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HINDUISM TODAY ❖ SOUTH AFRICA'S SIVA-SHAKTI ❖ THE NARMADA RIVER ❖ SAMADHI IN SPACE ❖ JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2018

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(Cover) In February of 1971 astronaut Edgar Mitchell was returning to Earth from a lunar landing when suddenly his consciousness became cosmic, an experience that would change his life forever; (above) the Siva Alayam Temple in Benoni, South Africa

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2018 • THE HINDU YEAR HEMALAMBA, 5119

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The Omkareshwar Temple hugs the banks of the Narmada, its steps leading into the rushing waters where pilgrims seek blessings. It is one of 12 revered Jyotirlinga sites sacred to God Siva and sits on an island in the river that is said to be shaped like a Sanskrit Aum.

Waters of the Narmada

Follow our 815-mile-ride down one of Mother India's most revered rivers **...Page 36**

HARI MAHIDHAR

GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

PM Modi Is Cleaning House

INDIA'S PRIME MINISTER MODI called upon the nation to begin a campaign called Swachhata Hi Seva, "Cleanliness is Service," from September 15, 2017, until Gandhi jayanti on October 2, 2017. During his address in August, he called for a massive cleaning to create an environment of cleanliness throughout the country so that Gandhi's birthday, and the third anniversary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, can be celebrated in a deserving light. He urged all NGOs, schools, colleges, social, cultural and political leaders, corporations, state and local government officials and collectors to accelerate sanitation activities during the two-week period.

The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation will soon launch a section on MyGov.in where, after constructing toilets and undertaking other sanitation-related activities, people can register their name and the name of the family whom they helped.

According to the Ministry's website, bit.ly/CleanBharat, over 33 million citizens have participated to date, and over 15 million activities were completed.

Transformed: *Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, received the award for cleanest iconic place in all of India thanks to about 60 employees and 300 volunteers working on numerous monthly housekeeping chores*

Only in India: *Ganesha with Ford Motors, made from auto parts*

INDIA

Vinayaka's Other Vehicle

IN AN AUGUST, 2017, GANESHA Chaturthi campaign to show off Ford's mission statement, a mega-Ganapati standing 6 and a half feet tall was built out of spare auto parts and painted as a work of art for the Oberoi Mall, Goregaon East, Mumbai.

Saurabh Makhija, the general manager of sales at Ford, unveiled the statue, which was open for public viewing during the last weekend at the mall. While unveiling the unique creation, Makhija said, "Safety is not an option but a priority for us at Ford. With the unique installation of Lord Ganesha, we want to highlight the significance of using genuine parts while servicing to ensure the well-being of loved ones."

The Ganesha statue was created by artist Madhvi Pittie from Workshop Q in collaboration with Nishant Sudhakaran, a metal artist in Mumbai.

HISTORY

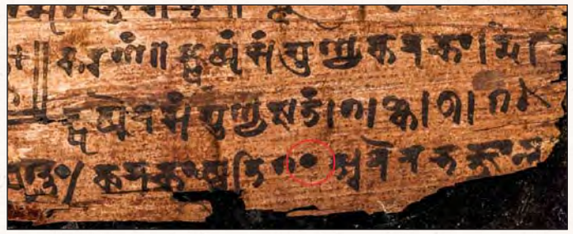
The Birth of Zero

THE NEW SCIENTIST MAGAZINE reported in September, 2017, that carbon dating an ancient manuscript has aged the use of zero by 500 years. The Bakhshali manuscript, first thought to be from the 9th century, is now dated around 224 to 383 ce. The previously oldest recorded example of zero was a 9th-century temple wall inscription in Gwalior, India.

The Bakhshali manuscript was discovered by a local farmer in 1881 in what is now Pakistan. It is housed at the University of Oxford's Bodleian library.

Timothy Revell of *The New Scientist* writes, "The use of zero as a placeholder appeared in several different ancient cultures, such as the ancient Mayans and Babylonians. But only the Indian dot would eventually go on to gain true number status, first described in 628 ce by the Indian astronomer and mathematician Brahmagupta."

Marcus du Santoy, professor of mathematics at Oxford, says, "The creation of zero as a number in its own right... was one of the greatest breakthroughs in the history of mathematics." The text is thought to be a training manual for Buddhist monks.



Hundreds of zeros: *The red circle highlights the zero in the text*

TOP TO BOTTOM: HINDUSTANTIMES.COM; EDGYMINDS.COM; UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

INDIC STUDIES

Reaching Out to the Next Generation

A GROUP DEEPLY COMMITTED to Indian values, culture and history has created a series of YouTube videos called *India Inspires*. Their core mission is "spreading the eternal ideas of India that have played a pivotal role in inspiring intellectuals for millennia around the globe."

India Inspires brings experts and thinkers from diverse areas onto one platform to share their work and vision. The initial set of videos are heavily focused on tackling key controversial issues where Western occidentalism and the modern media have dominated the Indian narrative with negative misinformation. The video medium has a marvelous effect of bringing some experts' entire life work on a subject into a one-hour summary.

The talk by famed scientist, mathematician and polymath Dr. C. K. Raju on *The Tale of Two Calendars* is a must see by anyone interested in the issue of time, astrology, calendars and the differences between Indian calendars and the Julian calendar. In Dr. David Frawley's videos on *The Myth of Aryan Invasion in India*—beginning with the earlier hegemonic views of the British and Germans—he exposes and dismantles the Aryan Invasion theory as a myth. It is a useful video for any viewer who has wondered about the still pervasive notion that much of India's culture was imposed by ancient invaders from the North. His piece on *The Right and Left in India*, is humorous and at the same time an eye-opener, lending understanding to why some Indians tend to denigrate their own cultural heritage. *India Inspires* is not afraid of controversial issues. View, for example, Dr. Bharat Gupt's talk titled *Hindu View on Homosexuality*. Viewers will likely take away something useful from every India Inspires video. Our one suggestion is that we wish they would add new resources more often.

Finally, a channel for the truth about India: *Visit the web sites at indiainspires.org and youtube.com/IndiaInspires.org*

On a call: *Rebekah Carter of Montrose leads children in singing at a vacation Bible School event in Kannada*

EVANGELISM

Mission Tactics Exposed

IN AN AUGUST, 2017, ARTICLE titled "First Mission Trip to India," the *Fort Madison Daily Democrat* revealed candid Christian ideas about the Indian Hindu community and how they can be converted to Christianity.

Rebekah Carter, a 2015 Central Lee graduate and a student at Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa, went on a three-week mission trip during the summer with a recent graduate from the college, Renee Boswell, and her mother, Becca. They went to Kannada, in the southern part of India, where Renee's father is a pastor.

In the article this young missionary revealed that the couple they were working with had been abusing tourist visas in India for over 30 years and using their stay to evangelize, which goes against the tourist visa policy.

Another aspect of the mission work is using humanitarian services as a way to preach the gospel and convert. From the article, "The majority of the team did medical camps at various villages. While (the others) were giving medical treatment, we were giving spiritual treatment," Carter said." This is evangelism hiding behind the cloak of humanitarian service.

The phenomenon of American students going on short-term mission trips to India has grown rapidly over the last 2-3 decades. Some Christian groups estimate that short-term missions across the world attract over 2 million participants each year from America alone.

Where do these students go? Most of them go to countries located in what's known as the 10/40 Window—a rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude. The 10/40 Window, a term used by the hardline Christian "Joshua Project," is also called "The Resistant Belt" and includes the majority of the world's Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims.

