindrances, and the transformed Ammaiyar spontaneously sang the “Arputat Tiruvantati,” her longest devotional work. From then on, Karaikkal Ammaiyar became known as Peyar, as she assumed the form of an emaciated old woman.

The transformed bhaktar went on pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, Siva and Parvati’s sacred abode in the Himalayas. Considering it a sin to place her feet on the blessed mountain, she made the journey on her hands. As described in Karen Pechilis’ work, Karaikkal Ammaiyar beseeched the Lord: “May those who desire you with undying joyful love not be reborn; if I am born again, may I never forget you; may I sit at your feet, happily singing while you, virtue itself, dance.” Lord Siva told her to visit Thiruvallangadu, where she would witness His cosmic dance.

### Mystic Poetry

Karaikkal Ammaiyar devoted her life to singing hymns in praise of

**Cymbals of love:** Karaikkal Ammaiyar sings to her dancing Lord Nataraja, as two ripe mangos hint at her early life; (right) the Karaikkal Ammaiyar Temple in Karaikkal town, built to honor the Goddess Punitavati.

Siva, though her biographical story might be even more popularly known than her poetic contributions. We know of four devotional works that Ammaiyar composed, a total of 143 verses, through which she invented certain Tamil poetic forms, including the antati genre, in which the last word of every verse is the same as the first word of the following verse of the poem.

Themes in Ammaiyar’s poetry include Siva as the heroic ideal, His majestic cosmic dance as Nataraja, Ammaiyar’s servitude, ridiculing those who don’t see Siva as the ultimate goal, and the spiritual significance of the cremation ground. Ammaiyar urges us to constantly meditate on Lord Siva rather than focusing on rituals. She signed some of her poems as “Karaikkal-pey,” as per the form that she requested Siva to bless her with.

Her eloquent poetry, at times filled with imagery of death and decay, demonstrates the path of devotional love that leads a human being to liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

During the Chola rule in the 12th century, around 600 years after Ammaiyar’s time, her biography was included in the *Periyapurānam* (“great narrative”) of court poet Sekkilar, with 4,253 verses in Tamil describing the lives of the 63 Nayanmars. This work, also known as the *Thiruthondar Purānam*, is one of the popular texts of the Saiva canon. In art, Ammaiyar is often depicted as an old woman, cymbals in hand and with a joyful smile expressive of her oneness with Siva. Sculptures of this extraordinary poet-saint, some created during the Chola period, can be viewed in museums around the world.

The temple most closely associated with the life of Karaikkal Ammaiyar is the Sri Vadaranyeswarar Temple in Thiruvallangadu, one of the five renowned Nataraja temples, where Lord Siva performs the Cosmic Dance (Siva tandava). Here Karaikkal Ammaiyar settled down with Siva’s guidance, composed hymns, watched Lord Siva dance into eternity and ultimately attained spiritual liberation (*mukti*). Her saint-day is celebrated here each year.

In 1929, the Karaikal Ammaiyar Temple was constructed by Malaiperumal Pillai in the center of Karaikkal, the birthplace of the poet-saint. The main Goddess here is Punitavati—Karaikkal Ammaiyar herself. The annual mango festival, called the Mangani Tirunal festival, is celebrated to commemorate the great mango legend associated with the saint.

### LEARN MORE

- **Visit** Sri Vadaranyeswarar Temple & Karaikal Ammaiyar Temple in Tamil Nadu, India
- **Read** *Interpreting Devotion*, by Karen Pechilis
- **Watch** “Karaikkal Ammaiyar” Tamil film (1973)



## Karaikkal Ammaiyar’s Poetry

TRANSLATED BY ELAINE CRADDOCK

Look!

Having become a slave to the beautiful feet of the One whose red matted hair has the waves of Ganga, We have realized Him through scriptures, We have become suitable for this life and for the other world. Why do others gossip about us behind our backs? Understand us. (*Arputatiruvantati*, 91)

I thought of only One.

I was focused on only One.

I kept only One inside my heart.

Look at this One!

It is He who has Ganga on His head,

A moonbeam in His hair,

A radiant flame in His beautiful hand.

I have become His slave. (*Arputatiruvantati*, 11)

My heart!

Give up your bondage, your wife and children.

Saying that you take refuge here at His feet,

Think of Him and worship. (*Tiruvirattai Manimalai*, 13)

Not following a false path ruled by the five senses, We have achieved merits, Because of the Lord’s love for His slaves. (*Tiruvirattai Manimalai*, 16)

He is the one who knows.

He is the one who makes us know.

He is the one who knows, because He is knowledge itself.

He is the truth that is to be known.

He is the sun and moon, the earth, sky,

And all the other elements. (*Arputatiruvantati*, 20)





## Akka Mahadevi: Karnataka, c.1130–1160

A fervent devotee of Lord Siva, Akka Mahadevi was a poet-saint in the Virasaiva tradition, a Saivite Hindu religious movement that became popular in 12th-century South India. The prefix *Akka* is an honorific meaning “elder sister,” which Mahadevi earned as the archetypal sister in the Kannada-language bhakti tradition.

Kannada is a Dravidian language largely spoken in Karnataka, and globally in the Indian diaspora. It has a long and rich literary tradition, to which Akka Mahadevi contributed immensely, composing hundreds of poems (300 still known) as offerings to God. Each poem in this genre is known as a *vachana*, meaning “saying” or “utterance.” The form is free-verse lyrics, usually produced as couplets in six to twelve lines. *Vachanas* carry a rhythmic structure not through sound, as is the case in most poetry, but through semantics and sentence patterns. *Vachanas* are so profound and experientially rich that they are revered as Kannada-language *Upanishads*. Two short compositions by Mahadevi, *Mantragopya* and *Yogangatrividhi*, are considered her finest contributions. Her spiritual brothers in the famed assembly of Kannada poets were Dasimayya, Basavanna and Allama Prabhu.

Akka Mahadevi’s *vachanas* are “highly personal, highly poetical, imaginative expressions of mystical experiences and spiritual insights, in which mystical bridal imagery abounds,” says Dutch-Canadian scholar Robert Zydenbos. As present-day seekers, we meet Mahadevi Akka through her *vachanas*, in which she demonstrates the various *sthalas*, or stages of spiritual development, and exemplifies three forms of love commonly found in Sanskrit poetry: love forbidden, love in separation, and love in union. A strong bhakta and leader of the Virasaiva movement in her time, Akka Mahadevi is a feminist icon for social activism even today.

### Mahadevi’s Legendary Life

Mahadevi was born in Udatadi village, around 1130, in the Shimoga district of Karnataka. Initiated into Saivite tradition at age ten, she thereafter considered herself to be truly born. As she grew into a beautiful maiden, some thought of her as Rudrakannike, a Goddess born on Earth with a spiritual purpose. Even as a child, Mahadevi was captivated by Lord Siva as Chennamallikarjuna, “beautiful Lord, as white as jasmine,” the main Deity in her village temple. The name *Chennamallikarjuna* appears in all of her poems, both as a signature (*ankita*) and an invocation of Siva.

Like Andal in South India and Mirabai in the North, Mahadevi considered none other than the Lord Himself as her life partner. One day a king named Kaushika saw Mahadevi and fell in love with her. When he approached her parents to request her hand in marriage, Mahadevi protested. Not only was he no comparison to Chennamallikarjuna, but he didn’t even believe in the existence of God. By the prevailing account, as fate would have it, Kaushika persuaded Mahadevi’s parents and took the maiden as his bride. Chandra Mudaliar writes that one of her poems includes three conditions for her marriage, including that she be free to spend her time in devotion, or in conversation with other saints (*Religious Experiences of Hindu Women: A Study of Akka Mahadevi*). By other accounts, she never married Kaushika, or they did marry but never actually lived together.

Kaushika was a materialistic man who gave prime importance to sense pleasures, while Mahadevi had transcended worldly existence and was fully absorbed in her devotion to the Lovely Lord White as Jasmine. Not surprisingly, Akka Mahadevi’s *vachanas* address these conflicts and portray her yearning for her beloved and only legitimate

**Dressed in tresses:** Following the Virasaiva tradition, Mahadevi holds a Siva Lingam in one hand and offers flowers to it with the other; (right) a shrine to the saint at the Akka Mahadevi Caves in Srisailem.

husband, Chennamallikarjuna.

Over time, Kaushika exerted his will on her so strongly that she decided to preserve her dignity by leaving him for good. Legend tells us that she abandoned her birthplace, parents, and even clothing, as the ultimate act of social defiance. She became a wandering renunciate, covered only in her tresses, searching for Chennamallikarjuna and the company of His devotees.

She ultimately reached Kalyana in northern Karnataka, the epicenter of Virasaiva bhakti, where she met poet-saints Allama Prabhu and Basavanna. That is when the famous conversation between Allama and Mahadevi took place, a guru-disciple dialogue of sorts, during which

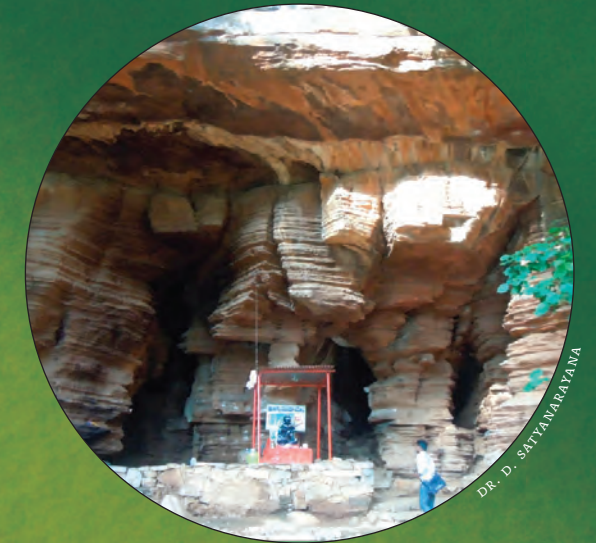
Allama asked her about the identity of her husband, to which she replied that she was married forever to Chennamallikarjuna. He then asked her the obvious question (from *Speaking of Siva*, A.K. Ramanujan): “Why take off clothes, as if by that gesture you could peel off illusions? And yet robe yourself in tresses of hair? If so free and pure in heart, why replace a sari with a covering of tresses?” Her reply is boldly honest: “Till the fruit is ripe inside, the skin will not fall off. I’d a feeling it would hurt you if I displayed the body’s seals of love. O brother, don’t tease me needlessly. I’m given entire into the hands of my lord white as jasmine.” Her answer was so profound that she was thereafter accepted into the company of the Virasaiva saints.

Akka Mahadevi spent time in the town of Kalyana at the Anubhava Mantapa, a famed Virasaiva forum for spiritual discussion, then continued her wild, God-intoxicated pilgrimage. She eventually reached the holy Srisailem mountains, in present-day Andhra Pradesh, where she found Lord Mallikarjuna and became lost in Him. She was hardly in her twenties when she walked into the Kadali forests and gave up her body into oneness with Siva.

A *vachana* attributed to Akka Mahadevi suggests that towards the end of her life, King Kaushika visited her in the forest and sought her forgiveness.

### LEARN MORE

- **Enjoy** *Speaking of Siva*, by A.K. Ramanujan
- **Read** *Mahadeviyakka*, Oxford Bibliographies by Robert Zydenbos
- **Read** “Akka Mahadevi in Hinduism and Tribal Religions,” *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions* by Sushumna Kannan
- **Visit** the Akka Mahadevi Caves in Srisailem, Andhra Pradesh, India



## Akka Mahadevi’s Vachanas

TRANSLATED BY A.K. RAMANUJAN, *SPEAKING OF SIVA*

Like...

treasure hidden in the ground  
taste in the fruit  
gold in the rock  
oil in the seed,  
the Absolute, hidden away  
in the heart  
no one can know  
the ways of our lord  
white as jasmine.

You are the forest  
you are all the great trees  
in the forest  
you are bird and beast  
playing in and out  
of all the trees

O lord white as jasmine  
filling and filled by all,  
why don’t you  
show me your face?

\*\*\*

Four parts of the day  
I grieve for you.  
Four parts of the night  
I’m mad for you.

I lie lost,  
sick for you, night and day,  
O lord white as jasmine.

\*\*\*

For hunger,  
there is the town’s rice in the  
begging bowl.  
For thirst,  
there are tanks, streams, wells.  
For sleep,  
there are the ruins of temples.  
For soul’s company,  
I have you, O lord  
white as jasmine.

\*\*\*

I love the Handsome One:  
He has no death  
decay nor form  
no place or side  
no end nor birthmarks.  
I love him O mother. Listen.

I love the Beautiful One  
with no bond nor fear,  
no clan, no land, no  
landmarks  
for his beauty.  
  
So my lord, white as jasmine,  
is my husband.  
Take these husbands who die,  
decay, and feed them  
to your kitchen fires!





## Basavanna: Karnataka, 1106–1167

**B**asava means “bull” in Kannada. The name well suits this reformer, political activist, philosopher and poet-saint who embodied the spirit of Siva’s divine bull, Nandi, as he boldly spread social awareness through his powerful *vachana* verses. A 12th-century saint from Manigavalli, Basavanna (the suffix *anna* means “elder brother”) lived in Karnataka during the reign of the Kalachuri king Bijjala I. Learned in the traditional Sanskrit classics, an ardent Saivite, he devoted his life to serving the Lord.

Basavanna lost his parents in childhood and grew up under the care of a grandmother and foster-parents, Madiraja and Madambike, a brahmin couple of Bagevadi village. Early in life, he rebelled against the strictures of caste, orthodoxy and ritual, renouncing it all by the age of 16 when he decided to spend his life worshipping and serving Siva. His 15th-century poet-biographer, Harihara, wrote, “Love of Siva cannot live with ritual.’ So saying, he tore off his sacred thread which bound him like a past-life’s deeds... and left the shade of his home, disregarded wealth and propriety, thought nothing of relatives. Asking no one in town, he left Bagevadi, raging for the Lord’s love, eastwards... and entered Kappadisangama, where three rivers meet” (from *Speaking of Siva*, by A.K. Ramanujan). There, Basavanna sang to and about his chosen form of God, Siva as Kudalasangamadeva, Lord of the Meeting Rivers. This name appears as a signature in all of Basavanna’s poetry.

In Kudalasangama, Basavanna met his guru, Ishanya Guru, a Saivite brahmin of the Kalamukha sect, and spent several years studying with him. One night, as legend has it, Basavanna had a dream-vision in which Lord Siva directed him to leave Kudalasangama and go to Mangajavada, where King Bijjala I reigned. In the dream Basavanna

protested. Soon thereafter a small Sivalinga manifested for him in the mouth of the temple Nandi. Reassured of Siva’s intent by this miraculous omen, Basavanna set out for Mangajavada. He visited Kalyana, where he married his cousin Gangambike and her close friend Nilambike. Gangambike was the daughter of his uncle Baladeva, a minister of King Bijjala I. Basavanna soon became the king’s trusted friend; and when Baladeva died, the king made Basavanna his new finance minister.

In Mangajavada, Basavanna eagerly began implementing the social ideals instilled in him by Ishanya Guru, spreading the message of a new, visionary religious society. He utilized state funds to undertake social reforms, and also to serve and empower wandering Virasaiva ascetics, or *jangamas*. At age 48 he moved with King Bijjala to Kalyana, where, joined by Allama Prabhu, his fame continued to grow for the next fourteen years.

In Kalyana, Basavanna set up innovative public institutions such as the Anubhava Mantapa, where male and female devotees from all socio-economic backgrounds were welcomed to discuss spirituality, as well as economic and social issues. Many Virasaiva saints gathered in this famed “Hall of Experience,” including Allama Prabhu and Mahadevi Akka. All of this led to a renaissance of Siva worship, and gave rise to a new form of Virasaivism called Lingayatism. Here Basavanna lived and preached for twenty years, developing a large Saivite movement. “A new community with egalitarian ideals disregarding caste, class and sex grew in Kalyana, challenging orthodoxy, rejecting social convention and religious ritual. A political crisis was at hand” (*Speaking of Siva*).

Eventually, the king, persuaded by gossip about his minister, moved

**In the palm of his hand:** *In the radiance of Siva’s light-filled grace, Basavanna is blessed to receive the small Sivalingam from Nandi; (right) the Sri Basaveshwara Temple, built by the ruler of Chalukya dynasty in the 11th century to honor the saint.*

to curb the rise of the movement. Traditionalists in the caste-oriented larger society were outraged when, in 1167, a wedding took place between two devotees of different castes (brahmin and shudra), though both had renounced caste in joining the casteless Virasaiva community. King Bijjala sentenced the fathers of the bride and bridegroom to death. “Meanwhile, extremist youths were out for revenge; they stabbed Bijjala and assassinated him. In the riots and persecution that followed, Virasaivas were scattered in all directions. But in the brief period, probably the span of one generation, Basavanna had helped create a new community.”

(*Speaking of Siva*). Basavanna, who was committed to nonviolence but unable to restrain the extremists, left Kalyana and returned to Kudalasangama, where he became one with the Divine soon thereafter at the age of 62.