TOP TO BOTTOM: INDIAINSPIRES.ORG; DAILYDEMOCRAT.COM

NEPAL

Every Dog Will Have His Day

On October 18, the second day of the festival of Tihar (as Diwali is called here), family, working and stray dogs alike across Nepal were devoutly worshiped by grateful humans. It is called Kukur Tihar, or Dog Day, when the pets are garlanded, decorated with kumkum, honored with an arati lamp and fed their favorite treats.

At Central Dog Training School in Kathmandu the dogs were given with garlands and medals for their special contributions in providing security and solving cases. "The dogs have contributed greatly to the investigations," Dr. Deuti Gurung, the Superintendent of Nepal police told reporters.

Among the explanations of the festival are that is in honor of Samara, the mother of dogs, who in the *Rig Veda* assists Indra by retrieving stolen cattle. It is also said to honor Shvan the dog who accompanies Shiva in His form as Bhairava, the protector. Some say the dog is the guardian and messenger of Lord Yama.

Gratitude: *Handlers at Kathmandu's police dog school offer flowers to one of their 80 dogs in training*

FOOD & LIFESTYLE

Fast Food Goes Veggie

Amy's Drive Thru is America's first vegetarian, organic, gluten-free-optional fast-food restaurant. Just off Exit 484A on 101 North through Rohnert Park, California, it stands right alongside the fast-food giants Burger King and Taco Bell. Since opening in 2015, the company has doubled revenue and plans on taking on a new location south of the 101 in Corte Madera in 2018. Amy's Director of Operations plans to open locations all across the country. This speaks volumes about America's paradigm shift towards healthy and local eating.

Amy's environment-friendly business model is not limited to the solar-powered drive-through and recyclable tableware. Ingredients are mostly local, organic produce. This is slightly more expensive, but it's what Amy's customers have come for. The company makes little to no profit on its gluten-free options like pizza, but the owners feel it's their duty to provide a service for those who don't have good options.

The kitchen at Amy's is divided into thirds, with vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free dishes all prepared separately so as not to cross-contaminate. Instead of the standard 15 employees per outpost, Amy's employs over 90, because it takes more people to prepare the artisanal food. Low-cost franchises like Burger King are built for efficient delivery of frozen foods made somewhere else and shipped in. Menus in one of those chains don't offer specialization. A "gluten-free burger," for instance, is simply a burger wrapped in a lettuce leaf—not in a gluten-free bun. But America is clearly changing and headed in a different direction—towards Amy's.

To your health: *Amy's two year-old craft fast-food house sits pleasantly off California's highway 101 and continues to dominate*

GLOBAL DHARMA

THE FAMOUS SYDNEY OPERA house has lit up its sails for the fourth year in a row in celebration of Diwali. The festival has significance to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains, and is celebrated globally by Indian and South Asian communities. It commemorates the triumph of light over darkness, good overcoming evil.

IN OCTOBER, 2017, THE K. CHANDRASEKHAR Rao government in Telangana allotted US$274 million to develop Yadadri, a centuries-old hill temple with 11 acres consisting of seven domes, in a bid to build something on the lines of Tirumala's Tirupati temple in the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh. This will also include a 100-foot main dome, and 1,400-acre tourist facilities comprising cottages, multilevel parking and housing for temple priests. Five hundred sculptors have been hired for the construction, which is expected to be completed in 2019.

Global Dharma news provided by

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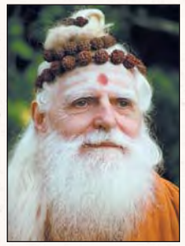

Hinduism Today was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus 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
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Assistant Editors: Sadhaka Jayanatha, Yogi Rajanatha
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. *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 & Ashwinee Ragoonanan. *Printer:* Quad/Graphics, Waseca, Minnesota.

IN MY OPINION

Safeguarding Dharma

How we can benefit from adhering to the foundational religious principles of our lives

BY VAIDYANATHAN SUBRAMANIAM

Our shastras declare that of the millions of living species, only humans have the inherent capability of performing their dharma as a means to attain moksha. It is indeed a rare opportunity to be born as a human being, and it is even rarer to have the drive to adhere to one's natural path.

Dharma stems from the Sanskrit root *dhru*, which means "that which is upheld," meaning the universal law. This law is eternal; hence, the way of life that follows this law as laid down by Vedic literature is called Sanatana Dharma, the eternal path. The word *dharma* is so esoteric in nature that a truly equivalent anglicized word does not exist. Is dharma only about doing one's duty to one's self, family and society, or is the meaning even deeper? How can Hindus ensure that dharmic values are instilled and propagated in our communities, thereby helping to create harmony between people and with other species?

A good way to start fulfilling dharma is by visiting a temple regularly to interface with the Gods. Lord Ganesha is especially good at helping people understand their role in life. Many temples offer more than just worship, also serving as a center for our sacred arts—their very construction having been guided by our *Agamas*. Such temples imbue the aura of visitors with positive energy.

But it isn't enough that we simply visit temples to enjoy their inner peace and bliss. We must also contribute to their welfare. We Hindus have an innate responsibility to proactively maintain our temples. Devotees have many options. They can form groups to take up various facets of upkeep, such as cleaning and washing the premises, ensuring that required articles for the day's puja are available, making donations to the temple kitchens and other such programs, organizing bhajans and prayer groups, etc. Willingly contributing one's services to the temple fosters dharmic responsibility and the sense of belonging to a community.

An important but often ignored religious aspect among Hindus is the wearing of kumkum on the forehead, between the eyebrows. This mark confers important spiritual benefits. It is the point where the ajna chakra resides. This chakra is the seat of wisdom, and applying kumkum on this chakra helps us to channel our cosmic energies and ward off unwanted thoughts and distractions. Wearing a tilak, or forehead mark, also proclaims one's beliefs. Children should be taught the importance of the tilak, and parents and elders should emphasize that it is a mark of distinction. Even in school or at work, it should be worn with pride, knowing that our peers will always respect us if we respect ourselves.

It is paramount that children be taught the tenets of dharma right from a young age, as it will help them blossom into responsible adults. Our scriptures should be present in every household, and at least one sh loka taught to children before they begin each day. This will go a long way in creating leaders of tomorrow and good human beings.

These and other dharmic practices have esoteric and practical relevance. The more one seeks to understand them, the more they reveal. Today our traditions seem to be taking a back seat. However, we should remember that our Vedic path is eternal. With no beginning or end, it only culminates in the Supreme. Our challenge is not so much from hostile external forces as it is from ourselves, who must awaken and arise to realize the greatness of our religion and what it has taught the world. As Swami Vivekananda said, "It is the duty of all to support and side with dharma." Let us strive to awaken ourselves spiritually and continue to carry the bastion of Vedic knowledge and hand it over with utmost care to the next generation.

Vaidyanathan Subramaniam, 30, *is a cellular and molecular biologist living in Bengaluru, India, with a penchant for understanding and propagating Vedic dharma. Email:* naren_parker87@live.com

PUBLISHER'S DESK

Five Suggestions for SBNRs

Select a rewarding spiritual path from Hinduism's banquet of choices; then follow it with faith and persistence

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IN RECENT DECADES, THE GROUP OF individuals who identify themselves as "Spiritual But Not Religious" (SBNR) has grown dramatically. In our July, 2017, issue, author Lauren Valentino shared that 20 percent of people in the United States identify as SBNR. Among young people in the US, an amazing 62 percent consider themselves spiritual but not religious. Wikipedia offers a crisp definition: "A life stance of spirituality that takes issue with organized religion as the sole or most valuable means of furthering spiritual growth. Spirituality places an emphasis upon the well-being of the 'mind-body-spirit,' so holistic activities such as tai chi, reiki, and yoga are common within the SBNR movement."