Basavanna wanted to inspire all people—both the lettered and unlettered, regardless of caste, class or gender—with his teachings on the path to Siva. His teachings were embodied in simple *vachana* verses, written in praise of Lord Siva in the common Kannada language. In his verses he repudiated social discrimination, superstitions, rituals and traditions, such as wearing the sacred thread. Rejecting temple rites led by brahmins, he advocated personal, direct worship of Siva, introducing the Ishtalinga necklace encasing a Sivalinga to serve as a reminder of one’s devotion to Siva and the Lord’s constant presence. Lingayat devotees faithfully perform puja to their personal Lingam every day while holding it in the palm of the left hand. Basavanna suggested treating one’s own body and soul as a temple of Siva. His verses, such as “Kayakave Kailasa” (referring to “work is worship”), remain enormously popular. As a key figure, Basavanna contributed greatly to Virasaiva devotional history, religion and contemporary politics. Several statues of the saint have been erected; the most prominent, at Basavakalyana (formerly Kalyana; renamed after the saint), is 108 feet tall.

### Did you know?

Virasaivites, “ardent Siva worshipers,” consider Kudalasangama a key pilgrimage site. Poet-saint Basavanna’s Aikya Mantapa (holy samadhi) as well as the Swayambhu (self-manifested) Lingam can be found here.

### LEARN MORE .....

- **Read** *Speaking of Siva* by A.K. Ramanujan
- **Visit** Kudalasangama, Karnataka, India



## Basavanna’s Vachanas

TRANSLATION BY A.K. RAMANUJAN, *SPEAKING OF SIVA*

When, like a hailstone crystal,  
like a waxwork image,  
the flesh melts in pleasure,  
how can I tell you?

The waters of joy  
broke the banks  
and ran out of my eyes.

I touched and joined  
my Lord of the Meeting Rivers.  
How can I talk to anyone  
of that?

\*\*\*

The eating bowl is not one bronze  
and the looking glass another.

Bowl and mirror are one metal.  
Giving back light, one becomes a  
mirror.

Aware, one is the Lord’s;  
unaware, mere human.

Worship the Lord without  
forgetting, the Lord of the  
Meeting Rivers.

Milk is left over  
from the calves.

Water is left over  
from the fishes,  
flowers from the bees.

How can I worship you,  
O Siva, with such offal?

But it’s not for me  
to despise left-overs,  
so take what comes,  
Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

\*\*\*

The pot is a god.  
The winnowing fan is a god.  
The stone in the street is a god.  
The comb is a god.  
The bowstring is also a god.  
The bushel is a god  
and the spouted cup is a god.

Gods, gods, there are so many,  
there’s no place left for a foot.

There is only one God. He is our  
Lord of the Meeting Rivers.





BANNI SEKHON

## Kanakadasa: Karnataka, 1509–1609

One of India's famous bhaktas was the 16-century poet-saint Kanakadasa. He is known as a Haridasa, part of a devotional movement that originated in Karnataka and spread the teachings of Madhvacharya in that state and eastward into Bengal and Assam over a span of nearly six centuries. History counts ten or more Haridasa saints and mystics who helped shape the culture, philosophy and art of South India. Kanakadasa composed numerous works in easily understandable Kannada that are treasured in the Carnatic music tradition. He is best known for his characteristically bold kirtanas.

Named Thimmappa Nayaka at birth, he was the son of Biregowda and Beechamma of Bada village in Karnataka's Haveri district. Exemplary and well educated, Thimma became the village chieftain. Based on one of his compositions, it is interpreted that after he was severely injured in a war and miraculously saved, he renounced his warrior profession and devoted his life to composing music and literature to explain philosophy in the language of ordinary people. He became a devotee of Lord Krishna, worshipping the Lord as Adikeshava at a small shrine near his home. Surrendering his princely life, he moved to nearby Kaginele village. In time, he became a follower of the great Dvaita philosopher Vyasatirtha from the Madhva order of Udupi.

Vyasatirtha was the patron saint of the Vijayanagara empire and guru of the ruler, Krishna Deva Raya. He is famous for composing the popular Carnatic song "Krishna Ni Begane Baaro" in Yamuna Kalyani raga, which is still performed by classical musicians. It was Vyasatirtha who gave Thimmappa Nayaka the name Kanakadasa.

Udupi was one of the epicenters of Vaishnavism. One time when visiting his teacher, Kanakadasa went to the Udupi Sri Krishna

temple for worship. Despite Vyasatirtha's requests, he was not allowed entrance, as he belonged to a lower caste. With determined devotion, Kanakadasa sat outside fervently singing poems in praise of Lord Krishna. Suddenly, the outer wall of the temple cracked open and the installed murti of Krishna turned westward to face Kanakadasa—such that Kanakadasa could have darshan of the Lord! Stunned and overwhelmed, Kanakadasa offered heartfelt prayers to the Lord. To this day, there is a small window called Kanakana Kindi through which devotees come to get a glimpse of Lord Krishna, like Kanakadasa did, before entering the temple. This popular legend gets retold to attest that all people are equal in the eyes of God, and what counts most is the devotee's faith, surrender and purity of heart.

Vyasatirtha once questioned his students, asking who among those present could attain liberation. Kanakadasa responded in clever wording that none of them could do so. His fellow scholars were inflamed by his apparent arrogance, taking his words to mean that only he would be liberated—none other, not even his teacher! Vyasatirtha, however, understood Kanakadasa's intent. The phrase he used loosely translates to "I will go (to heaven) if my-self (selfishness) goes (away)." This contains a deep Vedantic truth: only one who has lost the "I" (ego) can attain liberation.

Kanakadasa composed many poems with powerful social messages, promoting the cause of equality for all. Today, musicians have access to around 240 of his songs (Kirtane, Ugabhogas, padas and mun-diges), in addition to his major works, such as *Haribhaktisara* (core of Krishna devotion), *Narisimhastava* (compositions in praise of Lord Narasimha), and *Ramadhanyacharite* (story of ragi millet). Kanakadasa's songs stress cultivating good moral values and devotion to

**Hymns to Him:** With the Tirupati Temple behind, Kanakadasa sings to Adikeshava, his chosen form of Lord Vishnu; (right) the Udupi Sri Krishna Temple.

the Supreme. His signature (ankita), appearing in the last verse of every composition, is *Adikeshava*, a remembrance and dedication to his favorite form of Vishnu.

Kanakadasa is believed to have spent his final days in Tirupati, the famed abode of Lord Venkateswara. In current times, Kanakadasa Jayanti, his birth anniversary, is honored as an official state holiday and is grandly celebrated by thousands in Bada village. A Sri Krishna temple there enshrines a murti of his family Deity, Adikeshava of Kaginele, as well as a bronze of

Kanakadasa. The Karnataka state government has created a magnificent Vijayanagara-style fort near Bada with a life-sized golden-colored statue of Kanakadasa as a warrior on horseback. Inside the fort is a majestic palace with a gigantic statue of the saint, as well as beautiful paintings and sculptures depicting episodes from his life and times.

Kanakadasa and the other Haridasas, including his famous contemporary Purandara Dasa, are a major influence on Kannada Vaishnava devotional literature to this day. Their unified voice powerfully promulgated the dvaita philosophy of Madhvacharya. Their philosophical, intuitive and experiential approach to the Divine was influenced by Virasaiva poet-saints of the region, such as Basavanna, Akka Mahadevi and Allama Prabhu, as well as by the Tamil Alvars.

### Testimony from a Devotee

"I've enjoyed singing his kritis at the Maryland Shiva Vishnu Temple's annual Haridasa Aradhana festival celebrating all the saints in the Haridasa movement. In Kanakadasa's compositions, he tries to change people's attitudes such that they treat everyone equally."

JAYA BALA, CARNATIC VOCALIST & INSTRUCTOR, SAN JOSE, USA

### LEARN MORE .....

- **Watch** "Bhakta Kanakadasa" film (1960)
- **Visit** Udupi Sri Krishna Temple and Kanakana Kindi (Kanak's Window)
- **Read** *Mystic Tradition in Religion and Art in Karnataka*, by M.V. Krishna Rao



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## Devaranamas of Kanakadasa

### Nee Mayeyolago

Are you a creature of illusion? Or is illusion your creation?  
Are you a part of the body? Or is the body a part of you?

Is space within the house? Or the house within space? Or are both space and house within the seeing eye? Is the eye within the mind? Or the mind within the eye? Or are both the eye and mind within you?

Does sweetness lie in sugar, or sugar in sweetness?  
Or do both sweetness and sugar lie in the tongue?  
Is the tongue within the mind? Or the mind within the tongue?  
Or are both the tongue and mind within you?

Does fragrance lie in the flower? Or the flower in fragrance? Or do both the flower and fragrance lie in the nostrils? I cannot say, O Lord Adikeshava of Kaginele! O peerless one, are all things within you alone?

TRANSLATION: [HTTP://BIT.LY/KANAKADASANEE](http://bit.ly/kanakadasanee)

### Tallanisadiru Kandya

Fret not, O mind! Be patient.  
He will protect everyone; there is no doubt about it.

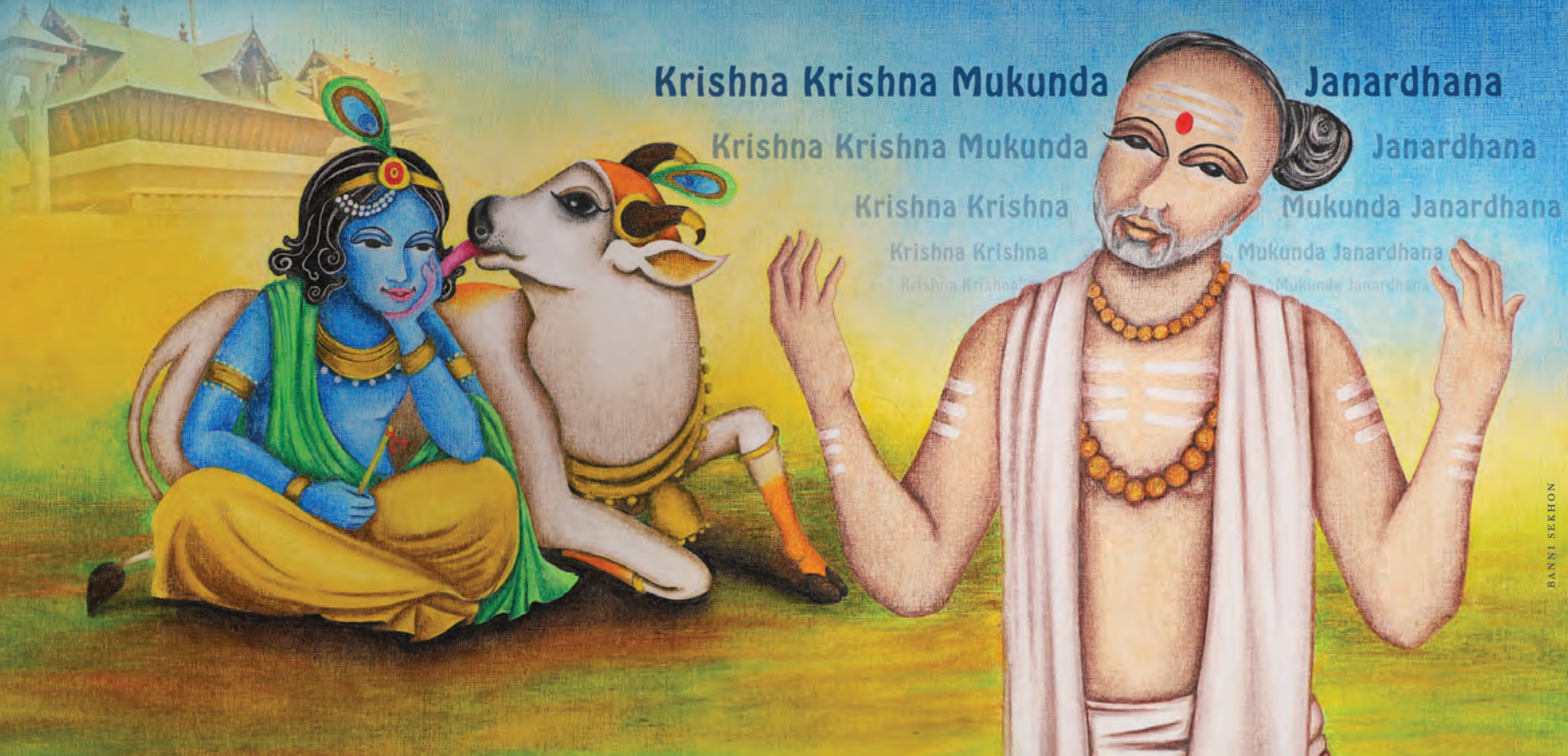
Who was it that tended and watered the tree that grew on a hilltop?  
As He is responsible for your existence,  
He will certainly look after you; have no misgiving.

Who was it that fed the animals and birds that roam in the forest?  
Just like your own mother, He will take the onus to care for you without fail.

Who nourished the worms and insects that were born on a stone?  
The lotus-eyed Adikeshava of Kaginele  
will protect everyone; there is no doubt about it.

TRANSLATION: CHAKRAVARTHI MADHUSUDANA  
[HTTP://BIT.LY/KANAKADASA](http://bit.ly/kanakadasa)





## Poonthanam: Kerala, 1547–1640

A sacred place is made famous by saintly people who have resided in and propitiated the Deity of that region through their sadhanas and devotional works. Their spiritual example travels far and wide. Guruvayur, the town of the Deity Guruvayurappan, is such a holy place. It is a famous pilgrimage center in Kerala's Thrissur district, drawing thousands of devotees and revered as Bhuloka Vaikuntha (Lord Vishnu's earthly abode). Among the many noble souls associated with Guruvayur Temple, where Lord Krishna is worshiped as a little boy, is poet-saint Poonthanam of the 16th century.

Poonthanam was a devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan from childhood. Marrying at age 20, he and his wife were childless for a long time. They sought the grace of Lord Guruvayurappan by reciting "Santhana Gopalam" (a series of mantras traditionally chanted 108 times for 108 consecutive days, while visualizing the baby Krishna). In time a son was born to them in 1586. The overjoyed couple arranged for a grand celebration and invited everyone they knew. But alas, the child tragically died an hour before the ceremony. Shocked and filled with sorrow, Poonthanam sought refuge at Guruvayur Temple. According to legend, he was consoled by Lord Guruvayurappan, who lay in his lap for a moment as baby Krishna. Poonthanam writes in his magnum opus, *Jnanappana*, "When the divine child Krishna dances in our hearts, is there any need to have little ones of our own?" Thereafter Poonthanam thought of Guruvayurappan as his own child and spent his days in the temple expounding the Lord's glories.

### Bhakti or Vibhakti: Devotion or Scholarship?

One day, Poonthanam went to meet the respected Narayana Bhattathiri, a celebrated devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. Bhattathiri was

a prolific Sanskrit scholar and author of *Narayaniyam*, a condensed version of *Bhagavata Purana*. Poonthanam took with him some of his own devotional poetry, written in Malayalam, with the hope that the scholar would read and comment on it. Seeing that the work was in the local dialect and not in Sanskrit, Bhattathiri trivialized Poonthanam's request and refused to read the proffered poems. Poonthanam left with a heavy heart. In those times, Malayalam was considered inferior to Sanskrit.

That night, Lord Guruvayurappan, touched by Poonthanam's humility and devotion, appeared in Narayana Bhattathiri's dreams and declared, "I prefer Poonthanam's genuine bhakti to your *vibhakti* (alluding to scholarship)." The next morning, Bhattathiri, chagrined by his pompous blunder, rushed to Poonthanam and sought his forgiveness.

### The *Jnanappana*, "Song of Divine Wisdom"

Employing simple Malayalam, Poonthanam composed many works in praise of Lord Guruvayurappan, such as the *Sri Krishna Karnamrtam*, *Santanagopalam Pana* and *Anandakarnamritam*. Of all his works, his 360-line *Jnanappana* is considered his masterpiece. *Jnana* means wisdom, and *pāna* refers to a style of folk poem or song meter typical of Malayalam poetry. It is admired for its poetic finesse in expressing deep philosophical and devotional messages, while being linguistically accessible to all. *Jnanappana* is revered as the *Bhagavad Gita* of Malayalam. It's said it was composed with the help of Lord Krishna Himself, to embody the essence of the *Bhagavatam*, the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*.

Through his poems, Poonthanam provides ways to make the

**Krishna's songster:** With the Guruvayur Temple behind Him, young Krishna listens as Poonthanam offers his poetic praises; (right) the Guruvayur Krishna Temple, famed for its annual elephant parade.

transient human life meaningful, by elucidating metaphysical truths about the soul's nature and existence. He encourages all to strive towards liberation (mukti), and points out that bhakti is the easiest way to attain union with God in the Kali Yuga.

### The Power of Namasmaranam

Glorifying the names of God is a common practice in many world religions, including Sanatana Dharma. Poonthanam emphasized the power of Namasmaranam (remembrance and repetition of God's names) throughout his works, as did countless other saints and mystics in the Hindu tradition, from Draupadi and Prahlada, to Mirabai and Thyagaraja. In the *Jnanappana*, the following verse comprising names of Lord Krishna appears

repeatedly. It is traditionally sung as a refrain after every verse in the composition.