Reasons for identifying as SBNR vary widely, but one common report is that the religion of one's family does not lead to experiencing higher consciousness, one's innate spirituality and oneness with God as omnipresent, loving consciousness. In fact, the born-into religion may be overtly opposed to such pursuits. Therefore, when there is a profound personal interest in spirituality, it is logical to disassociate from such religions.

The fact is, nineteen million young Americans designated as SBNR adhere to beliefs and practices, often unknowingly, that resemble Hinduism. This should come as no surprise, considering the West's fascination with India's ancient teachings and the reality that in Hinduism there is virtually no division between religion and spirituality.

Hinduism has its own growing group of young SBNRs. I have met quite a few, most in their twenties. Though they understand that Hinduism has many spiritual paths within it, they have decided not to participate in the religious ceremonies held in Hindu temples, as they see no value in doing so. They still hold dearly the desire to be a spiritual person. During satsang at a well-to-do home, a young man asked, "I don't enjoy attending the temple and therefore don't go. Is that all right?" I told him, yes, that is fine. I, like my guru, encourage Hindus to attend the temple once a week, but there are many good Hindus who do not do so. Temple worship is not the only way to pursue spirituality in our faith. My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave a brilliant answer to this question: "Hinduism is a religion more of experience than of doctrine. It prefers to say to its followers, 'This is the nature of Truth, and these are the means by which that Truth may be realized. Here are the traditions which have withstood time and proved most effective. Now you may test them in your own life, prove them to yourself. And we will help as we can.' Hinduism will never say, 'You must do or believe thusly or be condemned.'"

To SBNRs seriously aspiring to make spiritual progress in this lifetime by following the Hindu approach, I offer five suggestions.

1) Study Existing Spiritual Literature

A common SBNR approach is to go it alone, without studying what others have experienced in the past. I advise against this tactic. Spirituality is like any field of knowledge. We can make greater progress if we understand and benefit from what others have accomplished rather than trying to figure out everything on our own. Delve deeply into the well of Hindu teachings, which my guru praised as follows: "The storehouse of religious revelations in Hinduism cannot be reckoned. I know of its equal nowhere. It contains the entire system of yoga, of meditation and contemplation and Self Realization. Nowhere else is there such insightful revelation of the inner bodies of man, the subtle pranas and the chakras, or psychic centers within the nerve system. Inner states of superconsciousness are explored and mapped fully in Hinduism, from the clear white light to the sights and sounds which flood the awakened inner consciousness of man." Ignoring these treasures would definitely limit the spiritual progress one could make.

2) Choose One System and Stick with It

After studying the literature of spirituality, choose one system and follow it with determination. We can compare this to taking up Indian classical dance. Eight forms are broadly acknowledged: Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Kathakali, Sattriya, Manipuri and Mohiniyattam. For an aspiring dance student, the greatest progress would be made by choosing and pursuing one system rather than dabbling in two, three or four at the same time.

3) Study with a Qualified Teacher

A third suggestion is to choose a guru who is accomplished in the system you have chosen. When I am asked, "Is a guru necessary?" I often reply by asking: "Do you need a teacher to learn to sing devotional songs?" I then answer by saying, "Anyone can learn to sing simple devotional bhajans without a teacher. However, if you want to master the more difficult Hindu classical songs, a teacher is definitely needed." By keeping a healthy diet, meditating, worshiping regularly and reading scripture you can make spiritual progress on your own. But if you want to maximize your progress in this lifetime, you need a teacher. Here are five benefits of having a guru.

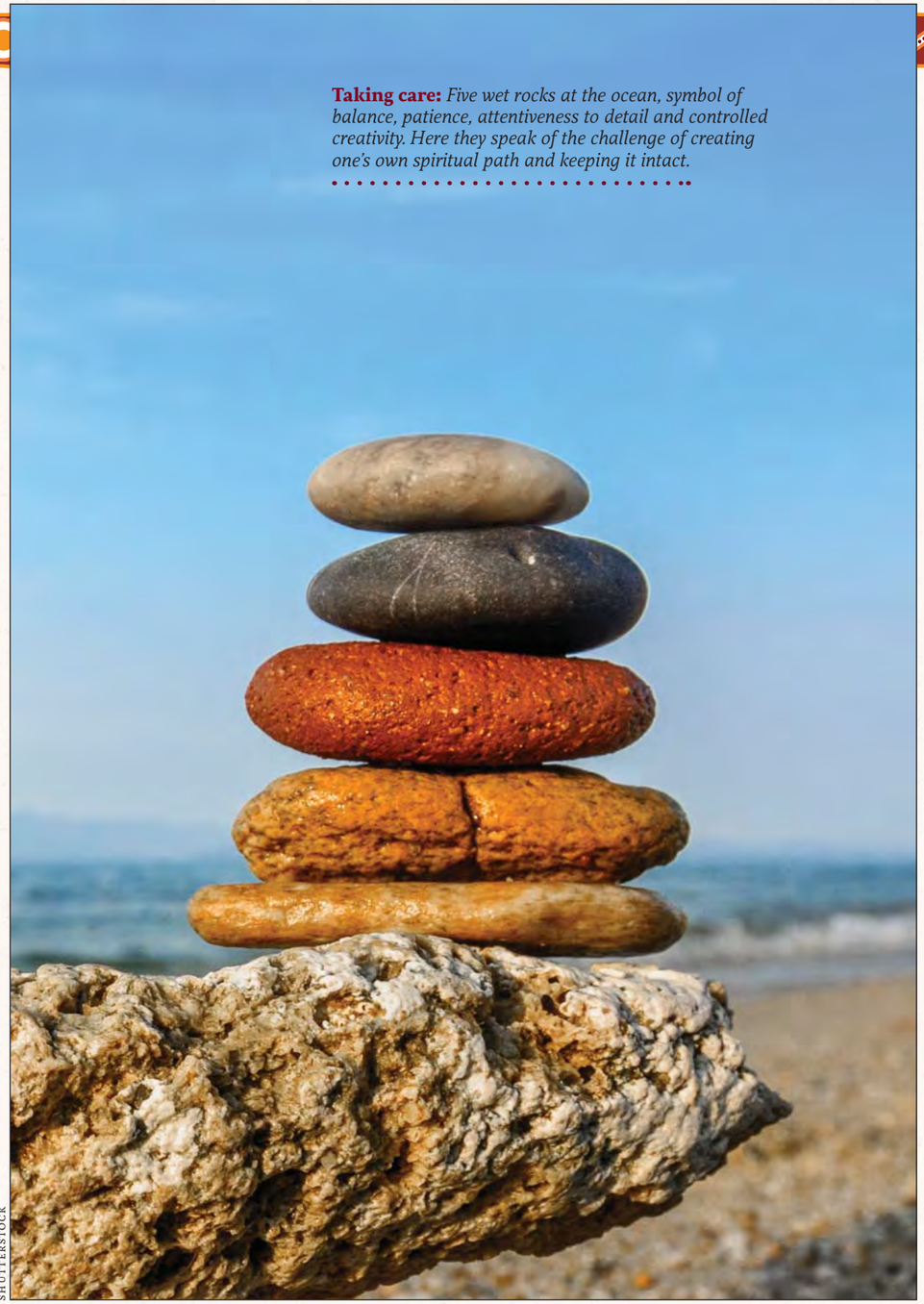
First, the guru provides encouragement to continue to strive and move forward, even through difficult times. As our guide, he helps us achieve more than we could otherwise.

Second, the guru helps us develop a spiritual self-concept. Whatever self concept we bring to him—be it one of self doubt or one of great pride—the guru helps us move beyond it and truly identify ourself as a divine being.

Third, by voicing the ancient truths, the guru provides personal, living insights that surpass the understanding one acquires by reading books.

Fourth, the guru helps us improve our behavior through focusing on our weakest areas as well as giving us guidelines as to how we should behave, how we should relate to the world.

Fifth, to advanced students, he or she provides initiation, called diksha, to quicken unfoldment and bring divine blessings into one's life.



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Taking care: *Five wet rocks at the ocean, symbol of balance, patience, attentiveness to detail and controlled creativity. Here they speak of the challenge of creating one's own spiritual path and keeping it intact.*

4) Practice Daily

What is a one word answer to the question "Can you name the quality needed to become a good dancer?" Everyone I ask knows the answer: practice! To become an excellent dancer, you must practice every day. The spiritual journey to moksha is the same. We move forward through practice, daily practice, steady practice.

I encourage anyone serious about the path to establish an altar in their home, ideally in a special room used only for sacred activities. Make this your refuge, a portal to the within of yourself, your place for spiritual reading, chanting, singing, japa, meditation and puja. Hold a vigil every day, even if it is just ten minutes. An ideal session is half an hour and early morning is the best time.

5) Cultivate Devotion

For those uncomfortable with the idea of religion, I would say it is important to distinguish between religion in the sense of traditional ceremonies held in a temple, church or other religious building, and the concept of religiosity—which is one's personal devotion to the Divine, however you define that Holiness. In the broadest sense, devotion is a deep reverence for everything that exists, an abiding appreciation, veneration and awe. My Gurudeva explained, "When you have the energy of bhakti, of love, flowing through your body, meditation is easy. ... The bhakti experience takes the pranas into the higher chakras from the lower chakras."

Devotion plays an important role in many systems of spiritual discipline. For example, in Patajanli's classical yoga, cultivating devotion to God, called *Ishvara pranidhana,* plays a vital role in overcoming wrong cognitions and achieving the deepest level of meditation. In Hinduism, devotion to God can be cultivated privately at home through singing, chanting and devotional ceremonies. It can also be strengthened by sharing these activities with other devotees. There is no requirement that these practices be done in a temple.

Conclusion

The challenge for the SBNR is to make significant spiritual progress without traditional guidelines. The key is to craft your own systematic approach based on a proven spiritual path. And remember, enjoy the journey!

LETTERS

An Invaluable Resource

This is in grateful appreciation of your magazine for all it has done to enhance the scope of my understanding. When I initially began to explore Sanatana Dharma and seriously consider that it might be my path, I searched every bit of available information. When I found this magazine, I was ecstatic. There is so much to like and learn. Initially, I enjoyed reading it online; and the one article that really hooked me was the July/August/September, 2012, story on the five powers of Siva, which were thoroughly explained and depicted in various forms, giving deeper insight into how we might worship.

Other helpful and spiritually enhancing stories were "Understanding the Layers of Existence" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2017), "How the Major Religions View God, Soul and World" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2015) and "Anger Management,"with information from the *Tirukural,* (Apr/May/Jun, 2014), just to name a few.

Each edition of this magazine contains relevant educational articles for those of us who want to know more about all aspects of our spiritual and cultural path. In many ways Hindu culture and spirituality entwine so that understanding and appreciating one helps us fathom the other. HINDUISM TODAY really gets this, and integrates aspects of both, presenting them beautifully to both East and West as a complete package. Thanks to this magazine, I feel more than superficially connected to my ethnic Hindu family.

One of the practices I note regarding Christianity is the plethora of educational offering,s such as Bible study classes and scriptural discussion groups. I am sorry there aren't many such opportunities for Hindus in the West. HINDUISM TODAY helps to fill this gap and offers me and others of my ilk informative explanations to enhance understanding of the deeper aspects of our spirituality.

Each quarter I eagerly await my mailed copy and save each one for future reference. I have listed this magazine on my blog, the-invisiblehindu.com, as an invaluable resource. Please keep up the good work, and thank you for such a superb publication.

JON BANKS
SURPRISE, ARIZONA, US
JBANKS1212@HOTMAIL.COM

Mandukya Upanishad

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your article, "The Beginning and the End of All Beingness" (October/November/December, 2017). The *Mandukya Upanishad,* which the article addresses, has always been one of my favorites. This Upanishad states, "*Mandukya* alone is sufficient for an aspirant to reach liberation." The most remarkable thing about the *Mandukya Upanishad* is that it examines life in its entirety, as opposed to a run-of-the-mill philosophy that covers only the waking state of a person. The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes the four states of consciousness, namely, wakefulness, dreaming, dreamless sleep and transcendental consciousness.

The model provided by *Mandukya Upanishad* correlates well with the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Wakefulness corresponds to a person's gross body, which in turn corresponds to the "food sheath" plus the "vital air" sheath, as mentioned in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* in the section on the five bodily sheaths, or *panchakosha*. Dreaming corresponds to a person's subtle body, which in turn corresponds to the mental sheath plus the intellectual/emotional sheath, as cited in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Dreamless sleep corresponds to a person's causal body, which corresponds to the bliss sheath. Transcendental consciousness corresponds to *Atman* or the Supreme Self.

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA
ALBANY, CALIFORNIA, US
PRADEEPSCOOL@HOTMAIL.COM

Our Sacred Cows

In Hinduism, cows are worshiped as a mother. They are consider as Lakshmi, the Goddess that controls this universe through Her Shakti, the powerful feminine element. Many Hindu households in India consider the cow to be part of their family. These intelligent beings are taken care of from the beginning of their lives to the end. They are loved for their personalities and given elaborate names, treated like humans, and respected for the resources they provide.

A zebu cow's milk is believed to be *sattvic* and purifying. Hundreds of different foods like ghee (clarified butter) are prepared from this pure milk she provides. The ghee is said to enhance memory, alleviate arthritis and disorders in the eyes, and is known to contain various antibacterial and antiviral properties. Cow dung is used as a fertilizer rich in minerals, and as fuel for fires and a disinfectant in many homes. Cow urine is used for medicinal purposes because it has amazing germicidal powers.

The ancient verses of *Rig Veda* consider cattle among the most important animals. In *Rig Veda* 3.33.1, cows figure frequently as symbols of wealth and are compared with river goddesses: "Like two bright mother cows who lick their young, Vipas and Sutudri rush forth with their waters." The importance of the cow is not stressed over other animals; rather it is to show that the cow—because of is amazing gifts—is a central representation of the kind of compassion we must show to all living beings. It is through the cow we perceive the beauty of all animals and of all creation.

RAKHI WADHWANI
MAHARASHTRA, INDIA
RAKHI.R.WADHWANI@GMAIL.COM

An Empty Nest

I've found Vatsala Sperling's article in the July/August/September, 2017 issue of HINDUISM TODAY to be not only accurate to life, but also superbly written. My wife and I have been retired from our full-time, paid teaching positions since 1997. Our son and grandchildren are grown and have gone to different places, though we do remember and contact them often. We ourselves have never had a feeling of an empty nest. For five years we offered a voluntary service to Maharishi University, where we were fully engaged in promoting Hindu festivals in addition to other work there. For the last ten years or so we have been continuously engaged in reading, writing, thinking and lecturing about Hindu dharma. As Vatsala suggests, with such an active life there is no vacant time to sit around, feeling lost within an empty nest. As a result of our activities, we continue to receive commendations and encouragement, along with a knowing that we are marching forward on our eternal road of spiritual development.