*Krishna Krishna Mukunda Janardana  
Krishna Govinda Narayana Hare  
Achyutananda Govinda Madhava  
Satchidananda Narayana Hare*

Why constantly chant, sing or remember the Lord's Name? Sage Vyasa affirmed that in the Kali Yuga it is easy to reach God through chanting the Lord's names. In the 28th verse of *Jnanappana*, Poonthanam declares that no effort can lead to liberation other than chanting of the divine names Krishna, Mukunda, Janardana, Govinda, Rama, etc. It is believed that in 1640 Lord Guruvayurappan came down to Earth and took Poonthanam to His heavenly abode, Vaikuntha. In contemporary times, devotees celebrate the poet-saint's life annually at the Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple on "Poonthanam Day" by reciting his devotional works. During March of each year, a week-long literary festival is held in Poonthanam Illam, the poet-saint's home.

### Testimony from a Devotee

"Poonthanam's story is very famous in Kerala. His verses are quoted by parents to children. Jnanappana teaches us that God is always within, and God will give what is best for us. We live with that faith."

RAJI KRISHNAN, 92, CARNATIC VOCALIST & VIOLINIST, COIMBATORE

### LEARN MORE .....

- ❑ **Visit** Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple and Poonthanam Illam in Kerala, India
- ❑ **Read** *Jnanappana*, commentary by Savitri Puram (online)
- ❑ **Listen** to "Jnanappana" (Poonthanam's magnum opus) on YouTube



## Verses from the *Jnanappana*

TRANSLATED BY ANEESH, FROM HIS "TRUE INDOLOGY" BLOG

### Gurunathan Thuna Chaika

May the guru bless us to have the holy names of God on the tip of our tongue forever, and to chant those auspicious names always, so as to make this human life meaningful and to fulfill the purpose of life.

### Innaleeyolam Enthannarinjeela

We do not know what happened until yesterday, nor do we know what will happen tomorrow. We do not know what will happen to our body in the next moment, nor do we know when it will perish.

### Kandukandangirikkum Janangale

If God wishes, the people we see now or are with us now may disappear or be dead in the next moment.

Or, if He wishes, in few days a healthy man may be paraded to his funeral pyre.

If God wishes, the king living in a palace today may lose everything and end up

carrying a dirty bag on his shoulders and walk around homeless.





QUESTIONNAIRE

# Let's Hear from India's Youth

To assess the religious ideas and opinions of youth of her generation, our author posted a questionnaire and followed up with phone calls

BY PALAK MALIK, NEW DELHI

**W**HEN HINDUISM TODAY ASKED me to interview a sampling of Indian youth about their religious views and practices, my first reaction was to somehow escape the situation entirely. India's political environment is so intertwined with religion that to engage with others on the topic is to risk being stereotyped. HINDUISM TODAY suggested that we focus on the personal religious lives of individuals and not the Indian politics of religion. I wondered how to make that distinction. Where I come from, the lines are very blurry.

I struggled to wrap my head around this idea of my talking to youth about their ideas and understandings of Hinduism. Did I even want to do this? Secretly, yes, because I struggle with my own ideas of religion on a daily basis, and I'd like to know what my peers think. Rarely do you get a chance to delve deeper into the beliefs of others.

And how does one tap the pulse of youth? Who should I start with? How could I find the right sample to represent the views of the whole of India's young adults? Frankly, a full and accurate representation is simply not possible and is not what I was able to assemble. With the help of my father, Rajiv Malik, I developed a questionnaire that I hoped would inspire respondents to reflect on their life and personal evolution with respect to matters of faith. The next challenge was to identify our survey range. My father suggested we seek respondents from diverse fields, jatis, communities and different Indian states. For practicality and my personal comfort, I favored a smaller scope, so we agreed to limit the survey to metropolitan youth. Still, the hope was to encompass the entire spectrum, from utter non-belief to unquestioning devotion.

After much discussion, we settled on a set of questions for our online questionnaire. The first segment focused on personal religious beliefs, with emphasis on the environment where one grew up. We designed this set of questions around temple visits, festival



Palak

celebrations, family pilgrimages and daily rituals. We wanted to evoke memories of childhood in relation to religious practices, and hopefully evoke thoughtful answers.

This led to one of the most pertinent questions one may ask: "Do you today self-identify as a Hindu?" Based on this one answer, we crafted two paths. If they identified themselves as Hindus, we delved into their ideas of God and other religious practices and beliefs, including karma, dharma and reincarnation. In terms of practice, we asked, "How does Hinduism manifest in your life?" We also inquired about the differences they perceive between themselves and the older generations in their household.

For those who no longer identified themselves as Hindus, we followed with different questions. Were they atheists, agnostics, a member of another religion, spiritual but not religious? Were they more in the millennial "I just don't care" category? At what point did they become estranged from Hinduism. What issues, philosophical or otherwise, did they find troubling? How do they interface with the celebration of Hindu festivals and other events which are so prevalent in Indian culture? Finally, what they would want to change about Hinduism.

We approached only those who were born

and raised in India. We gathered 36 individual responses. For the eleven that were most articulate and open to further questions, I followed up with in-depth interviews by phone. Eight of those are featured here. Most of our respondents were urbanites in their twenties. Obviously, the views expressed here do not reflect all—or even most—of India's Hindu youth. We would especially expect different answers from youth in the vast rural areas. All responses have been edited for clarity.

## Aastha Taneja, 28

Before we approached our interviewees, we did a pilot run of the questionnaire with my first cousin Aastha Taneja, who lives in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. When asked about the effects of religion in her life while young she mentioned, "In growing up I never really noticed people discussing religion or noticed religion having an obvious impact in their daily activities. I was brought up in a quite liberal household with no stringent rules about following our faith. My parents are reverential toward God and do believe in a greater power; however, they have never performed any overtly religious activities."

Aastha's mother is more religious than other members of the family. She is vegetarian; the others are not. Aastha developed a liking for meat and has continued to eat it. "I believe no one should impose rules about what an individual can eat or not. Religion can't dictate what foods you like."

As do most Hindu households in India, Aastha's house has a shrine room with figurines of Hindu Gods. "My parents pray daily, but I don't participate. We are free to choose if we want to or not." When our interview touched on the ritualistic practices of Hinduism, there was a slight resistance. She considers rituals dull and boring. This was typical of many youth I interviewed: their fast-moving lives take center stage, and religious practices, often misunderstood, seem onerous and unnecessary. Aastha believes in the presence of God, but does not feel a need for daily prayer. "I do recite the Gayatri Mantra when I feel like it, and going to the temple makes me feel good—empowered and happy." Still, she attends temple much less frequently than when she was younger. While growing up, she and her parents would pilgrimage to

.....  
**India's youth:** (Left) A young woman at a market in Udaipur, Rajasthan. Like her, more than 65 percent of India's population are under age 35. (above) the author, Palak Malik



far-off holy shrines in other states, and these memories now evoke a feeling of nostalgia and family time.

Like most of India's Hindu families, Aastha's family celebrates major festivals, including Holi, Diwali, Dussehra, Makar Sankranti and Lohri. Her favorite festival is Diwali, because it means get-togethers with extended family for serious festivities. "It's one of the most celebrated and biggest Hindu festivals, and people seem happier during this time of the year."

By talking with Aastha, I became aware of the growing divide between private and family life that many youth experience. Aastha, does not follow rituals personally, as they seem inconvenient or unimportant, but she participates with the family in collective activities like festivals and pilgrimages.

By now I was beginning to realize the complexity of the subject I was dealing with. Through the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews, many paradoxical statements would come to light. This can be partly attributed to the two phases of life that we are accounting for. Initially, parents play a very influential part in defining a child's habits and behavior. For instance, Aastha's mother used to make her recite alongside her as she did her own puja. "But

.....  
**An introduction to a generation:** (left to right) A night-time view of Chennai in Tamil Nadu, one example of the many urban environments shaping India's youth; Aastha Taneja; Saagar Sharma

## Modern views on an ancient faith



when you start growing up, it depends on you if you want to take it forward or not. My parents have never forced me to pray, but they have always taught me how and encouraged me and my brother to be thankful for what we have."

She also grew up on heavy dose of mythological stories; watching TV episodes of the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* on Sundays was practically a family ritual. For those like Aas-

**"Today's youth want freedom. They want to do things in their own way. If you try to force anything on our generation, they will not accept it."**

SAAGAR SHARMA

tha and myself who grew up in the 1990s, there was no cable TV, and these programs were consistently played on the one and only Indian National television. "We were watching it all for pure entertainment. Only later have I personally understood the meaning of the *Gita*, or of the politics and teachings involved in the *Mahabharata*. I personally find *Mahabharata* one of the most interesting works I have ever read."

Aastha seemed unsure how to describe the depth of her religiosity. "I have belief in God, and we have so many of them"—but she said she isn't doing anything on a daily basis. How does Hinduism manifest in her life?



AASTHA TANEJA

One aspect Aastha mentioned was the red thread, the *mauli*, that is an obvious symbol of the faith. "That's a clear giveaway of my belief in Hinduism. I consider it sacred and wear it most of the time."

In this conversation and those that followed, I was particularly intrigued that while other religions may make the distinction between practicing and non-practicing members, in many Hindu traditions, participation is completely up to the individual.

### Saagar Sharma, 26

Saagar was born and brought up in a religious environment and currently lives in New Delhi. His parents perform daily rituals that include arati and the chanting of the Hanuman Chalisa. Saagar joins his family for sahaj yoga on a weekly basis. "It is a type of meditation. Every Thursday our whole family goes to the center. It is definitely a religious activity for us."

Saagar firmly believes in God and prays often. "I do not go to the temple each morning or pray to God every morning, but I do have faith in God. When I pass by a temple, I definitely bow my head in reverence. At the same time, I am not a very consistent Hindu. I am not an extremist. I am very practical. In fact, Hinduism allows one to be practical." In his view, the Hindu religion has become more flexible. "There is a great difference between

how my parents approach things and how we approach things."

Saagar and his family celebrate every major festival. Diwali is his favorite, "because it's the festival of lights. Every corner, every home is decorated and well lit. It brings a lot of positivity." He has also pilgrimaged to holy sites like Haridwar, Amarkantak and the Vaishno Devi Shrine over the years.

"Youth connect to religion in their own way. Those I've come across at the sahaj yoga center take their religion very seriously. Youth and even some young children are curious about learning meditation. Many are deeply involved in meditation. A lot of youth my age come to this same center, and it is clear they are committed to their faith, even though many of them do not talk about it or show it off at all. Personally, I mix with this kind of youth, but I also have friends outside this spiritual circle. So I have to maintain a kind of balance between relations with both sets of people. For many, their religious path is very private and is not discussed with others who are not a part of their spiritual group. I only share my interest in spirituality, and related experiences, with those who take keen interest in my spiritual life."

Saagar observed, "I feel Hinduism is the most liberal and complete religion. Today's youth want freedom. They want to do things in their own way. If you try to force anything on our generation, they will not accept it, whatever their religion may be. The society is getting more and more liberal, and the level of education is also becoming higher."

"On a scale of one to ten, I would rate my religiousness as an eight. I am not one to judge as right or wrong the various practices within our religion. For instance, some people will blindly follow the teachings of the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*. I do not. I take out the positive teachings that apply to me and leave the rest. The *Bhagavad Gita*, too, has a lot of nuggets of wisdom; for instance its discussion of karma and also the idea of being a free soul—coming here without any attachment and then leaving this world without any attachment. Going through the scriptures and their teachings does help in your practical life. While performing your day-to-day chores, you have a foundation for what is right or wrong."

"Your thoughts about divinity are also related to the kind of people you meet regularly. They, too, influence your thoughts. I do feel that there is divinity in the people around me, such as in my family and friends."

### Shreya Dubey, 21

Shreya is a college student currently living in New Delhi. She grew up in a Tamil brahmin family that housed three generations under one roof. She describes her grandfather as highly religious. She remembers his daily morning and evening pujas ever since she was a child. Her parents are only moderately religious, they follow the same routine. "While growing up, I was required to visit the temple. Even if I had to attend my coaching classes, I had to find the time to go. For my parents it was important, despite my struggling to manage and being somewhat unwilling."



SAAGAR SHARMA

the same time, I have cousins from orthodox families who keep adding me to brahmin WhatsApp groups and the like. So for me it's like dealing with two different worlds."

While not opposed to Hinduism, Shreya respects people's right to hold their own views and opinions. Her family is strictly vegetarian, and her mother can't even bear to see meat on a TV screen. In her home, it is not even a point of discussion. Shreya felt she had to make her own decision. "I tried everything [meat]. I did not like any of it. I opted for vegetarianism out of a choice, mainly because I am against killing animals."

Asked if there was anything she would like to change about Hinduism, she said she would like to make it a bit more flexible. "I see it as more like a way of living rather than the highly political religion it has been made into."

She does not appreciate it when things are taken to the extreme or when certain practices are forced on her. "Only this afternoon my mother was telling me how she wanted me to get married by 24 with a brahmin boy, and the boy has to be a certain subclass of brahmin. So, he has to be a Hindu, he has to be a brahmin. Brahmin over everything." Her mother believes the right age to get married is 20, as mentioned in the *Vedas*. Shreya is already past that age, and the pressure is building.

Shreya explains she has never felt estranged from Hinduism, but Hinduism is being represented in a skewed manner. "At one point I just felt ashamed and scared of my religion. I don't feel that way anymore, because I know that what the media and others are portraying as my religion is not really what my religion is."

As she is deeply interested in Indian psychology and knows a bit of Sanskrit, she started reading the original *Bhagavad Gita*. She quickly realized that the essence of the book was being distorted in its translations. "Few people read Sanskrit, and the problem arises when they follow the distorted versions of the book. Recently I started reading a translation of the *Gita* that my grandfather gave me. It is so hideous! In the first few pages it says that if the women of a house are left alone then their dharma becomes impure. The original *Gita* never said that!"

At this point, Shreya considers herself as spiritual but not religious (SBNR), which is the fastest-growing category of belief in many nations. "I am basically making my own religion, and I've been trying to do that for some time." In the process she draws inspiration from Hinduism itself.

"The *Ramayana* talks about integrity, which



I value highly. I think not compromising integrity is something I learned from it." Today she can debate whether Ram is an ideal to follow, but when she saw a *Ramayana* cartoon as a 6-year-old, she clearly understood that Ram left home because he did not want his family to break down. "I think I would do the same; but then again, if it at any point stopped me from being my own person, that's where I'd draw the line."

Shreya enjoys all Hindu festivals, both for the family closeness and for the delicious foods that come along with such events.

She also practices meditation, because she wants to be in a state of constant awareness. For her it's a way of knowing herself, and she feels that she carries a sense of divinity with her through life. "I believe you should be tolerant and respect other people's opinions, cultures, and everything else that is different from yours."

#### Sonam, 22 (Anonymous)

Sonam grew up in an extremely religious, ritualistic family. From the beginning, she felt she was being forced to go to the temple and to participate in daily prayers and perform rituals that she did not identify with. Her actual disconnect with Hinduism happened over an unfortunate turn of events that affected her personally. Sonam was close to her grandmother. She happened to

be in Kedarnath when her grandmother fell ill. "Unfortunately, my prayers did not help her recover. That is the time I realized that God exists in our imagination. There is no way of knowing if God exists or not."

Over time, she has started identifying as an atheist. "As I grew up, I realized that reli-

**"I see a lot of discourse now which wasn't there before. I see a lot of young people even trying to defend the old practices if they have any merit to them"**

VIGNESH KARTHIK

gion is just a way to anchor one's life, to give it morality and meaning, even though there is no tangible evidence that an omniscient, omnipotent God exists." Her atheistic beliefs became more entrenched after she attended the Jesus and Mary College Christian college. "It made me realize that all religions are the same in structure; just the rituals/gods/artifacts/history are different."

Sonam believes all religions including Hinduism exist on the principle of instilling a feeling of "fear of God" in people. "Religions say, 'Do right because God is watching you

and you will pay for your deeds.' It forces a morality on people which people follow due to fear of punishment."

She believes that it is generally difficult for most people to have an internal moral compass. That motivates them to look outside of themselves, to believe in God. With God as their motivation, they are able to exhibit good behavior, as they fear the consequences, such as facing hell. "Personally, I believe it is good to be kind to people. I think I am a better person for not doing good things out of compulsion. Also, if I am kind to people, they would naturally also be kind to me. For me it forms a reciprocal relation with people."

Despite being an atheist, Sonam participates in Hindu festivals for the sake of her family's happiness. She recalls how Holi was her favorite festival while growing up, "Because it was only a small ceremony and I could play with water and colors with my friends afterwards."

Most of the youth Sonam interacts with come from devout Hindu families and rarely question their elders about the religion. "They do not deal with religion and religious beliefs in a critical manner."

It is her observation that her generation are less ritualistic in their religious practice. "I do not think that people of my generation hold such lengthy pujas as my parents do, nor are they performing idol worship in

such a devout manner." She attributes this to modernization and the growing influence of Western culture. India's religious landscape has changed owing to the global sharing of information through technology. "Earlier we were unfamiliar with other cultures, and we did not have the knowledge of what was going on apart from our own religious viewpoint. We are now at the cusp of an information revolution and possibly due to it we become more irreverent (if I may say so) towards following lengthy rituals, pujas and havans."

Sonam believes that with the BJP in power, religious politics has multiplied manifold, and religion is increasingly used as a tool to control people. "Recently, during Eid there were objections raised to the slaughtering of animals. But Hindus, too, slaughter animals, for example last year when I visited Kamakhya Temple in Gauwhati I came across slaughtering of animals." Moreover, Sonam believes religion creates hostility towards

**Works of lasting relevance:** (left to right) A priest chants from Hindu scripture; Shreya Dubey feels that despite her not being very religious, she draws wisdom from original versions of sacred writings; Vignesh Karthik; a statue in Rishikesh depicts a scene from the Bhagavad Gita. Many interviewees grew up with these stories and consider them foundational to their moral development.

other religions. "I feel that religions make you blind to reason. This happens when one is opposed to other religions."

#### Vignesh Karthik, 25

Vignesh also lives in New Delhi. He grew up in a religious family that prays to Lord Siva. He says that while young, he was taught hatha yoga and meditation, "but my fondness for mixed martial arts does not give me time for hatha yoga. I meditate regularly and I have been taught a practice called *shambavi mahamudra* (*shakti kriya*), which I do as a spiritual exercise."

In his youth, most family outings comprised visits to temple and other holy places. To this day, he goes to a temple twice a week. "It started as something my mother wanted me to do, owing to an astrologer's insistence. Now it is more to help me focus and feel better."

Vignesh has become an avid seeker. "This enables me to better myself with every passing moment. Furthermore, God has helped me fathom the essence and potential of 'I do not know.'" He believes that the experience of religion or spirituality can be better if the potential of "I don't know" is explored.

His search is a constant process of learning and unlearning. "Belief systems are great, but I'd want them to be a small core of my being." He holds himself open to all sorts of new ideas and thoughts, whether they come in the form of criticism or differences.

Vignesh credits the core values of Hinduism for his decision making. He says Hinduism has been an important source of information in his life. It helps him form his arguments and opinions, on both abstract and pragmatic dimensions. "I used to watch *The Ramayana* (the animated version). However, I really loved reading *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Considering the fact that I know the stories quite well, I go back to them with a different view every time I get an idea or a chance. For example, 'no violence against women, no matter what' is something the *Mahabharata* has taught me so much."

Even when making small, simple decisions, like whom or where to help, Vignesh looks at the intent of the person and not just the action in isolation. "So, looking at how I make decisions, I have a value system. It came from my mom, and she got it from the God that she worshiped and the stories she had heard, stories she has told me. I'm always trying to forgive a person who didn't intend to cause harm."

Vignesh is a student of identity politics. He feels youth are not trying to ape Western culture. "Just because I walk into temple wearing jeans and a t-shirt doesn't mean I am any less Hindu than you are. It is convenient, instead of draping an entire dhoti, which is uncomfortable for me."

Youth, he says, are not trying to denounce the religion, but rather to adjust it. "I would want to make it more inclusive, egalitarian



SHUTTERSTOCK



SHREYA DUBEY



VIGNESH KARTHIK KR



SHUTTERSTOCK



and less rigid. We just need a few good people, because I believe revolutions are started by just a handful. The ideations and the discourse just happen amongst a few people. It's the dissemination that has to happen in a large scale.

"I see a lot of discourse now which wasn't there before. I see a lot of young people even trying to defend the old practices if they have any merit to them." He firmly believes we need to preserve the spirit of questioning. "Even a cursory look, even a bird's-eye view at our history tells us that only discussions, debate and non-violent engagement have brought us results, and not violence in any form."

Vignesh thinks of karmas as the building blocks of one's life. "If you sow good things, you get back good things. I came across an interview of A.R. Rahman (Oscar-winning Indian music composer), where he said if you do a wrong thing, don't give up—don't go around feeling guilty, but instead compensate with ten good things. I think that's a great practice."

"I have a set of principles that guide me involuntarily. For example, I don't resort to violence, I don't resort to lying to people, I don't resort to cheating. This just happens naturally." In his view, Hinduism manifests as a tool to navigate the journey of life. "Religion is a tool just like the GPS. Spirituality is the destination."

## Shinjini Kulkarni, 24

Shinjini lives in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. She is the ninth generation of Kathak dancers in her lineage, and is the granddaughter of Kathak maestro Pandit Birju Maharaj. Kathak in its essence means story, and from a very early age she was exposed to the art of performance storytelling. "From the very beginning, when we were growing up, he

"We all want to seek and connect to something which is divine, more powerful and bigger than ourselves."

SRISHTI CHOPRA

taught us *shlokas* and *vandanas* which we perform in dancing. Otherwise, a young child of three or four years will not remember Sanskrit shlokas, right? So, when you are dancing to it, to a tune, then automatically you know it by heart."

She grew up in a religious atmosphere. "My family taught me how to practice religion. We are devotees of Shri Sai Nath of Shirdi. In our family, we believe Sainath is like the elder of the house, so he is going to take care of everything. If you have a worry, give it to him. If you have a desire, give it to him. It can be the most worldly desire."

Other than daily puja, their emphasis on ritualistic practices is minimal. "Daily prayers are offered, but the time of puja isn't fixed. Also, it is not any one person's responsibility to offer the prayers. At the same time, lighting of the lamp is a must."

Her family celebrates all major festivals in a traditional way. In addition, *katha* (religious storytelling) is held approximately every three months. "For Janmashtami, an annual Hindu festival that celebrates the birth of Krishna, puja happens at 12 midnight, and we do the whole Krishna Janam Leela. Krishna is a very important God for dancers, so we celebrate it with a lot more fervor."

"We also celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi and smaller festivals like Beej and Pradosh."

Festival celebrations in Shinjini's house focus more on *bhava*, or emotion, rather than ritual. For example, she recounts when the family brings Ganapati to the house for Ganesh Chaturthi, according to ritual you have to keep a modaka, an Indian sweet, in his hand, and offer him sweets because he is a revered God. "Instead I imagine

.....  
**Hinduism through other mediums:**  
(left to right) A kathak dancers fastens bells to her anklets. Shinjini describes dance as a powerful way of passing on the tradition; Shinjini Kulkarni during a performance; Srishti Chopra describes yoga as her greatest vehicle for India's wisdom

## Tradition through dance



you got this really cute young boy whose parents have dropped him at your house. He is a guest for five days, so you try to keep him happy and indulge him with love and affection. That sort of *bhava* becomes more important than the ritual."

Hinduism forms an important part of her personality and identity. "Hinduism gives me roots, and allows me to use the knowledge of great seers and sages to nurture my own soul. But if I wasn't a dancer, I probably never would have taken so much interest in mythological stories or the ritualistic traditions."

Shanjini practices meditation as a part of dance. "It is a unique exercise among the kathak dancers. We gradually raise the tempo of our footwork and concentrate on the sound of our ankle bells. The constant sound in a balanced tone is like repeatedly chanting a mantra, and helps us to focus our mind, and meditate."

Indian classical dance is based on Hinduism. "Thus, Hinduism manifests in my professional life in the form of choreographic pieces that I perform, or teach to my students."

In India, she feels there is a huge difference between the North and the South. "The normal children who are studying at various public or private schools in North, when they come and take dance classes with me, I have to teach them the very basics. I have to tell them who Vishnu is, who Siva is, because usually a five-year-old child from the North has not been taught this at home by their parents or grandparents." Whereas, in the South there is a lot of emphasis on teaching children classical dance and music to inculcate cultural values.

Shinjini also teaches underprivileged children at Sai Sanstha. "These children, brought together under the Shirdi Sai Trust, have been taught about his life stories and the whole concept of praying daily. So they are very devoted children and are a little more religious than the students I teach at home."

When she recently taught second-generation children in the USA, she observed that classical dance is a way to reconnect with Indian culture. "I realized their parents had taken active steps to give them cultural roots and religious roots via the classical dance forms from a young age, so that they don't lose their cultural and religious touch. It is because we learn so much about mythology through the dance form. We learn all these stories about Gods and Goddesses on moral values."

Shinjini grew up with an idealistic view of her religion, believing that Hinduism is the most perfect faith. But when she started classes as a student of history, her

perspective was shaken. "In the very first year, we studied a course on Ancient India that covered Hinduism and Brahmanism and Vedic science. When my professor critiqued the Hindu religious practices, I used to feel bad. But soon I figured that people are going to have different views about my religion. I think my college experience made me more



setting in and the whole country crazy and berserk with the shopping—buying and exchanging gifts. These customs bind us together as a country, as a community. That's where religion is playing a part."

## Srishti Chopra, 26

Srishti labels herself as "religiously spiritual." She lives in New Delhi, and was born in a family that practices all pertinent religious rituals, whether related to birth, marriage or death. But when it comes to belief systems, there was always freedom to search and explore. "We never visited temples. We were always free to visit out of our own choice, of course, but we were always taught that God is omnipresent with or without the existence of temples." She does not visit temples often but does believe that temples have great vibrations of austerity.

Srishti says her personal study and learning from Hindu scriptures guide her in life. She does not remember exactly how and when she started walking her spiritual path, but notes that yoga has been an integral part of it. "When I was facing health issues while approaching adulthood, yoga came to my rescue. I feel if I had not taken to yoga, I would have become obese and been prey to so many diseases like thyroid problems and depression."

"I took to the spiritual path under the umbrella of yoga following the teachings of Sri Sri Ravishankar, through his Art of Living program." She thinks Hinduism is a bridge to a deeply spiritual life. Here belief in the Divine and in the divinity in the world makes her "God-loving and not God-fearing. I have experienced the divine power many times when I was facing difficulties in life."

"We try to practice religion per the scriptures. We pray to the murtis, go to the temple and also on pilgrimage. There are so many religious places in our country which I fully admire and respect. However, unlike other religions, there are no pre-set conditions, such as a requirement to visit a certain place once a year or even once in a lifetime. I am not bound by any such conditions, though religion is important to me, and worshipping the murtis in the temple is important to me."

"We all want to seek and connect to something which is divine, more powerful and bigger than ourselves. In fact, we feel that such a source of power will help us move smoothly through the hurdles, problems and ups and downs of our lives. As part of Sanatana Dharma, and as per the teachings of our scriptures, we not only pray to the murtis, but also to nature, including fire, sun and earth. Even though the sky does not have



a form, we still worship it. So we worship both form and formless. I feel that the God is not just there in the murti, but is also there in all of us, and I try to understand and imbibe this knowledge.

"There is definitely a change required in Hinduism that is being followed by us today. Earlier the Hinduism we used to follow was a bridge leading to be more God loving, finding our own selves, learning to be more kind, humane and helpful.

"We should first learn about the basic values of Sanatana Dharma that have come from our ancient wisdom and inscribe those in our lives. Unlike youth belonging to other religions, most of the youth belonging to Hinduism are not well aware of their scriptures. How many of our Hindu youth today have actually studied their basic scriptures, and how many of our youth have read the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*? I feel our youth need to apply the teachings of our dharma in real life. Our dharma and scriptures teach us to love and serve others and this is what we need to practice. That is the whole crux of what I want to say."

#### Prakash Kumar Sahoo, 28

Prakash lives in Banki, Odisha, and comes from a religious family. "My mother is very religious, my father, moderately so. Both do puja and follow all rules and regulations set within our tradition. They do morning puja and evening puja followed by spiritual text reading."

His family celebrates all Hindu festivals.

"My favorite is Diwali, because it brings all the family members together. It gives us a reason to be together and celebrate it together as well. Diwali is not just using fire crackers and lighting diyas in my village; we also honor our ancestors through chants, which I like the most."

He grew up watching the Krishna and *Mahabharata* TV series, which he feels has impacted his understanding of right and wrong. "It was all about understanding the

### "Hinduism gives me roots, and allows me to use the knowledge of great seers and sages to nurture my own soul"

SHINJINI KULKARNI

stories and characters and trying to learn good things from them."

His mother is the only vegetarian in his family. She is deeply religious and believes that one should not kill to eat. She does cook non-vegetarian food but never tastes it. "Even though I'm a non-vegetarian, I did not know that people ate beef. When I went to Bengaluru, I stayed in a Tibetan hostel for three or four days. They eat beef momos and beef rolls, but I never ordered them. However, someone once gave me a beef roll by mistake, and I ate the whole thing. I never felt any regret about that or anything."

He is currently working from his home town with an NGO and interacts

closely with youth in his village. A lot of his friends are from his village. These youth firmly believe that their religion is the best and they are defensive about their religious practices. "A few weeks back we had a Ganesha Puja. After the puja, all these youth danced to music from a DJ while getting drunk as they took the idol of Lord Ganesha to the river for immersion. I asked them, 'Where is your Hinduism? You all get drunk, you dance and you take the God to the river, but where is your belief system? Do you know whether God wants this or not?' They had no answer. But they will still defend their religion."

Prakash mentions that in his village there is a common belief that everything happens because of God. "Like if a tree grows, it's because of God. They always say that if wind blows, it's because of God. So, if there is flood, it means that God is angry." But at the same time he feels the current genera-

tion has started questioning such beliefs because of easy access of scientific knowledge. "There is science for everything. For example, if there is a flood, it's due to heavy rain. It's not that God is angry with you."

He thinks his generation is starting to question why we do what we do. This is unlike his parents' generation, who took certain beliefs for granted and passed them on to the next generation. "My parents picked up their beliefs from their parents, and they obey those ideas for their entire lives without ever questioning them."

While working with tribals in the naxal

areas, he had a first-hand experience of the consequences of religious preaching. "In the village I was working in, tribals were largely converted to Christianity by Christian missionaries, before the government could even reach these remote places. Approximately 5-6 years back, there was a communal riot between Hindus and a Christians in one of the districts. The moment you start preaching one religion is better than another, the problems begin. So I have issues with the way my religion is misrepresented. I do not have any philosophical issues with the core values of Hinduism."

Prakash does not believe in reincarnation but does wonder about questions like what happens after death. He is also unsure about the concept of karma.

#### Conclusion

Speaking for myself, and most urban youth I've met, we tend to think of ourselves as liberals and secular and are fairly open in stating that we don't practice our religion that much. But our simple study here made me scratch below the surface, where I found

.....  
**From past to present:** (left to right) A young woman takes a photo during the 2017 Delhi Queer Pride Parade; another woman whispers her wishes into the ear of Mushika, Ganesha's mount; Prakash Kumar Sahoo believes that with many societal changes, the current generation is questioning long-standing beliefs and practices, but observes they are by no means abandoning their religion.

threads of Hinduism interwoven in our everyday lives and existence.

Without doubt, youth are struggling to reconcile private and public life in regards to religious expression. Many, it seems, are living in two conflicted realities. When we say a form of salutation to please our parents, or attend festivals and events for the sake of appearances, we are forming separate identities for our family from who we are to ourselves. At the same time we feel rooted or ground-

### "The moment you start preaching one religion is better than another, the problems begin"

PRAKASH KUMAR SAHOO

ed in our childhood experiences of Hindu traditions.

There is a great inter-generational gap, wherein a rational questioning of the ritualistic aspects of faith is occurring. And there seems to be a gradual decrease in ritual practice between generations, partially because youth are not receiving satisfying answers to their questions.

But judging from those surveyed here, youth are open to spiritual experiences, regardless of religious structure. Many have taken up yoga and meditation and swear by the benefits. All share the belief in a general sense of goodness or right and wrong.

Today we are living in the age of information, and with multiple sources of knowledge about our practices, with multiple answers,

many hand-me-down guidelines, all of which are being questioned. This is leading to meaningful discussions and debates, bringing new thoughts and ideas. The more responses we received from youth on our questionnaire, the more I realized that the roots of Hinduism go deeper than I imagined. While at times overt practices like puja and aarti or temple visits might feel forced upon us by our parents, all the while, the subtle nuances of these experiences—which may have gone unnoticed—have become a major part of our lives and identities.