PRABHAKAR JOSHI
LIBERTYVILLE, ILLINOIS, US
JOSHIPPS@HOTMAIL.COM

Gratitude from Malaysia

HINDUISM TODAY publisher Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami's article in the October/November/December, 2017 issue entitled "One God, Many Divinities" was most enlightening and a joy to read. I also enjoyed the "In My Opinion" piece by Shawn Binda. I like his approach of leveraging YouTube to awaken pride in young Hindus and his active community involvement in teaching youth.

I would also like to mention Himalayan Academy's recent publication, *Path to Siva, A Catechism For Youth,* which is based on Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's Master Course Trilogy. I think this book is a must for every family, in order that we may pass our traditions on to the next generation, especially given the ever growing diaspora worldwide.

As I write, Deepavali celebrations and accompanying Skanda Shashti observances are taking place at Murugan temples worldwide. I hope that HINDUISM TODAY will have special coverage on the significance of this week—maybe discussing devotees' fasts and personal disciplines which culminate in chariot processions and worship.

Kantha Swamy Temple in Scott Road, Kuala Lumpur, has mounted annual celebrations, and one of their elders, Dr Thilagawathy, has video-recorded their significance in English, which is worthy of viewing. Like the Arupadai Veedu temples of Tamil Nadu, Murugan temples here are holding elaborate celebrations. For instance, the Sri Palanimalai Murugan Temple is organizing discourses on the Kantha Puranam by Professor Meenachi Sundram of Madurai University, South India. Also, Kalamandapam Hall is holding a seminar with Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami to encourage future Hindu leaders. These are but a few examples of how communities can inform and educate. All the best. I hope everyone gets to read HINDUISM TODAY.

S.N.RAJAN
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
SN.SNRAJAN@GMAIL.COM

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:
Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: **(808) 822-4351**
or visit: **www.hinduismtoday.com/letters**

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

"I Am in Awe to Have Found this Teaching"

How to help searching souls find their way forward

"HOW DID YOU COME TO SUPPORT HINDUISM TODAY so devotedly?" we asked Aran Sambandar of Walnut Creek, California. To answer, he went back to his youth, when he had several powerful inner experiences and visions—starting at age 10. "They filled me with wonder. I felt fortunate, but also insecure. I had no idea what they meant. Why was I was so different? What would people say if they knew? Who was I?

"I never dared speak of that until 1967, when, at age 25, I trusted someone enough to open up to and ask for guidance. This was Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY. He answered my deepest questions, and said my experiences were not strange at all. They were well known signposts along Sanatana Dharma, the eternal path to illumination. Hinduism understood all that had happened to me. It knew who I was and what I should do next. I was overjoyed to realize I'd inwardly been a Hindu all along. I'm in awe to have found this teaching."

Aran became a Hindu officially, changed his name, was a monk for several years, lived and pilgrimaged in India for a time, then taught school in the US until recently, when he retired. His personal life has been, and continues to be today, one of reclusion, meditation, contemplation, and other daily sadhanas, including the yogas and mental disciplines he learned in the monastery. "I've put everything into these teachings and practices. It's my life."

All the while, Aran has generously supported HINDUISM TODAY and its Production Fund. "It is vitally important to support this fund to keep the magazine prospering and assure its longevity. The world needs to know Hinduism's ability to enrich life, its kindness and wisdom. HINDUISM TODAY, in print and digital versions, is uniquely qualified to do justice to the subject. Being founded by a great mystic, it carries immense spiritual power that ever points toward the path to realization. I like to imagine that my gift makes the teachings more widely available, reaching people at a delicate juncture, perhaps, where they need the guidance to go confidently forward as I once did. I see them finding whatever they may be thirsting for, among those blessed pages."

Aran Sambandar: *"In one magic moment, HINDUISM TODAY can inspire people to find their way forward."*

You can donate to the Production Fund at www.hheonline.org/donate_pf
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QUOTES & QUIPS

Questioner: How are we to treat others? Ramana Maharishi: There are no others.

Ramana Maharishi

The concept of shakti is indivisibly connected with Mother worship. Generally the worship of Durga, Kali, Sarasvati and other Goddesses is considered Shakti worship. But the worship of Narayana, Shiva, Ganesha and other Gods, too, is the worship of Shakti Herself. This is because in the use of all these there is a superimposition of the creation, preservation and destruction aspects of Shakti either fully or partially. **Swami Prabhavananda** (1893–1976), *monk of the RK Mission*

Many have died; you also will die. The drum of death is being beaten. The world has fallen in love with a dream. Only sayings of the wise will remain. **Kabir**, *from the* Bijak, *1440*

The science which teaches arts and handicrafts is merely science for the gaining of a living; but the science which teaches deliverance from worldly existence, is not that the true science? *Prajnadanda (The Staff of Wisdom), attributed to* **Nagarjuna**, *150 bce*

What is the purpose or goal of living? Getting rid of all limitations. **Swami Advaitananda**, *resident Acharya of Chinmaya Mission*

The highest truth cannot be put into words. Therefore the greatest teacher has nothing to say. He simply gives himself in service and never worries. **Lao Tzu**

Say not, "This poor man's hunger is a heaven-sent doom." To the well-fed, too, comes death in many forms. Yet the wealth of the generous giver never dwindles, while he who refuses to give will evoke no pity. *Rig Veda 10.117.1, "In Praise of a Generous Giver"*

Spirituality is not to be learned by flight from the world, or by running away from things, or by turning solitary. Rather, we must learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomsoever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there. **Meister Eckhart** (1260–1328), *German philosopher*

The tiller of the soil and the grocer in the shop of India may be uneducated and often wholly illiterate, but even they, while tilling the ground, driving a bullock cart or resting after the work of the day, will be singing songs full of mystical meaning, and for the moment transporting themselves to regions beyond the touch of material gains and comfort. **Surendranath Dasgupta** (1887–1952), *scholar of Sanskrit and philosophy*

Such is the all-round development of the human psyche offered by philosophy. It balances mystical intuiting by logical thinking, religious belief by critical reflection, idealistic devotion by practical service. **Paul Brunton** (1898–1981), *British mystic & author*

Sivan is hiding in our mind like fire in firewood, like ghee drawn from good milk and the brilliance in a large gem. He will appear before us to grant His vision if we vigorously churn with the churning rope of love fixed to the stick of clear discernment. **Saint Appar**, *7th century, Tirumurai 5.90*

Foreign should not be defined in geographical terms. Then it would have no meaning except territorial or tribal patriotism. To me that alone is foreign which is foreign to truth, foreign to atman. **Ram Swarup** (1920–1998), *avant garde Hindu thinker and author*

The challenge with moksha is to make life's ultimate spiritual attainment relevant to day-to-day family life. While the destination may be distant, the journey toward it is already happening, whether we recognize it or not. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami,** *publisher of Hinduism Today*

As a thermometer reacts to heat and cold, so does the kundalini when tampered with by the novice under the guidance of commercialization. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of Hinduism Today*

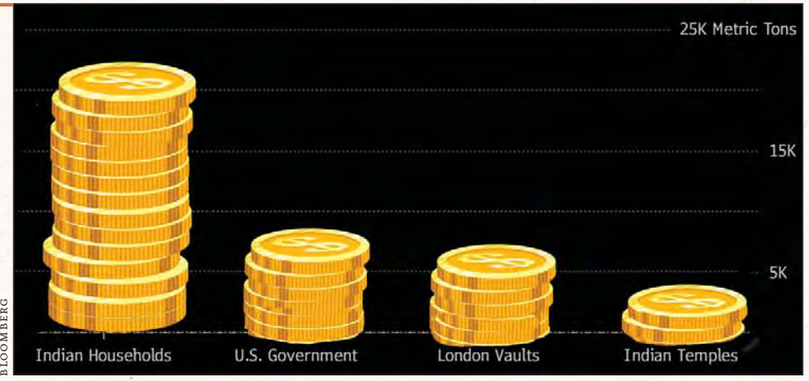
SPEEDBUMP

DID YOU KNOW?