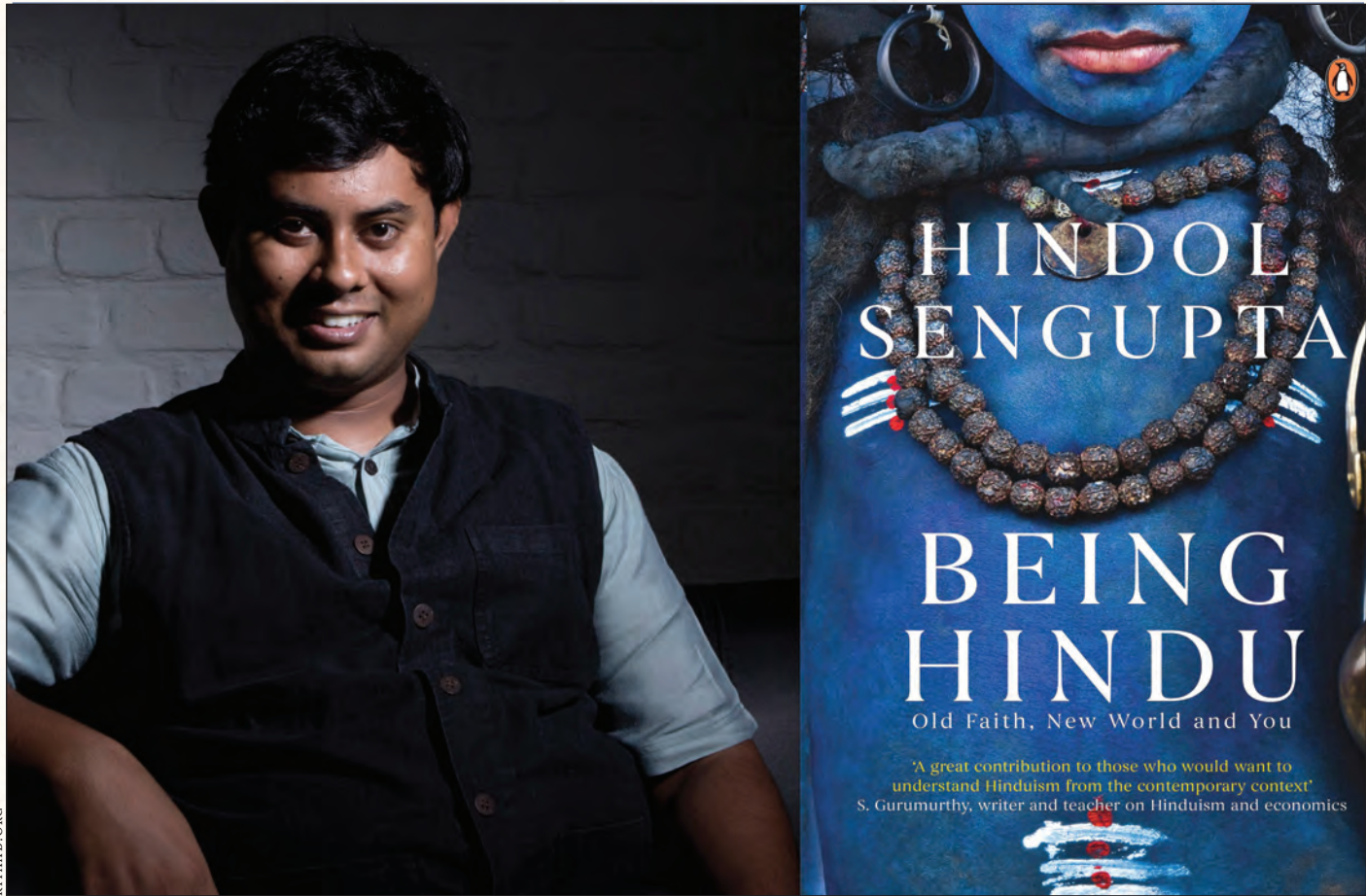
Even if you do not believe in the ideas of a Hindu god or a religious practice, chances are that if you are born a Hindu, you will remain a Hindu in some capacity. Even if you don't get married according to Hindu traditions, your cousins will, and, who would miss a great Indian wedding?

Whether you live in India or abroad, your belonging to a Hindu household will afford you a melodramatic call from Ma asking you to come home for Diwali. Because you grew up on a high pedigree of Bollywood movies and Indian advertisements, your heart will lead you home even if your head doesn't agree, and at the end of the day, we all have an emotional side to balance out our logical decisions and justifications. Even if you hate the family drama, you do love your family. So we will all sit in the puja because it makes our parents happy. In that sense, despite our questioning and our challenges to traditions, it really is our religion that keeps the family and society together.

#### New perspectives on a long-standing religion







BOOKS

## Demystifying Hinduism for the Next Generation

Hindol Sengupta thinks out loud with a bold narrative that stands strong for Hinduism and proclaims, “You are not a sinner. You are divine.”

“PROGRESS CANNOT TRANSPIRE UNLESS Hindus first understand who they are, where they come from and where they are going.” So writes Hindol Sengupta—journalist, entrepreneur, editor-at-large at *Fortune India* and author of eight books. He continues, “There has been a myth in India that Hindus do not, ever, place their moral and political superstructures and points of view in the philosophies of their faith. This is untrue, and one of the people who really understood this reality was Gandhi. His infusion of Hindu belief systems, idioms, iconography and commitment to plurality, which came directly from the core principle of the *Rig Veda*—*ekam satviprah bahuda vedanti* (truth is one, the sages describe it variously)—lifted the moribund Indian National Congress from a tepid, elite debating society to a fervent national movement.”

*Being Hindu* was released in 2015 by Penguin Random House, India, and quickly made a name for itself as being Hindol’s

best-selling work. His approach? Keep it simple. Sengupta is well educated, with a bachelor’s degree in journalism and a master’s in mass communication from the A.J.K. Mass Communication Research Centre, but his writing on Hinduism is clear and approachable. Keeping his skeptical Indian audience in mind, Sengupta wrote *Being Hindu* for the all-too-common Indian youth who has grown up inside the religion as a way of life, but never awakened to its deeper meaning.

### Who, What, When, Where and Why?

The story of Sengupta’s path from childhood begins in the Americana of the Assembly of God Church School in Calcutta. He quickly defines what a typical Indian youth experiences in the throes of Christian schooling. “During mass each day,” Sengupta remembers, “different pastors solemnly walked up and stood on the large stage before us, holding fat *Bibles* full of Post-it notes. The pastors would tell us stories from the *Bible* and

the moral lessons those stories held.... There were giants and heroes with swords flashing in them. The young David with a sling before Goliath, the hair of Samson that was the secret to his magical strength, Jesus miraculously multiplying bread and fish—it all seemed familiar,” he says, reflecting on his grandmother’s tales from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

A now older and wiser Sengupta continues, “What we did not understand for many years was the deeper message. We did not comprehend that something else was being said to us.” This was the idea that “to not believe in Jesus was to be a sinner.”

Fast forward several years, and the reader is introduced to a self-explored man who has grown up yearning to know more about the religion of his family and of his country. The chapters, broken into digestible topics, follow Sengupta’s evolution of reflection and insight, study, contemplation and research on Vedanta. From how the book was inspired, to whom the author is trying to reach, Sengupta

plots his Hindu path with sections about who and what is a Hindu, when and where Hinduism lives and why it has persisted throughout history.

Prodded by the author’s brazen Hindu perspective, the reader can learn much about Indology—the study of Indian history, literature, philosophy and culture—throughout the book. Sengupta starts at the basic level when he writes, “The Persians, who considered the River Sindhu (Indus) as one of the boundaries to their empire, supposedly could not manage the “s” in the river’s name and replaced its pronunciation with an “h” to suit their own tongue. So it became that everyone who lived south of the Sindhu (now Indus) came to be called Hindu.”

On the ancient Hindu concept of meaning, Sengupta starts to unravel the complex nature of what we comprehend as the eternal truth. “One of Hinduism’s oldest and most revered hymns, sung ceaselessly every morning by thousands for perhaps 3,000 years—perhaps more—the Gayatri Mantra, is a prayer for illumination, for radiance, for knowledge, for that intelligence which is eternally enlightening. One of the earliest and most convincing devotional pleas was for intelligence. Not material blessings, not refuge, not solace, not providence, but intelligence.”

After defining the basics of Hindu beginnings, common Hindu thought and what really makes a Hindu, Sengupta ends the first section of the book with a soul-grIPPING message that is left out of far too many Hindu narratives. “The idea that man can invoke Divinity in clay (any idol) to make it God and then worship it is, to me, the most sublime idea of the potential in each of us; the idea that not one of us is condemned. Not one of us needs saving or an external aid.

“All that we seek, all that we will ever need and could ever need lies within us. None of us is a heathen. None of us is an infidel. Not one of us is an unbeliever, for how can you be an unbeliever in yourself? There are no false Gods, because how can that which lies within you, which you worship, be false to you? How can you be false to yourself?

“You and me, we are manifestations of God. We are God; we just don’t know it yet...You and me, we are not sinners. We are the Divine, we just don’t know it yet.”

### On Vegetarianism

One chapter of *Being Hindu* is entitled, “Does Being Hindu Mean You Are Vegetarian?” Sengupta’s answer is no. His point is that Hinduism is traditionally and historically accepting both of vegetarians and meat eaters. For the latter, he cites the example “the ultimate modernist in Hinduism,” Swami Vivekananda, who hailed from Bengal, where vegetarianism is historically rare. He

also quotes Mahatma Gandhi—a vegetarian for most of his life—who pointed out: “Unfortunately today Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Hinduism is in danger of losing its substance if it revolves itself into a matter of elaborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemi-ousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but is by no means an end in itself.”

Sengupta attributes the teaching of nonviolence—the ethic upon which vegetarianism is based—to the Buddha, failing to note that non-injuriousness, is an ancient Hindu ethic, clearly mandated in *Yajur Veda* 12.32: “You must not use your God-given body for killing God’s creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever.” Further, the *Mahabharata* explains, “there are three forms of killing: he who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells, or cooks flesh and eats it.”

### Why We Need Religion

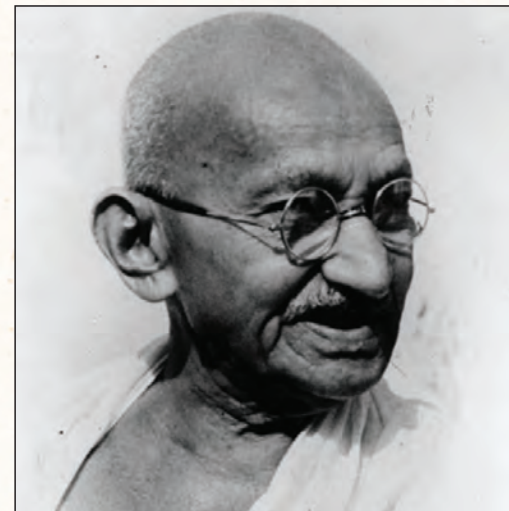
*Being Hindu* ends with a powerful call to defend oneself from materialism and to save oneself from a loss of meaning and purpose.

“How many Hindus really know why they pray? What do the mantras mean, and why do they mouth them? No one taught us to understand that the act of prayer is really inward, not outward, and that in the act of seeking all you can ever hope to receive is the understanding of that which lies within you.

“We grow up believing that to pray is to reach out to the external, that which lies outside of us. All the while, in reality, we are seeking something that lies within us... What is prayer if not a lesson in the profound power of vulnerability? Prayer teaches us that to be vulnerable is to be human, even alive.

“But the idea that one prays for external sustenance is not the basis of the Sanatan Dharma. Wonderfully, if you contemplate this, Hinduism teaches that your prayers are truly directed, in a sense, to yourself. You are praying to yourself. So, I felt that understanding how we relate to God is far from futile. Understanding how you relate to the idea which you turn to, sometime perhaps almost embarrassingly in your most helpless moments, can hardly be useless. In fact, it is entirely seminal in our individual journeys. It is only through this travel that we come to appreciate that there isn’t one individual journey; it is the manifestation of the larger path the universe takes.”

***Being Hindu***, 192 pages, softbound, ISBN 978-0-143-42532-8. Available via Amazon at [bit.ly/being-hindu](http://bit.ly/being-hindu)



**Sources of inspiration:** (opposite page) Author Hindol Sengupta juxtaposed with the cover of his bestselling book; (top to bottom) Sri Ramakrishna; Mahatma Gandhi; Swami Vivekananda—three historic giants who are the basis for many of Sengupta’s insights and devotions



# Enter the Sacred Kavu Groves of Kerala

A little-known tradition of Hindu temples is maintenance of a natural habitat, a space where elemental devas, the spirits of earth and water, can abide freely

BY ARAVIND GOPAL, KERALA, INDIA

**S**EATED BENEATH THE BANYAN TREE, Lord Dakshinamurti (Siva), the immortal, the first Guru, who “breathed out” mantras of the *Vedas*, silently blends the presence of nature with the eternal revelation of God. In Hinduism we honor this concept with many sacred places where we can see murtis such as Lord Siva, Shakti, Ganesha and Naga (the serpent guardian) beneath trees. In many cases these statues are situated on a low wall built around the tree. Our ancient scriptures, including *Vedas* and *Agamas*, affirm the sacredness of trees and nature; and ayurveda has proven the role of nature in curing illness. In a world in which nature is recklessly altered and disturbed by humanity, sacred groves must be protected.

In Hindu culture sacred groves are associated with supernatural entities. As a rule, the natural vegetation is left uncultivated and undisturbed. Many are associated with ponds and streams, both natural and man-made. Such groves are known as *kavu* in Malayalam, *devbhumi* in Hindi, *kovil kadu* or *swamichola* in Tamil, *devarakadu* in Kannada and *devrai* in Marathi. The exact number of sacred groves in India is unknown. The official estimate is 14,000. There are likely many more.

Sacred groves are of three general types: those associated with a temple; independent groves, with no temple, and groves associated with burial or cremation grounds. Kavus in Kerala belong to the first two categories.

Kerala, resting in the lap of the Western ghats, is home for 2,000 magnificent ever-green kavus, many with ponds. The major kavus are dedicated to Lord Siva, Shakti or Bhagavathy, Sastha (or Ayyapp), and Naga. Others are associated with spirits of a grandfather, grandmother or some extraordinary personality of the locality. Almost all kavus honor the presence of Naga God (“Snake God”), Naga Goddess. Their murtis, known as Naga Raja and Naga Yakshiamma, are commonly installed on an open platform.

## Mannadi Palayakavu

My fascination for kavus began with a visit to the Mannadi Palayakavu Bhagavathi Temple, situated less than two miles from Enathu on the Enathu-Kadambanad road in

Southern Kerala’s Pathanamthitta district. The temple is on the right side of the main road; on the left, a narrow road leads to the banks of the River Kallada, perhaps a thousand feet away. On the riverbank is a stone mandapa with a flight of steps down to the river. But the fragile banks and muddy water of the river testified to the extent of soil erosion caused by storms and the deteriorating

ecology.

Coming back from the river, I found the lush grassy entrance of the temple to be a soothing scene. The main shrine, to Bhadrakali, the presiding Deity, is enclosed by thick forest—the kavu—on three sides. To the left of the entrance, the Naga murtis are installed on an open platform under the thick dark canopy. The murti here is a



ALL PHOTO BY ARAVIND GOPAL



naturally emerged stone (svayambhu). The center of the temple roof is open so as to give the murti direct contact with nature. In front of the shrine is a small hall on wooden pillars, where traditional rituals are conducted on special occasions.

The priesthood of this kavu is chosen from one family, and the current priest is Sri Manoj Narayanan Potti. According to him, the kavu has been there since time immemorial, and the rituals are performed according to proper Agamic South Indian tradition. For Naga murtis, rituals are performed only once a month.

Presently the grove covers three to four acres, less than half the size it was a few decades ago. Pained by this encroachment and by the damage done to associated kavus by the construction of bigger temples, Manoj told me his family and other devotees have resolved to preserve their kavu and its traditions.

## The Oracle of Mannadi Palayakavu

Until the 19th century, this temple had the continuous presence of an oracle, or *kambithan*—a man who “channeled” the devas as their spokesperson. The oracle was the epitome of spiritual and martial arts and held the title of a village head. Devotees came to him for advice in resolving various problems. When a kambithan attained samadhi, his sword and anklet were thrown into the river in front of the mandapa. Each kambithan, selected according to merit, and had to

recover the sword and anklet from the river to keep and care for throughout his life.

The Mannadi Palayakavu Bhagavathi temple has an important place in the history of Kerala. One of the first freedom fighters, the Prime Minister of the erstwhile Travancore kingdom, came to this temple to seek the help of the kambithan.

The samadhi of the last kambithan can be seen at the Devaswom board of the nearby temple complex. Devaswom (Sanskrit: “Property of God”) are socioreligious trusts, mostly in Kerala, that comprise members nominated by the government and the community. Kerala’s five Devaswom boards administer around 3,000 temples.

## Iringole Kavu

The second-largest kavu in the state is the dense 50-acre Iringole kavu, a famous Shakti kavu in central Kerala. Situated near Perumbavoor town in Ernakulam district close to Kochi, the Queen of the Arabian Sea, this serene and calm natural forest is only about one-half mile from the busy Aluva-Munnar state highway. The kavu has a Durga temple at its center, but the forest is so thick that it denies the sight of the temple until we have followed a narrow footpath about a hundred meters. Here the richness of biodiversity can be heard from the songs of cicadas and birds and seen in the rich flora and flora. Entering the temple, we leave the cool, humid, shady natural environment for a brighter and slightly warmer one. Uniquely, this

**Honoring Gods of the earth:** (left) entrance to a family-owned Nagakavu, where a beneficial damselfly (inset) finds habitat free of human interference; (below) Mannidi Palayakavu Bhagavathi Temple, surrounded on three sides by thick forest. Less than four acres, this reserve is half its original size.

temple has only one Deity, Goddess Durga, as a *kumari* (virgin youth), exemplifying the austere, serene environment. The Iringole sanctuary is a full-fledged temple governed by the Travancore Devaswom Board, which administers around 1,200 temples in the state.

Sri Gopalakrishna Shenoy, manager of the temple, told HINDUISM TODAY that as a native of this place, he has noticed that the size of the kavu has decreased substantially during the past few decades. He stressed the need of better and concerted efforts to protect the remaining area from further loss.

## Privately Owned Kavus

Some kavus are owned by families who are the priests of the kavu’s temples and live in close proximity. In addition to the temple and/or kavu, there is a personal sanctum sanctorum inside the priest’s house where the Naga Gods are worshiped. Entry to this shrine is restricted to family members. Examples can be found at Mannarassala Sree Nagaraja Temple, Vetticode Sree Nagaraja Swamy Temple and Pambummeekkattu Mana.





(*Mana* is a Malayalam term for brahmin family home.) The first two, located in the Alappula district, have temples and kavus; the third is in the Thrissur district and has only kavus. These green patches of divinity are the Naga kavu, where the main Deities are Lord Nagaraja and his consort Nagayakshi amma. All these divine centers are governed by family-owned trusts, each with a story of its own.

The Pambumekattu Mana legend is that long ago, due to intense poverty and miseries, the head of the mana did penance at the 7th-century Thiruvanchikulam Mahadeva Temple, one of the Paadal Petra Sthalam, for many years. Lord Vasuki (Nagaraja) appeared before the brahmin with His consort.

According to the Mannarassala legend, as told by Sri Seshanag of that family, when one of the early generations was childless, they worshiped Nagaraja, and were blessed with twin baby boys. One of these was Lord Anantha Naga, who one day disappeared into the storeroom of the house. That room was converted into a sanctum sanctorum. Since Lord Anantha Naga was a sibling of one of their forefathers, they consider Him their grandfather. Today, the oldest woman of the family represents the great-grandmother who gave birth to Anantha Naga and performs the main rituals to the God and Goddess.

The eight-acre Mannarassala kavu enshrines the temple of Nagaraja Vasuki and his consort, with minor shrines for Sri Dharma Sashta and Sri Bhadrakali. Another portion of the kavu is associated with Anantha Naga, known as Appoopa (grandfather).

Vetticode is another kavu with a temple for Naga God and Goddess. Sri Sreenivasan Namboothiri, who is secretary of the temple trust and a member of the family that owns the temple, told HINDUISM TODAY the system they follow was devised by Sage Parasurama and refined by Sri Shankaracharya.



ALL PHOTO BY ARAVIND GOPAL

According to their system, Lord Ahirbudhanya is one of the many forms of Lord Rudra. The Nagaraja temple and kavu spreads over six acres.

At Pambumekattu Mana, the divine center consists of the mana (house) of the priest family. According to legend, the presence of Nagaraja and His consort was first experienced in the eastern portion of the old mana. On this six-acre kavu, the presence of Nagas is readily felt. The secretary of the mana, Sri Jathavedan Namboothiri, told HINDUISM TODAY the Naga Gods are the owners of the earth. He told us that non-Hindus, including atheists, also worship Naga Gods.

Certain provisions in scripture allow moving Naga God and Goddess murtis from their original place in family kavus and relocating them elsewhere. Pressure to turn old untouched groves to agricultural use, for cattle or to build homes has resulted in moving some of these Deities. However, there is now a strong movement among authorities to discourage kavu destruction and displacement.

Many Siva temples in Kerala have kavus on their lands. One of these is the famous Trichendamangalam Mahadeva temple at Peringanad, near Adoor in Pathanamthitta district. This temple is managed by a locally elected committee of devotees. It is a full-fledged Kerala-style temple with a one-acre grove behind it. The president of the temple, Sri Sreekumar, said the kavu is the hair of Lord Siva personified.

Oachira Parabrahma is another famous and popular Siva temple in Kerala. Here Lord Siva is worshiped as Parabrahma in the form of a Sivalingam situated under a Peepal

tree. This temple also has a Naga kavu. The priests here are non-brahmins by caste. Like the Trichendamangalam Mahadeva Temple, this one is governed by a locally elected committee of devotees; but unlike other kavu temples, the management here utilizes the surplus funds for charity.

One of the most famous Nagaraja temples in South India is Kukke Shree Subrahmanya Temple in Karnataka state. According to legends, puja offerings made to Lord Subrahmanya are also received by Nagaraja. Lakhs of devotees throng these kavu temples, especially on special religious occasions.

#### Kavus Are a Blessed Resource

To feel the perfect tranquility, serenity and bliss of Naga kavus, one should visit one of the many big kavus owned by families, where human intervention is absent. People enter the kavu only during the annual puja. On all other days, a traditional oil lamp will be lit at its entrance. In some kavus, family members perform the annual puja, while others hire the services of a priest. Active kavus are seen in almost all Hindu communities and remain an integral part of the culture.

People worship Nagaraja for curing infertility and skin diseases. Kavus are also part of the agricultural culture with folklore associated with them. Generally, devotees never harm any living being residing in the kavus; they even leave a fallen or dead tree to decompose naturally.

Mr. Kummanam Rajasekharan, now the governor of the state of Mizoram, is an environmentalist who was instrumental in

**Deterioration and closing kavus:** (left to right) Mr. Kummanam Rajasekharan, governor of the state of Mizoram, believes that sacred groves (Kavu) should be placed the world over; the banks of the River Kallada at Mannadi Palayakavu has eroded from storms, and the mandapam on its banks is deteriorating; a Nagaraja murti that was moved to Vetticode Kavu from a kavu that was taken over by human habitation

saving paddy fields in the Aranmula Heritage village from being converted into an airport. He told HINDUISM TODAY that kavus should be created all over the world, mainly in urban areas and next to agricultural fields, after proper studies. In adequate number, these can create a healthy environment which can provide long-lasting protection for life on Earth.

Even though a new sacred grove can be created without any rituals, simply by leaving the vegetation uncontrolled on a piece of land of any size, the number of kavus and the acreage devoted to them is decreasing due to the pressure on land caused by urbanization, encroachment, unethical socioeconomic attitudes, and indiscriminate intervention by groups such as atheists and communists. Still, many kavus have survived the onslaught because of the divine protection given them by our wise ancestors.

#### Environmental Benefits

In this world of harsh weather, pollution and rapid urbanization, the environmental benefits of kavus are profound. A kavu and pond are a small-scale forest and natural water body which can protect life on earth in many ways:

- 1. Maintain the equilibrium of air and food:** Humans and animals need food and oxygen and excrete carbon dioxide and water. The plants, algae, etc., in the kavu use carbon dioxide and water and release or produce oxygen and food.
- 2. Filter and store water, and drastically reduce storm-water runoff:** Forests filter and regulate the flow of water. The litter over the forest floor acts as a sponge which filters, stores and gradually releases the water to natural channels and ground water. Natural ponds inside the kavu also store water.
- 3. Conserve valuable topsoil and reduce soil erosion:** A forest is like a protective green cloth over Mother Earth's fragile body.
- 4. Conserve biodiversity and balance ecology:** In a natural environment, the populations of species are balanced to an optimum minimum level. Forests shelter the predators of pests. Snakes in the kavu can regulate rodent population in nearby agricultural fields. Kavus and ponds shelter natural enemies of



mosquitoes such as backswimmers, dragonflies and their larvae, damselflies and their larvae, diving beetles, frogs and tadpoles, and native fishes.

**5. Reduce pollution:** Plants can remove and/or phytoremediate pollutants and contaminants from soil and water.

**6. Arrest or reverse global warming:** Global warming can cause extinction of species, tropical cyclones, extreme weather, tsunamis, abrupt climatic change, sea level rise, increased human stress resulting in violence, etc. These are just a few of its catastrophic effects. Plants can lock CO<sub>2</sub> in their bodies to save our planet and the life on it.

The need for nature and kavus was

recognized by our ancestors thousands of years ago, long before the world began facing global warming and ecological disasters.

I remember the words of the renowned physicist Niels Bohr: "I go into the *Upanishads* to ask questions." In these natural habits we find another golden example of the wisdom of the Hindu sages. My search for answers to certain environmental problems ended in the kavus.

ARAVIND GOPAL, 41, is our Kerala correspondent. He has an MSC and MPhil in Biochemistry and is doing his PhD in Botanical Pesticides.





**NOW LIVE!**

## WHAT IS THE SHAKTI INITIATIVE?

The Shakti Initiative is an online clearinghouse showcasing Hindu teachings about and by women, the contributions of Hindu women throughout history, and the role both women and men play in bringing to fruition solutions that are grounded in Hindu teachings to address critical contemporary issues.

VISIT [WWW.SHAKTIINITIATIVE.ORG](http://WWW.SHAKTIINITIATIVE.ORG)

[www.HAFsite.org](http://www.HAFsite.org)

HAF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## WAYS OF GIVING THAT DON'T TAX YOUR FINANCES

When the Hindu Heritage Endowment staged its first-ever estate planning seminar in Walnut Creek, California, the fissures in the global economy were beginning to show in higher energy and food prices.

The seminar, however, focused on a strategy that works in good times and bad: protection from taxes, court costs and legal fees through sound estate planning.

With the economic meltdown, the Hindu Heritage Endowment is following a similar tack by encouraging ways of giving that allow donors to remain generous while not further taxing their battered finances. Here are some examples.

A 45-year-old marketing executive saw his IRA take a big hit in 2008. Still, he said, "I'm in this for the long run. By including the Hindu Heritage Endowment as a beneficiary of my IRA, I know that whatever the Hindu Heritage Endowment receives will be tax-free. My relatives will have to pay income tax on their share."

He added that the IRA designation is easy to do and has left his current finances unaffected.

A physician in her fifties used a similar strategy with a life insurance policy. "Many people think that life insurance proceeds are not vulnerable to estate tax," she cautioned. "They do not go through probate or get hit by income tax, but if you own the policy, it may be subject to estate tax." She knows that any portion of her life insurance proceeds that goes to the Hindu Heritage Endowment will go free of any tax.

"Besides, it was very easy to do," she explained. "I just filled out a beneficiary designation form naming the Hindu Heritage Endowment for a percentage and mailed it to my insurance company."

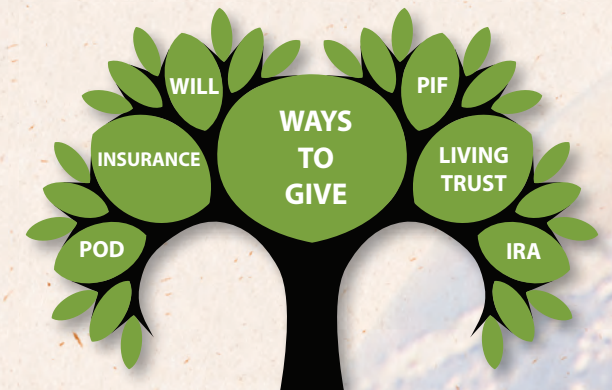
The parents of three adult children have a living trust. "We wanted most of our estate to go to our children," the father explained. "We used a residual bequest to accomplish this. It states that whatever remains after our children receive their distributions passes to the Hindu Heritage Endowment."

The three strategies above have common traits: they are tax-free, simple to do and revocable.

Phil Murphy, a former HHE consultant, emphasizes the virtues of revocability in dicey economic times: "Bequests to good causes, whether through IRAs, life insurance, living trust or wills, can always be changed. We remain in control."

Murphy thinks of estate planning as one way to recover from a shaken sense of personal power. "Most of us feel a loss of control when the value of what we own suddenly changes for the worse. But we can channel that anxiety into useful action by reviewing our estate plan. That way we can make sure that those we care about will not face avoidable taxes, fees and court costs. That's always a good idea, but especially when every penny counts."

For more information on estate planning and planned giving, visit the Hindu Heritage Endowment website at [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org) and click on Planned Giving. Or call Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012 extension 6. For an estate planning toolkit write to [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org).



**HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT**

KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA

808-822-3012 ext 6 • fax: 808-217-3108 • [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org) • [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org)



JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

|                                                  |           |          |                                                              |           |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b>        | Total     | 45.11    | Aran Sambandar                                               | 108.00    |
| Anonymous US\$5,066.70                           |           |          | Bryan Wagner                                                 | 100.00    |
| Rajendra Giri                                    | 151.00    |          | Total                                                        | 17,867.41 |
| Roshan Harilela                                  | 375.00    |          |                                                              |           |
| Gunasekaran Kandasamy                            | 145.35    |          | <b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b>                        |           |
| Srinivas R. Madaboosi                            | 100.00    | 173.76   | Benevity                                                     | 105.00    |
| Gayatri Rajan                                    | 75.00     | 108.00   | Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund                                | 200.00    |
| Chamundi Sabanathan                              | 78.75     | 93.00    | Murali Balaji                                                | 251.00    |
| Hitesvara Saravan                                | 42.00     | 100.00   | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn                                 | 4.23      |
| Jai Sivakumara                                   | 324.00    | 27.09    | Roshan Harilela                                              | 375.00    |
| Other Donations                                  | 50,000.00 |          | Gunasekaran Kandasamy                                        | 145.35    |
| Total                                            | 56,357.80 | 501.85   | Chamundi Sabanathan                                          | 78.75     |
|                                                  |           |          | Rodney & Ilene Standen                                       | 30.00     |
|                                                  |           |          | Total                                                        | 1,189.33  |
| <b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b>                  |           |          |                                                              |           |
| B. Elango                                        | 108.00    |          | <b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b>                      |           |
| Amey Surendra Gangal                             | 33.00     |          | Mano Navaratnarajah                                          | 225.00    |
| Anonymous                                        | 33.00     |          | Gassa Patten                                                 | 1,350.00  |
| Other Donations                                  | 78,884.00 |          | Total                                                        | 1,575.00  |
| Total                                            | 79,058.00 |          |                                                              |           |
|                                                  |           |          | <b>Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment</b>                 |           |
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund</b>       |           |          | Anil Kumar                                                   | 18.00     |
| Thirujnanam Arnassalon                           | 22.57     |          | Gananatha Subrahmanyam                                       | 100.00    |
| Usharani Iswaran Magana                          | 50.00     |          | Total                                                        | 118.00    |
| Juhivaasana Koothan                              | 8.47      |          |                                                              |           |
| Anil Kumar                                       | 27.00     |          | <b>Positive Discipline Endowment</b>                         |           |
| Ashwini Maureemootoo                             | 35.24     |          | Vinaya Alahan                                                | 66.00     |
| Saroja Maureemootoo                              | 11.29     |          |                                                              |           |
| Anonymous                                        | 13.05     |          | <b>Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund</b>                  |           |
| Jogendra Moorooogen                              | 5.64      | 45.00    | Shyamadeva Dandapani                                         | 36.00     |
| Vidyadevi Moorooogen                             | 5.64      |          | Srinivas R. Madaboosi                                        | 300.00    |
| Shanmugam Muthukumar                             | 85.34     |          | Total                                                        | 336.00    |
| Divyesh Nagarajan Pillay                         | 100.00    |          |                                                              |           |
| Subramaniam Pennathur                            | 66.64     |          | <b>Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund</b>                 |           |
| Kedarnathan Subramanian                          | 140.00    |          | Sathyainkara Balendra                                        | 24.00     |
| Anonymous                                        | 84.00     |          |                                                              |           |
| Total                                            | 654.88    | 2,074.00 | <b>Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund</b>          |           |
|                                                  |           |          | Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund                                | 100.00    |
| <b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b> |           |          |                                                              |           |
| Hiten Amin                                       | 299.00    |          | <b>Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund</b> |           |
| Julio Avalos                                     | 299.00    |          | Pathmini Saravanapavan                                       | 150.00    |
| Krishnan Balasubramanian                         | 299.00    |          | Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan                               | 15.00     |
| Hemakheshaa Naatha Batumallah                    | 14.00     | 855.00   | Total                                                        | 165.00    |
| Mekaladeva Batumallah                            | 14.00     |          |                                                              |           |
| Anil Chagan                                      | 299.00    |          | <b>Thank You Bodhinatha Fund</b>                             |           |
| Vinod Chandra                                    | 299.00    |          | Gunasegaran Chitravelloo                                     | 153.00    |
| Satish Gandhi                                    | 299.00    |          | Peter Christian                                              | 50.00     |
| Ravi Jahagirdar                                  | 299.00    |          | Shyamadeva Dandapani                                         | 108.00    |
| Ganesh Ketha                                     | 299.00    |          | Anonymous                                                    | 8,766.00  |
| Anonymous                                        | 16.55     | 75.00    | Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai                                  | 324.00    |
| Bhaveshan Moorghen                               | 8.47      | 42.33    | Brintha Devi                                                 | 15.50     |
| Shanda Kumaran Moorghen                          | 8.47      | 117.33   | Panshula Ganeshan                                            | 75.00     |
| Udeyadeva Moorghen                               | 8.47      |          | Debashis Ghosh                                               | 300.00    |
| Nandhini Nandakumar                              | 299.00    |          | Timur Izmaylov                                               | 12.00     |
| Ashish Patel                                     | 299.00    |          | Gunasekaran Kandasamy                                        | 348.35    |
| Ram Patel                                        | 299.00    |          | Michael Kempinski                                            | 1,188.00  |
| Rasik Patel                                      | 299.00    |          | Mooneenagen Koothan                                          | 28.26     |
| Yashica Patel                                    | 299.00    |          | Gaurav Malhotra                                              | 251.00    |
| Phalgun S. Prativadi                             | 299.00    |          | Silvarajoo Muniandy                                          | 101.00    |
| Sai Singh                                        | 120.00    |          | Mano Navaratnarajah                                          | 150.00    |
| Collin Vas                                       | 299.00    |          | Mrunal Patel                                                 | 1,001.00  |
| Total                                            | 4,674.96  |          | Saurabh Pathak                                               | 50.00     |
|                                                  |           |          | Nuckiren Pyeneehandee                                        | 56.63     |
|                                                  |           |          | Kishore & Suhasini Racherla                                  | 153.00    |
| <b>Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund</b>      |           |          |                                                              |           |
| Vel Mahalingum                                   | 16.93     |          |                                                              |           |
| Manogaran Mardemootoo                            | 28.18     |          |                                                              |           |