India's Gold Rush

A CHART RELEASED IN 2017 FROM THE London Bullion Market Association revealed that Indian homes contain almost $1 trillion worth of gold, roughly $1,000 for every man, woman and child in the country. This is more than the next two largest deposits combined: the U.S. government repository and all of the bullion in London. According to the World Gold Council, India is the second largest jewelry market in the world with 40% of the country's demand coming from the South. For the last seven years, India's gold consumption has been consistent. Researchers report that 79% of consumers believe gold will never lose its value in the long term.

Gold is deeply rooted in Indian culture, with purchases driven by tradition, festivals and other important family and societal occasions. In a 2014 ice360.in survey, the two most important motives for buying gold were gifting (46%) and a child's future wedding (27%). A TNS consumer research study in 2016 identified weddings (24%), birthdays (15%) and religious festivals (12%) as being the top three purchase occasions in India. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that between 40 and 50 percent of gold purchases in India—in jewelry or bars and coins—are for marriages, and that gold jewelry demand tends to peak in the run up to marriage season.



BLOOMBERG

Global research agency Kadence reports from a 2013–14 study: when offered Rs50,000 for a discretionary purchase, 42% of consumers over the age of 34 in urban India said they would buy gold jewelry. This dropped to 33% for millennials between 18 and 33. The comparable figure for US millennials is just 6 percent .

BASICS

What Is Vira Saivism?

From Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's Dancing with Siva

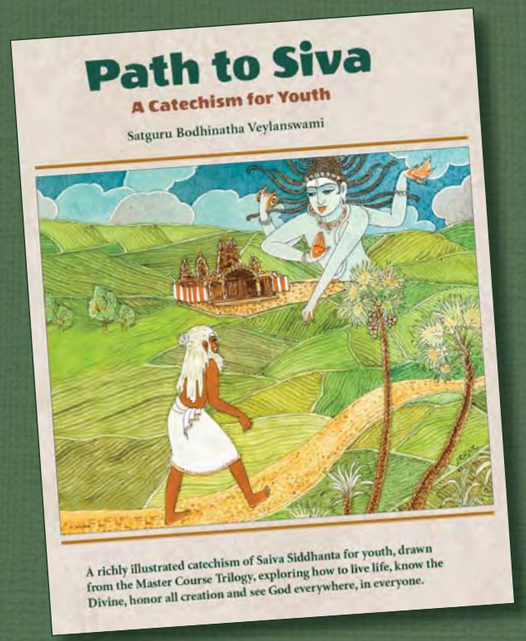
VIRA SAIVISM IS ONE OF THE MOST dynamic of modern-day Saivite schools. It was made popular by the remarkable South Indian brahmin Sri Basavanna (1105–1167). Adherents trace the roots of their faith back to the ṛishis of ancient times. *Vira*, "heroic," Saivites are also known as *Lingayats*, "bearers of the Linga."

All members are to constantly wear a Linga encased in a pendant around the neck. Of this practice, Thavathiru Santalinga Ramasamy of Coimbatore said, "I can say that Vira Saiva worship is the best form of worship because Sivalinga is worn on our body and it unites the soul with the Omnipresence. We are always in touch with Lord Siva, without even a few seconds break." Followers are also called *Lingavantas* and *Sivasaraṇas.*

In the centuries following the sect's reform, Vira Saivism gradually reabsorbed much of what Basavanna had rejected. Thus emerged temple worship, certain traditions of ritual purity, giving gifts to gurus, and the stratification of society, headed up by two large hierarchical orders of *jangamas*—resulting in the institutionalization of the crucial guru-disciple relationship, which by Vira Saiva precept should be very personal. Vira Saivites generally regard their faith as a distinct and independent religion. Vira Saiva saint Renukacharya said, "Like water placed in water, fire in fire, the soul that becomes mingled in the Supreme Brahman is not seen as distinct."

HINDUISM TODAY

God in one's palm: *A devotee has offered rice to a miniscule Sivalinga in his hand while Nandi the bull, cast in the man's ring, looks on devotedly.*



Path to Siva

A CATECHISM FOR YOUTH

Sixty-eight lessons based on Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's Master Course Trilogy for passing our tradition on to the next generation, and the next...

1 Who Am I and Where Did I Come from?

A young woman reflects on one of life's most profound questions. The answer may take her an entire lifetime to find, but that answer is the most important discovery she or any of us will ever make.

ALL IMAGES ©SIVAYOGA SELLES OTHAYOTH (ELATO)

SEEKERS ASK "WHO AM I AND WHERE DID I COME FROM?" THEY inwardly know they are more than just another person with a particular name who was born in a certain place. They sense that they are more than their body, mind and emotions. They want to understand, "Did I exist before I was born? Will I exist after death?" The answer given in Saivite Hinduism is that we are each a divine soul on a wondrous journey. We are an immortal body of light that has lived many lives, had many bodies and personalities. Gurudeva explained, "When the soul has had enough experience, it naturally seeks to be liberated, to unravel the bonds. That begins the most wonderful process in the world as the seeker steps for the first time onto the spiritual path. Of course, the whole time, through all those births and lives and deaths, the soul was undergoing a spiritual evolution, but unconsciously. Now it seeks to know God consciously." Our soul was created by God Siva out of Himself, like sparks flying forth from a fire. Like the sparks and the fire, we are both the same and different from Siva, our source. We live within His boundless creation, this unthinkably vast cosmos which is filled with His divine presence. Siva is the life energy in the birds, in the fish and in the animals. His being flows through all we see and experience. Our Vedic rishis have assured us that "God is the Life of our life." We are all beautiful children of God Siva. Deep within, we are one with Him this very moment. We came from God, live in God and are evolving into complete unity with God. Siva created each of us in a perfect state, but we have to discover that perfection within us to be whole. By seeing the life energy in all creatures and in all people, we are seeing God Siva in action. By drawing close to God, we draw nearer to our immortal soul. Siva is all and within all.

GURUDEVA: When we realize that we have come from Siva, the way back to Siva is clearly defined. That is half the battle, to realize we came from Siva, live in Siva and are returning to Siva. Knowing only this much makes the path clear and impels us to return to Him, to our Source, to our Self.

24 What's the Value of Spiritual Friends?

Five friends take a selfie to share online. Friends are important and worth cultivating. They encourage our ideals and goals in life. They provide fun & keep us safe from the world's negative forces.