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

|                                                    |           |                                                                    |                               |        |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|
| Sumathi Raja                                       | 450.00    | <b>Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund</b>                    | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn  | 8.47   |
| Chamundi Sabanathan                                | 1,008.00  | Shyamadeva Dandapani                                               | Srinivas R. Madaboosi         | 150.00 |
| Aran Sambandar                                     | 162.00    |                                                                    | Natraj Narayanswami           | 44.00  |
| Hitesvara Saravan                                  | 21.00     | 36.00                                                              | Krishanth Rajasooriyar        | 15.00  |
| Andrew Schoenbaum                                  | 10.00     | 30.00                                                              | Deepika Sharma                | 40.00  |
| Hridaya Sivalingam                                 | 15.00     | 66.00                                                              | Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan | 150.00 |
| Tejasinha Sivalingam                               | 21.00     |                                                                    | Arunasalam Vathavooran        | 75.00  |
| Ramesh Sivanathan                                  | 36.89     |                                                                    | Total                         | 534.22 |
| Vignesh Sukumaran                                  | 108.00    | <b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b>                                  |                               |        |
| Anba Dayananden Valayten                           | 11.00     | Anonymous                                                          | 33.00                         |        |
| Vayudeva Varadan                                   | 114.00    |                                                                    |                               |        |
| Sahunthala Vinothachandran                         | 730.00    | <b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b>           |                               |        |
| Michael Wasylikiw                                  | 648.00    | Anonymous                                                          | 733.71                        |        |
| Total                                              | 16,465.91 | Marlene Carter                                                     | 162.00                        |        |
|                                                    |           | Gaurav Malhotra                                                    | 101.00                        |        |
|                                                    |           | Subramaniam Pennathur                                              | 66.68                         |        |
|                                                    |           | Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan                                      | 150.00                        |        |
|                                                    |           | Total                                                              | 1,213.39                      |        |
| <b>Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment</b>        |           |                                                                    |                               |        |
| Shyamal Chandra Debnath                            | 150.00    |                                                                    |                               |        |
|                                                    |           | <b>India Hindu Tribals Endowment</b>                               |                               |        |
|                                                    |           | Kamalesh & Krishna                                                 |                               |        |
|                                                    |           | Gangopadhyay                                                       | 1,000.00                      |        |
|                                                    |           |                                                                    |                               |        |
| <b>Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund</b>       |           | <b>Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund</b>                   |                               |        |
| Kalyani Saravanapavan                              |           | Vayudeva Varadan                                                   | 54.00                         |        |
| Sanmugalingam                                      | 501.00    |                                                                    |                               |        |
| Pathmini Saravanapavan                             | 150.00    |                                                                    |                               |        |
| Total                                              | 651.00    |                                                                    |                               |        |
|                                                    |           | <b>India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund</b>                            |                               |        |
| <b>Taos Hanuman Fund</b>                           |           | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn                                       | 4.23                          |        |
| Anonymous                                          | 27.09     | Kulagan Moonesawmy                                                 | 16.93                         |        |
|                                                    |           | Total                                                              | 21.16                         |        |
|                                                    |           | <b>Anantha Ladies Home Endowment</b>                               |                               |        |
| <b>Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment</b> |           | Jai Sivakumara                                                     | 200.00                        |        |
| Canaganayagam Kugendra                             | 60.00     | Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan                                     | 30.00                         |        |
|                                                    |           | Total                                                              | 230.00                        |        |
|                                                    |           | <b>Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment</b> |                               |        |
|                                                    |           | Anonymous                                                          | 51.75                         |        |

**Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment**  
Anonymous 27.09

**Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund**  
Anil Kumar 27.00

**Digital Dharma Endowment**  
Anonymous 391.78  
Gunasekaran Kandasamy 72.67  
Chamundi Sabanathan 810.00  
Total 1,274.45

**Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment**  
Other Donations 600.00

**Insurance Premiums**  
Mrunal Patel 3,003.00

Total Contributions \$197,991.21

**Funds at Market Value, Sept. 30, 2018**  
Total Endowment Funds \$16,753,562.57

**Grand Total** \$16,753,562.57

**MISSION STATEMENT:** Hindu Heritage Endowment is a publicly supported, charitable organization recognized as tax exempt by the IRS on April 22, 1994. Employer ID 99-0308924. Founded by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, its philanthropic mission is to provide secure, professionally managed financial support for institutions and religious leaders of all lineages of Sanatana Dharma.

**PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS:** Halbert, Hargrove, Investment Counsel; Lynn M. Gaumer, J.D., Stelter Co. and Sonoda & Isara LLP, certified public accountants. HHE is a member of the Partnership for Philanthropic Planning, the source for education, research and advocacy for professionals who have a role in designing and implementing donors' philanthropic plans.

**I WANT TO PARTICIPATE:** Where should I Send My Donation? You can send your gift to an existing fund, create a new endowment or request information through the address below. Donations may be made online at [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org) to join our family of benefactors who are Strengthening Hinduism Worldwide. Thank you.



HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY  
107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA  
808-822-3012 ext 6 • Fax: 888-217-3108 • [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)  
[www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org) • [www.facebook.com/hhecares](https://www.facebook.com/hhecares)





# www.ReincarnationResearch.com

Equipped with Google Translate-104 Languages

Walter Semkiw, MD

“Evidence of Reincarnation” Video: Over 6 Million Views



Barbro Karlen  
Age 7      Anne Frank      Barbro Karlen  
Adult

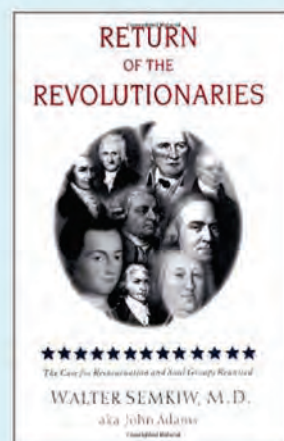
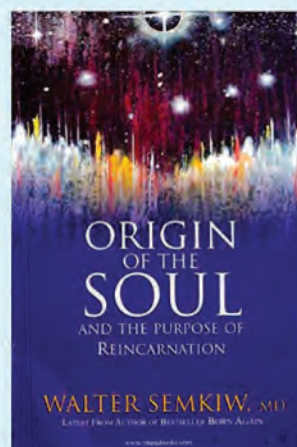


Edwin Booth      Amitabh Bachchan

1500 University of Virginia Validated Childhood Past Life Memory Cases Sorted By:

- Physical Resemblance from One Lifetime to Another
- Planning of Lifetimes to be Reunited with Loved Ones-You Will Be Together Again
- Phobias from Past Life Mode of Death
- Birthmarks Related to Past Life Physical Wounds
- Change of Gender and Associated Homosexuality
- Xenoglossy: Unlearned Language and Preservation of Personality within Your Soul
- Suicide and Reincarnation
- Spirit Being Intervention in Reincarnation Cases
- Split Incarnation: You can Animate More than One Body at a Time
- Change of Religion, Nationality and Ethnic Affiliation from One Lifetime to Another, which can Create Greater Peace on Earth: See Anne Frank and Amitabh Bachchan Cases in *Born Again*

The Amitabh Bachchan Soul Group is featured in *Born Again*. We Seek Your Assistance in Disseminating Evidence of Reincarnation. Contact [walter@ReincarnationResearch.com](mailto:walter@ReincarnationResearch.com)



## Experience a Living Tradition



Our Ayurvedic Studies Programs bring Ayurveda to life in the depth of your being. Experience firsthand this living wisdom as it unfolds in your life and expresses in your practice. Come for the knowledge and stay for the wisdom.

Call (505) 291-9698 or visit  
[www.ayurveda.com](http://www.ayurveda.com)



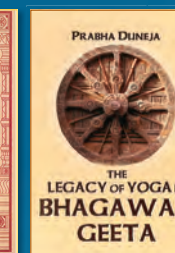
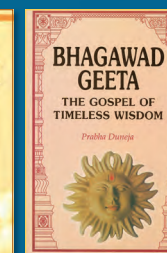
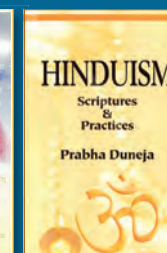
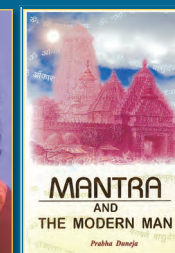
Ayurvedic Seminars & Intensives Offered Throughout the Year



## Your Hawaiian Pilgrimage Destination

Visit the spectacular gold-domed, all-white-granite *Iraivan Temple* being constructed at Kauai's Hindu Monastery—from stones quarried and hand-carved in India. Bring the children. Read more, see photos, videos and/or donate at:

[www.himalayanacademy.com/iraivan.org](http://www.himalayanacademy.com/iraivan.org)  
808-822-3012, x237 • [iraivan@hindu.org](mailto:iraivan@hindu.org)



## Resources for enhancing your life

All the guidelines for positive, joyful living were given to us long ago and preserved for you to enjoy and take full advantage of today. Inspire and enlighten yourself. Uplift your life.” —Prabha Duneja

Visit our website and share in the wealth of spiritual resources that Prabha Duneja has gathered and elucidated over a lifetime. She lectures widely and her writings are used in college and university classrooms. She is recognized for the depth of her personal devotion and her ability to shed light into Hinduism's spirit, philosophy and mysteries of mind and body, mantra, yoga and meditation. Many testify that her insights and articulations have transformed their lives.

Geeta Society • [www.geetasociety.org](http://www.geetasociety.org) • 925-484-5411 • [duneja@aol.com](mailto:duneja@aol.com)



Yoga for Health



Health for Humanity



HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH, USA  
Presents

# HEALTH FOR HUMANITY YOGATHON SURYA NAMASKAR YAJNA

January 12, 2019 to January 27, 2019  
(Throughout USA)

TRIHEALTH



Ayurveda

The science of vital power  
from the balance of nature

The most effective herbal remedies available in the US.

- Sourced from a family lineage in the ancient tradition.
- Constantly evolving in application to meet the health needs of the day.
- Through the optimal combination of potent herbs the efficacy has been ensured.



*"Of all nectars, Ayurveda is Supreme"*

800-455-0770 [www.trihealthayurveda.com](http://www.trihealthayurveda.com)



Hindi USA

HINDI CLASSES FOR CHILDREN AGES 5 - 16 AT ALL  
LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

Open a Professional Hindi School  
in Your Area Today!

SPECIALLY TAILORED GUIDANCE FOR  
NEW TEACHERS ACCORDING TO YOUR  
INDIVIDUAL NEEDS!

75 Schools Already Operating  
Throughout the United States

Log onto [www.hindiusa.org](http://www.hindiusa.org) or  
Call 1-877-HINDIUSA to start classes in your  
community and give the gift of our cultural  
heritage to the next generation

Celebrating Eighteen Years of Serving the Community!

SPECIALIZED CURRICULA

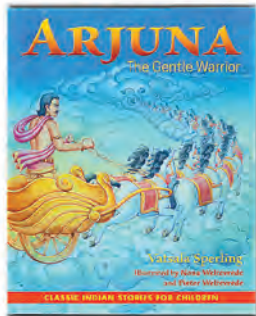
SPECIALLY DESIGNED BOOKS  
for students in the U.S.

EXAMS TO ASSESS PROGRESS





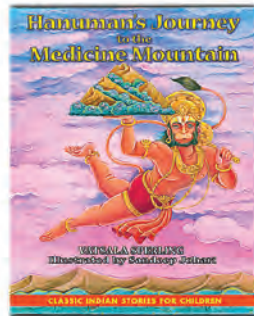
## CLASSIC INDIAN STORIES FOR CHILDREN



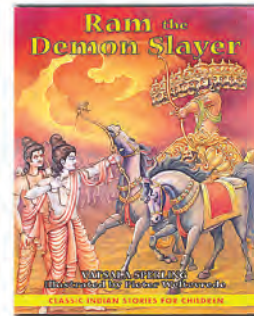
**Arjuna**  
The Gentle Warrior  
**Vatsala Sperling**  
Illustrated By **Nona Weltevrede**  
and **Pieter Weltevrede**  
A children's story featuring Arjuna, a compassionate warrior who must choose between abstaining from battle or fulfilling his destiny to end the war  
**\$15.95 • ISBN 978-1-59143-203-6**



**The Magical Adventures of Krishna**  
How a Mischief Maker Saved the World  
**Vatsala Sperling**  
Illustrated By **Pieter Weltevrede**  
Features Krishna, one of the most beloved characters of the Hindu pantheon, a spirited naughty boy who grows up to save the world  
**\$15.95 • ISBN 978-1-59143-110-7**



**Hanuman's Journey to the Medicine Mountain**  
**Vatsala Sperling**  
Illustrated By **Sandeep Johari**  
Tells the adventures of the magical monkey Hanuman, beloved in India as the devoted helper of Ram, hero of the Hindu epic tale the Ramayana  
**\$15.95 • ISBN 978-1-59143-063-6**



**Ram the Demon Slayer**  
**Vatsala Sperling**  
Illustrated By **Pieter Weltevrede**  
An illustrated version of the classic Hindu epic the Ramayana  
**\$15.95 • ISBN 978-1-59143-057-5**



Available Wherever Books Are Sold  
**800-246-8648 • InnerTraditions.com •**

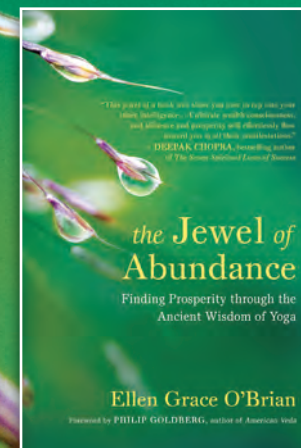
Text ITBCO to 33233 to Receive Special Offers and Discounts



Each sculpture has a story of the place & artist who made it.  
*Ask yourself, do you want a statue or a Lotus Sculpture?*  
— KYLE TORTORA, FOUNDER —

www.LotusSculpture.com • info@lotussculpture.com • 760-994-4455

## FINDING PROSPERITY THROUGH THE ANCIENT WISDOM OF YOGA



"This jewel of a book will show you how to tap into your inner intelligence, the ultimate and supreme genius that mirrors the wisdom of the cosmos. Cultivate wealth consciousness, and affluence and prosperity will effortlessly flow toward you in all their manifestations."

— **DEEPAK CHOPRA**,  
author of *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*



**NEW WORLD LIBRARY**  
www.newworldlibrary.com | Also available as an ebook

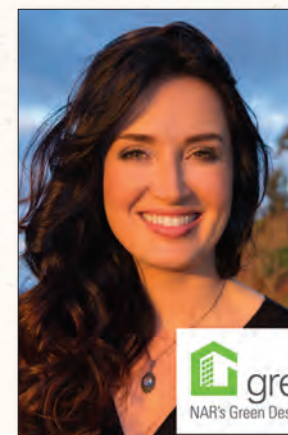


## Life Insurance and Estate Planning

Rely on a professional for Retirement and Estate Planning

For information, contact one of the most highly trained financial advisors:

Niraj P. Baxi, msi, clu, chfc  
Tel: 800-686-8436  
[niraj@baxifinancial.com](mailto:niraj@baxifinancial.com)  
[www.baxifinancial.com](http://www.baxifinancial.com)



**Moksha McClure R(S)**  
Diligent Buyer Representation.  
Extreme Marketing for Sellers.  
(808) 652-7387  
[M@OasisHawaii.com](mailto:M@OasisHawaii.com)  
[www.MokshaMcClure.com](http://www.MokshaMcClure.com)  
RS #73174



Oceanfront | Sotheby's  
INTERNATIONAL REALTY  
Each office is independently owned and operated



## Hindu Global Charity



We are currently planning projects in Nepal, Pakistan and Nigeria.

**A**merican Hindu World Service (AHWS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to educating the American public and the world about Hindu perspectives on global health and international development. It is now working on HIV/AIDS, nutrition awareness, women's empowerment and sustainable agriculture. It is active with other religious communities on interfaith issues, and serves without discrimination as to ethnicity, gender, nationality, or creed. More at [www.ahwsngo.org](http://www.ahwsngo.org)

AHWS • PO Box 1483, Laurel, MD 20725-1483, USA  
626-475-7149 • [ahwsngo@gmail.com](mailto:ahwsngo@gmail.com)



**Recover & maintain your health by yourself, at home**

**D**uring a lifetime of medical practice, Dr. Gowda MD observed that the ailments that burden people can almost always be improved or remedied easily by applying simple, basic principles and practices. He now

with simple, easy practices that have proved effective for thousands of years

shares his knowledge and experiences in highly illustrated **GYM3**. The title is an anagram referring to the three traditional practices: exercise, yoga and meditation.