AS SAIVITE HINDUS, WE KNOW this life is precious and are thankful for it every moment of every day. Appreciating the gift of life makes us want to do the best we can, improve our character, serve others and live a spiritual life. Knowing life's purpose, we hold firmly to dharma. Like a marathon runner, we must stay on the course to finish the race. Having good, religious friends helps us stay on the path. If we mix with a worldly crowd, we may lose our way. The *Tirukural* tells us, "As water changes according to the soil through which it flows, so a man assimilates the character of his associates." Friends who are good Hindus will help you most of all. If you befriend a person who is dishonest or mean, his example will lead you into trouble. If you befriend someone who studies hard and is kind and helpful, their example will inspire and uplift you. Some people poke fun at religion or make mischief and resist authority. They do not know the real purpose of life. They waste their time and cause pain to others. Wise teachers advise us to be nice to everyone, but make close friends only with those who will help build good character and set positive patterns for the future. The *Tirukural* tells us, "Purity of mind and purity of conduct, these two depend on the purity of a man's companions." Following our religious path is made easier when we are part of a satsang group with shared values and goals. Such companionship helps keep our sadhana strong, especially during difficult times in life. As Gurudeva often said, "The group helps the individual and the individual helps the group."

GURUDEVA: Make friends with those who are on the path. Be with fine, positive people. Don't be with negative, complaining people who have no relationship to what you are doing on the inside, or who are criticizing you for what you are doing.

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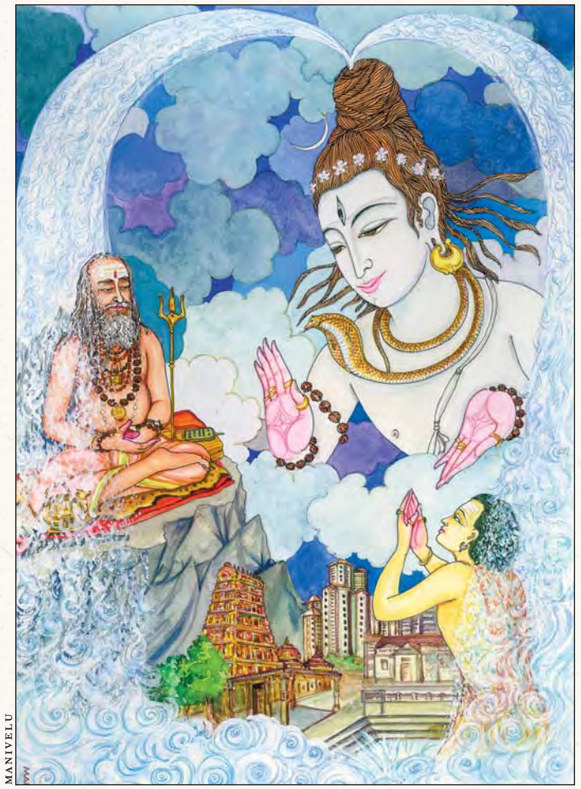
FROM THE UPANISHADS

Knowledge of God, Soul & World Is Eternal

An ongoing dialogue between Lord Siva and Sage Matanga

The following is a free translation of the Matanga Agama, section 6 of 19, *part of an ongoing conversation between Sage Matanga and Lord Siva. In this section Matanga asks about knowledge itself and the argument that it cannot be cognized.*


MANIVELU

THE EXTENT TO WHICH A SOUL CAN OBTAIN RIGHT KNOWLEDGE about God (who is intent on cosmic activity that is governed by a supply of power or sakti)and right knowledge about bound souls and the stockpile of their bonds is yet to be settled. These bound souls, the Lord who puts them under bondage and the bonds themselves are three realities which exist simultaneously. But it is said that knowledge of these three realities should be ascertained through sadhana and logical reflection. Their nature should be fully understood as they are. This accurate knowledge, accumulated through sadhana and reflection, should then be imparted to others. In this way, sage Matanga, being keen on gaining this knowledge, approached Lord Siva.

The Lord responded to the great-souled Matanga: "What has been termed *pasu* (the bound soul) is also referred to as *kshetri* (embodied), *kshetrajna* (knower of the nature of embodiment), *sariri* (possessor of body), *ruddhatma* (the self whose essential power is arrested) and *bhokta* (enjoyer)."

Matanga then commented: "Some venerable thinkers assert that the knowledge gained by the organs (*indriyas*) is in continuous flow, like the water in a river. Being momentary, the knowledge dies, giving rise to more knowledge, like one wave of a river giving way to the next. Such cessation of one knowledge and emergence of another is happening continuously. They say such knowledge does not exist in the soul—that knowledge itself is the soul. Apart from that knowledge, which ends in void, there is no soul. O, Lord, how could it be ascertained through the process of logical reasoning that apart from that knowledge there actually is a soul whose existence is eternal?"

The Supreme Lord answers: "The void at which your knowledge supposedly terminates never occurs. There is no valid proof for the presence of such void, and knowledge of an existence is not gained without proof. It is known clearly through logical reasoning. But, through the same logical reasoning, the absolute absence of an existence (*sunya*) cannot be established, since such a void is non-existent and cannot be perceived. Just as the presence of a cloth cannot be known in a lump of clay through valid reasoning, even so the presence of a void could not be known in an ever-existing object. The capability to cognize God, bonds and karma is never obstructed, since it is eternal; not momentary, as you have proposed, Matanga.

Lord Siva offered further, "If right knowledge of God, the soul's bonds and the soul's accrued karmic history—which has ceased to exist—is effervescent and cognition of it dies with it, how could a person ever cognize that knowledge? Only because of the continuous existence of that knowledge is one able to recollect the past. From one moment to the next moment, the knowledge continues to exist, and along with it cognition of the bonds also continues to exist. Such eternal knowledge is with the soul from the time of birth up to the time of death, and destruction of it never occurs. In spite of this, it is a great wonder that the destruction of such knowledge is observed by you in all situations.

"If these three forms of knowledge are momentary, and if one knowledge dies giving rise to another, is there a lapse of time between the cessation of previous knowledge and the emergence of another? Or is it constant, free from the lapse of time? If there is a lapse of time, then there must be discontinuity in the knowledge-stream. In the latter case, there could be no cognition of the objects already known before, since cognition would also have died. As such, the yogins of your system could never attain liberation, since they could not accrue knowledge of the disciplines laid down for the fulfillment of yoga. Because of the proposed break in knowledge, a person could not know the ordained disciplines.

"However, if there is no lapse of time between the cessation and the emergence and it is without interruption, then it becomes clear that the knowledge is not momentary but only eternal."

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas, Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Matanga Agama*.

HINDUISM
South African Style

Circumambulating the Benoni Siva Alayam temple during Thai Pusam festival, a devotee performs a severe form of kavadi, pulling Lord Murugan's chariot by chains hooked to the skin of his back

13 photographers

By Ramalingum Moodley
South Africa

The tallest known ardhanarishvara (Siva-Shakti) murti in the southern hemisphere, and perhaps in the entire world, stands proudly at the Siva Alayam temple in Benoni, a town on the East Rand in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The 52-foot-tall murti was built on a 20-foot base which contains a meditation room. The Deity is clearly visible from incoming airplanes landing at the nearby O. R. Tambo International Airport. Join us as we explore the history behind this murti, the coming of Indians to South Africa, the strong Tamil community in Benoni, the development and expansion of the Benoni Siva Alayam temple and the various services provided by the temple and its devotees to the community and to Hindus who pilgrimage from far and wide to attend the temple's powerful Hindu festivals.