106 pages • \$13.30, including shipping less for quantities • contact us:  
2025 Priest Road, Nashville, TN 37215 USA  
615-665-1565 • [ckhsg@gmail.com](mailto:ckhsg@gmail.com)



## CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads are US\$55 for 20 words, \$1 for each additional word. "Box ads" are \$80 and \$150 • 10% to 35% discount for repeat ads • 888-464-1008, 808-634-5407 fax: 888-217-3108 • [ads@hindu.org](mailto:ads@hindu.org) [www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)

### Appeal

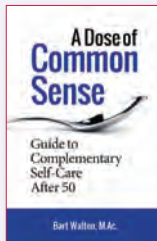
**Help Hinduism toward a brilliant future** by helping HINDUISM TODAY flourish. Support the Hinduism Today Production Fund which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. The fund was established to empower current and future editors to produce an ever more potent journal in both print and digital realms, able to reach ever more souls. Be a part of the global Hindu renaissance, donate at [www.hheonline.org/donate\\_pf](http://www.hheonline.org/donate_pf) Subscribe to our Production Fund newsletter at: [gurudeva.org/email-news](mailto:gurudeva.org/email-news) Contact: 888-464-1008 • [productionfund@hindu.org](mailto:productionfund@hindu.org)

### Ayurveda/Health

**Low-cost blood test.** Eg., PSA, \$20, HIV screen, \$20 • [www.BloodTestInChicago.com](http://www.BloodTestInChicago.com) or Call Dr. Siva, tel: 1-866-505-1556 (USA).

### Take Charge of Your Health

An excellent guide-book for self-care after 50. Simple home strategies for health and well-being by respected practitioner and consultant to staff of Hinduism Today, Bart Walton, M.Ac. • [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) [Japanesehealingarts.com](http://Japanesehealingarts.com)



### Devotional Supplies

**Top Quality Rudraksha beads and malas** Jai Hanuman Ltd. • [gdg4044@yahoo.com](mailto:gdg4044@yahoo.com) 641-472-2448 • [www.rudraksha.com](http://www.rudraksha.com)

### Free Products & Services

**Shri Shivabalayogi Maharaj Meditation** Blessings. Peace, Bliss and Self-Realization are Guaranteed through Meditation. Receive Shivabalayogi's photo, holy ash and meditation instructions. Free. Sanjay Singh, 8300 Halston St. # 7, Louisville, KY 40222 USA. [thesksmail@yahoo.com](mailto:thesksmail@yahoo.com) [www.meditate-shivabala.org](http://www.meditate-shivabala.org)

**Home-Study Course in the Vedanta.** Contact Parashakti Vidya Gurukul, PO Box 250, Spring Valley, NY 10977 [parashakti.vidya@aol.com](mailto:parashakti.vidya@aol.com)

## Professional Products & Services

**Norwegian-English Translation services.** Anil Badhwar, Oslo, Norway. [abadhwar@gmail.com](mailto:abadhwar@gmail.com) • +47-4-004-6723

### Taking Care of Our Own

Greesh Sharma, PhD, DMSP is a Diaspora psychologist, life coach and author. Contact for guidance in personal & family issues, suicide prevention and general wellbeing • [drgreesh@yahoo.com](mailto:drgreesh@yahoo.com) Skype: drgreesh1 • 1-267-575-2424 1400 Heller Dr., Yardley, PA 19067 USA [www.drgreesh.com](http://www.drgreesh.com)



### The Mind Is Your Servant

R. H. Pratt, Ph.D., Ltd., life coach & mindfulness teacher w/34-yr. exp. as clinical psychologist. 702 625-9291 • [dr-richard.com](mailto:dr-richard.com) [NoMovingMind@outlook.com](mailto:NoMovingMind@outlook.com)



### Fine Quality Neem Products

Specializing in fresh neem leaf, neem sticks, living neem trees and other Ayurvedic herbs. Our complete line of neem products contains more neem than any other U.S. manufacturer, all at fresh-from-the-farm prices. [www.neemtreefarms.com](http://www.neemtreefarms.com) 877-500-6336



### Freight Forwarder

Ship >45 kg or more Anywhere from US Fx: 1-800-396-6659 Sales2@air7seas.us [www.air7seas.com](http://www.air7seas.com)



### Publications

**Babaji's Kriya Yoga & Publications.** See our e-commerce at [www.babajiskriyayoga.net](http://www.babajiskriyayoga.net) • Books, correspondence course, seminars. In India: [india@babajiskriyayoga.net](mailto:india@babajiskriyayoga.net) Outside of India: tel. 888-252-9642 or 450-297-0258; [info@babajiskriyayoga.net](mailto:info@babajiskriyayoga.net)

**Dreaming Peace**, by Nori Muster. "Every right action, word and thought has a good effect." • [dreamingpeace.net](http://dreamingpeace.net)

### Sri Chinmoy Books

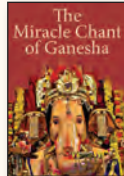
Wisdom of ancient India made clear and simple. Free catalog: 1-734-994-7114 [www.Heart-Light.com](http://www.Heart-Light.com) [www.SriChinmoy.org](http://www.SriChinmoy.org)



**Sri Aurobindo books.** Ayurveda. Reiki. Vedic astrology. Alternative health. Plus over 14,000 health & wellness products. Wholesale-retail-mail order. Free catalogs. Lotus Press, HT Box 1008, Silver Lake, WI 53170 USA [www.lotuspress.com](http://www.lotuspress.com)

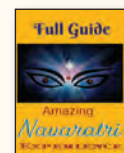
### Rely on Ganesha

*Miracle Chant of Ganesha* is a guidebook/workbook for chanting His mantra to successfully manage your life. Available on Amazon.



### Guide to Navaratri

Learn how to connect with the Divine Mother and tap into divine knowledge. Available on Amazon [livingsattva.com](http://livingsattva.com)



### Divine Life Society Publications

Choose from over 100 free e-books and 300+ printed books on Hindu philosophy, yoga, meditation and more by Swami Sivananda and his disciples. [www.dlsebooks.org](http://www.dlsebooks.org) • [www.dlsbooks.org](http://www.dlsbooks.org)



### Wisdom Wave Publications

Shrikrishna Kashyap was a beloved holy sage and Ayurvedic healer. Wisdom Wave offers Mantra CDs/downloads, plus books of his teachings on health, Vedic scriptures and philosophy. [www.wisdomwave.org](http://www.wisdomwave.org)



**Lemurian Scrolls.** Celestial messages given in 1973 to Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, that help us understand the times we live in and what it all means • [www.minimela.com](http://www.minimela.com)

## Custom Tours to India

Kali Travel is uniquely qualified to organize custom-made tours to satisfy the needs of any type of group, organization or individual and to structure an itinerary appropriate to their specific needs and interests.

Kali Travel, 169-12 Hillside Ave Jamaica, NY 11432-4498 USA 718-291-9292

[kaligroup@verizon.net](mailto:kaligroup@verizon.net) [www.kalitrandlandtours.com](http://www.kalitrandlandtours.com)



## The Spiritual Island

KAUAI, HAWAII



## Come Live in Paradise

Single Family Homes  
Farms  
Condos  
Land



Claire Sunita Keaton  
RS-73854

808-652-9543  
[clairekeaton@yahoo.com](mailto:clairekeaton@yahoo.com)

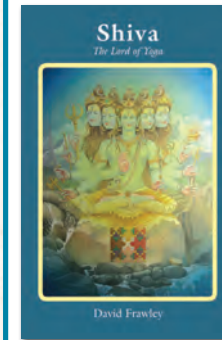
Kauai *Landmark* Realty  
4-356 Kuhio Hwy., Kapaa HI 96746  
[www.kauaihomeseacher.com](http://www.kauaihomeseacher.com)

Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press

# Shiva

*The Lord of Yoga*

David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)



ISBN: 978-0-9406-7629-9  
\$19.95 • 296 Pages

Lord Shiva is the personification of all the main practices of Yoga, as the origin and ruling power over asana, prana, mantra, inner seeing and meditation. He is the ultimate Yoga guru reflecting the highest Self-awareness. Yet this centrality of Shiva in Yoga is rarely understood and utilized. The current book unfolds the presence, light, energy and consciousness of the Supreme Shiva to take us beyond all death and duality.

Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri), is one of the most respected modern teachers of the deeper secrets of Yoga and the Vedas, an author of more than forty books in twenty languages worldwide. He has received the prestigious Padma Bhushan award from the government of India for his outstanding work in the Vedic field.

Lotus Press, Inc., a majority woman-owned, family business,  
P O Box 325, Twin Lakes, WI 53181 USA • Office Phone: 262 889 8561  
Office Fax: 262 889 2461 • Toll Free Order Line: 800 824 6396  
Email: [lotuspress@lotuspress.com](mailto:lotuspress@lotuspress.com) • Website: [www.LotusPress.com](http://www.LotusPress.com)  
Pandit Vamadeva Shastri • [www.vedanet.com](http://www.vedanet.com)

Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press

*Invest with*  
**a clear conscience**

We prudently manage wealth,  
screening for investments  
which affirm dharmic life.



**EASAN KATIR**

private wealth management  
since 1983

[easan.katir@gmail.com](mailto:easan.katir@gmail.com)  
1-530-231-5646 (USA)  
[easkanatir.com](http://easkanatir.com)





# Vegan Vitamins & Supplements

No animal products or derivatives of any kind

High quality  
Wide selection  
Affordable prices



...and many more!

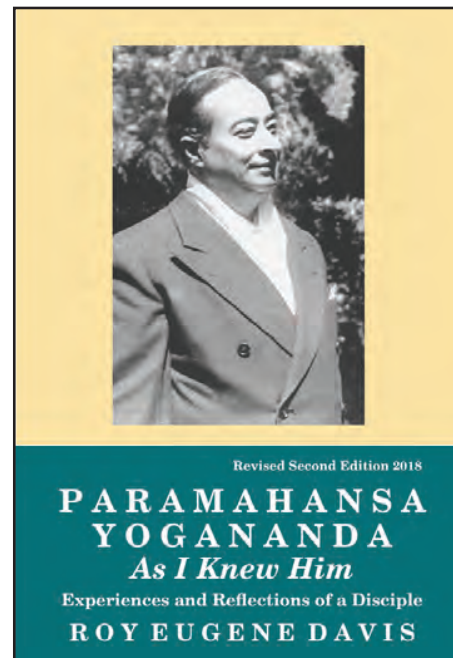
Available for purchase at:  
**WHOLE FOODS** & other  
Natural Health Food Stores.



DEVA vitamins are 100% vegan, vegetarian and certified by the Vegan Society, the non-profit organization that actually invented the word "vegan."

(888) 988-DEVA  
[www.devanutrition.com](http://www.devanutrition.com)  
[info@devanutrition.com](mailto:info@devanutrition.com)

Second revised edition, quality paperback  
224 pages 16 pages of photos  
\$8.00 plus \$3.00 postage



706-782-4723 weekdays 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.  
or e-mail [info@csa-davis.org](mailto:info@csa-davis.org)  
online at [www.csa-davis.org](http://www.csa-davis.org)  
Center for Spiritual Awareness Post Office Box 7  
Lakemont, Georgia 30552

**VASTUVED INTERNATIONAL**

MICHAEL BORDEN  
VASTU ARCHITECTURE

Building design in the ancient tradition of Vastu Shastra  
Residential and Commercial Properties  
Comprehensive Vastu Design Theory and Application for Everyday Life

<http://www.vastu-design.com/vastu-architecture-book.php>  
[www.vastu-design.com](http://www.vastu-design.com) 1-641-472-2157

**Crystal Ganeshas**  
All sizes

[minimela.com](http://minimela.com)  
[books@hindu.org](mailto:books@hindu.org)  
877-255-1510

## SRI GAYATRI

The Inner Secrets Revealed

3 volumes with 2 chant CDs



Amma Sri Karunamayi explains the sacred Gayatri mantra, syllable by syllable, in this uplifting collection.

"Gayatri Devi is One who is self-luminous. She not only illumines all the organs and chakras in the bodies of humans and all living beings, She also gives light to all the worlds in the entire universe."



Check out these and other inspiring books and CDs at our website.

## HAWAII HEAVEN



Quality 3-bed / 2.5-bath home plus guest house, two-car garage on half-acre in close proximity to Hindu temple



- excellent investment property; five years of positive, consistent cash flow
- 22-foot cathedral ceilings
- custom cherrywood kitchen cabinets, merbau solid wood floors
- master suite on ground floor
- mature fruit trees
- recently reduced to US\$ 899,000

Yelena Okhman Realtor®(S) • Remax Kauai  
808-635-6552 • [yelenastars@gmail.com](mailto:yelenastars@gmail.com)



## American Institute of Vedic Studies

Expand your horizons in Vedic Knowledge and Hindu Dharma. Practical teachings of Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley), D.Litt, Padma Bhushan. Authentic Vedic knowledge in a clear and modern idiom. Courses, publications, programs and retreats—with students from all over the world.

### Recent books:

- *Shiva: The Lord of Yoga*
- *Universal Hinduism*
- *Art and Science of Vedic Counseling*
- *Vedic Yoga: The Path of the Rishi*

### Institute Courses:

- Ayurvedic Healing Course
- Yoga, Ayurveda, Mantra & Meditation Course
- Ayurvedic Astrology Course
- Integral Vedic Counseling Course

American Institute of Vedic Studies  
PO Box 8357, Santa Fe, NM 87504-8357 USA  
tel: 505-983-9385 • [www.vedanet.com](http://www.vedanet.com)



## Yogini Shambhavi Devi

Yogini Shambhavi Devi is a mystic yogini, spiritual guide and educator rooted in the ancient traditions of Bhakti Yoga, Shakti Sadhana, Vedic Astrology, Mantra Yoga and Ayurveda.

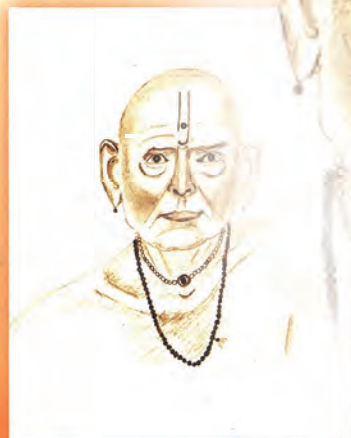
Shambhavi is co-director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies. She is a direct disciple of Sadguru Sivananda Murty, who has empowered her as a spiritual teacher.

- Yoga Shakti retreats in India, Europe, Canada and USA, 2018
- One-year experiential Yoga Shakti training programs
- Spiritual Guidance and Mantra Initiation with Yogini Shambhavi Devi
- Vedic astrology consultations with Yogini Shambhavi Devi

[shambhavi.yogini@gmail.com](mailto:shambhavi.yogini@gmail.com)  
[www.vedanet.com](http://www.vedanet.com)



**ETERNAL FRIEND**  
**ŚHRĪ SWĀMĪ SAMĀ**  
MAHĀRĀJ OF AKKALKOT



By  
**MUKUND M. HANUMANTE, Ph.D**

## Find the Divine Within

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

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

**"Eternal Friend** helps people manifest their deepest soul potentials."—Dr. David Frawley

By M. Hanumante, PhD • 142 p • hardcover • color • \$35 • [mukund@juno.com](mailto:mukund@juno.com)  
<http://akkalkotswamisamarth-usa.org>

Father, my begging bowl  
Is full.

But my begging eyes  
Are in a famine  
For Thee.

In the moment of understanding,  
I lost my understanding.

I am a little boy  
In a tumultuous crowd  
Sobbing for his Mother.

**Beyond the Sun**, by Dr. Arjūnan Subramaniam  
1st January 2006 – 4th January 2006 • Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



# DIGITAL DHARMA



ART

## Explore Thousands of Art Gems On Our New Web App, HAMS A

FOR FIVE DECADES THE MONKS AT KAUAI'S Hindu Monastery in Hawaii have been collecting and commissioning original works of art for their many publications, apps and web projects. For decades this burgeoning treasure trove was hidden higgledy-piggledy

in the binary recesses of their server. It has sometimes been difficult even for the monks to find what they needed!

Now the entire collection has been indexed and made available to everyone through HAMS A, the Himalayan Academy Museum

[www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)

of Spiritual Art. In Sanskrit, *hamsa* names the Indian goose (*Anser indicus*) or a swan. It represents the Ultimate Reality and the spiritually pure soul. The flight of the hamsa symbolizes moksha—the release from samsara, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, and the start of our soul's continued evolution in the inner worlds.

Indian spiritual art has no equal in the world for scope, sheer quantity, devotion and philosophical significance. Among the thousands of images available at HAMS A ([www.himalayanacademy.com/hamsa/](http://www.himalayanacademy.com/hamsa/)) you will find rare masterpieces, sacred religious symbols, illustrated alphabets, decorative borders, educational depictions of Hindu Deities, culture, philosophy, legend, children's stories, and much, much more.

The collection is searchable in several ways: by key word (tag), artist, collection (such as all the works from a particular book) or by any word of your choice. The Download button will save the highest available resolution file to your computer.

HAMS A is a work in progress, so access currently can be slow—and as you will note when you investigate the Tags button, some tags are spelled in more than one way, with a search for each yielding a different set of images. There are typos and misspellings. At this writing, a *chunting* tag brings up one image, while *chanting* yields others.

There is no tag for *japa* or *mala*; but if entered in the search field, *japa* gives three pertinent images and *mala* indiscriminately yields hundreds.

These particular issues may be fixed by the time you read this, but you will may encounter others. Just be aware that the treasure-hunt dynamic is very much in play here. Stay flexible, and be prepared for surprises.

These images may be freely used in service to dharma. For any commercial use, however, written permission must be obtained from the copyright holder, Himalayan Academy, by writing to: [contact@hindu.org](mailto:contact@hindu.org).