silver cloud creations

The First Indian Settlers

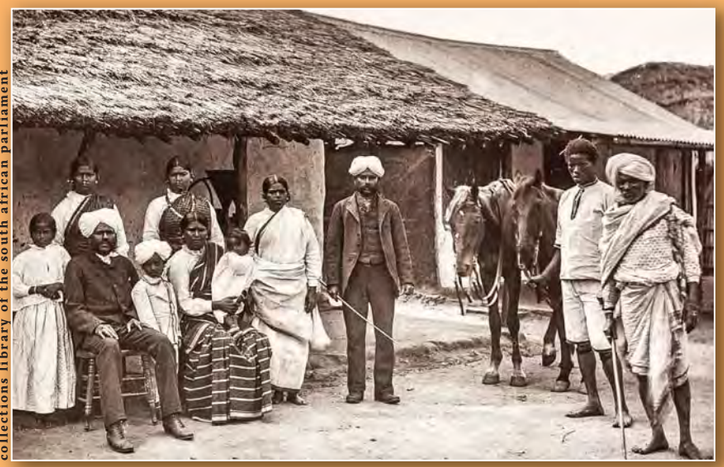
Prior to the founding of the South Africa Union in 1909, the area comprised four separate British colonies: Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River. Natal, now the Kwazulu-Natal province of the Union of South Africa, was formed in 1843. Faced with a shortage of workers to cultivate the newly introduced sugar-cane crop, the Natal government passed the Natal Coolie Law in 1859, permitting Indian nationals to be brought to the colony as indentured laborers. The law stipulated these laborers could return to India after five years, with free passage—or could re-indenture themselves for a further five years, after which they would be allowed to settle permanently in the colony, given crown land and full citizenship rights. Starting in 1860, thousands of Indians were shipped to Natal as indentured laborers, mostly from India's southern ports, to work on the sugar plantations on Natal's tropical coastal belt.

At the time, the newspaper *The Natal Witness* wrote in an editorial: "The ordinary Coolie ... and his family cannot be admitted into close fellowship and union with us and our families. He is introduced for the same reason as mules might be introduced from Montevideo, oxen from Madagascar or sugar machinery from Glasgow. The object for which he is brought is to supply labour and that alone. He is not one of us; he is in every respect an alien; he only comes to perform a certain amount of work, and to return to India...."

These early immigrants endured inhuman treatment, more akin to that of slavery than indentured labor governed by contract. Ferried to South Africa in crowded sailing ships, they were housed in military-style barracks on the sugar estates and worked under terrible conditions. Farming in those early years was very labor intensive, with little mechanization. Ox-drawn plows tilled the fields,

Present and past: *(clockwise from left) The temple's 52-foot Ardhanarishvara statue is clearly visible from planes arriving at the nearby airport; a drone aerial photo of the statue, temple and surrounding school buildings; indentured laborers loading sugar cane in the fields, late 1800s; Indian family in Natal, taken about 1888*

Indians Arrived in 1859 as Indentured Servants



collections library of the south african parliament

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which were then planted, weeded and harvested by hand. Some workers shoveled coal into the steam locomotives that hauled sugar cane out of the fields, others toiled in the mills, and some spent their days in workshops repairing locomotives and farm equipment.

Working in those disciplines, the Indian laborers acquired skills which served them well in subsequent years, farming, mechanics, boiler-making, welding, etc. Those who stayed after ten years became farmers, traders and artisans. Wanting their children to have a better life, and knowing the importance of education, they organized themselves as a community, built schools and hired teachers from India for their children. Once educated, the youth found employment as clerks, bookkeepers, waiters, shop assistants, tailors and in many other professions. It was in 1869 that the Natal Colony saw the first Indian immigrants who paid their own passage—traders, artisans, teachers and shop assistants.

In 1891, to discourage Indians from settling permanently in Natal, the colony revoked the benefits the indentured laborers had been promised—the right to settle permanently, the gift of land and full citizenship rights. The British were alarmed by

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the possibility of a majority Indian citizenship: by 1893 Indians were almost half the non-African population, and by 1904 they outnumbered whites. When their rights in Natal were revoked, many migrated to the northern colonies, lured by the 1884 discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand scarp in what was then the Transvaal Republic. Many of those migrants ended up in the Benoni area.

Benoni, 47 miles east of Johannesburg, was reserved for whites. The Indians migrating from Natal were allowed to live in a designated Indian area called Actonville. The first record we have of the community was the founding in 1947 of the Benoni Tamil School Board (BTSB—see btsb.co.za) by a group of elders. They hired a qualified Tamil-language teacher from South India, as Tamil had till then been taught only by dedicated community volunteers. In succeeding years several teachers were employed by the Board, each one advancing the cause of the community. Later a permanent school was built. Following on the success of the Tamil classes, the Board expanded its services by involving itself in weddings, funerals and religious celebrations.

The Mathar Sangam

In 1964 the temple's womenfolk founded the Benoni Tamil Mathar Sangam to complement the work of the school board.

A vibrant community: *(clockwise from above left) Red dot is location of Benoni area in South Africa; youth participation is encouraged from an early age; front entrance of Siva Alayam temple with its ornate golden kodimaram (flagpole)*

Siva Alayam's Grand Temple Entrance

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Benoni's Youth

Hinduism Today interviewed 26-year-old Jerkin Naidoo, coordinator of the Benoni Tamil Youth Group on the diverse activities of these dynamic youngsters.

OVERALL GOAL: Our main purpose as the youth group is to contribute to the betterment of society, especially that of Benoni, for the benefit of all religions and races. We hope to build this group from strength to strength; and this is the strongest we have ever had the group in about fifteen years.

TAMIL YOUTH GROUP MEMBERSHIP: Currently we have around 60 people in our WhatsApp chat group. About 25 to 35 participate in our activities. Most are between 18 and 25; the youngest is five and the oldest 41. Many are currently in school. Some have graduates—doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers and accountants—and those in other fields, such as music, the arts and mechanics. The active group comprises about 25 females and ten males. Including all members, we have about 40 females and 20 males. As a body under the Benoni Tamil School Board, we are financially supported and guided by the senior board members in terms of what we can or can't do. However, the group does enjoy a decent amount of autonomy.

SPIRITUAL TEACHING: Our educational material and spiritual guidance is given each Sunday by our guru, R. Vengataraman, the temple's resident priest for more than 20 years. We attend as a group and are taught from the *Tirukural*, the *Vedas* and the *Periya Puranam* stories of the 63 saints of Saivism. Each Sunday two of our members recite from the *Tirukural*, one in the original Tamil, the other in English. Before the service we have a yoga class conducted by one of the our members who has trained in this discipline. Overall, there is great interest in Hinduism among our youth.

UNDERSTANDING OF HINDUISM: I think the level of understanding has moved from a fairly rudimentary level to a better understanding. It is still growing through our study of the *Tirukural*.

Besides this, the youth regularly take part in the abhishekams (bathing of the Deities) whenever there is a puja. But, I would say that while the youth are active in terms of participating in the rituals, they have yet to acquire a full understanding of the meaning.

ACTIVITIES: We clean the temple and its surroundings once a month, assist during festivals and help with fund raising. We also undertake charity tasks, such as volunteering at Benoni's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. We raise money and collect supplies for orphanages and baby homes, and we spend time serving personally at these organizations. We interact with other temple organizations in Benoni, such as with the Hindi and Gujarati temple festivities, and we are working to foster good relations with youth groups from various other faiths.

IS CONVERSION AN ISSUE? In my time I have not seen any members converted to other religions. We have a good spiritual leader who has guided us well. We have been taught by our guru that everyone is born into a specific religion for a specific purpose. Thus, we will never attempt to convert others. However, if outsiders are interested, we are open to educating them.

KEEPING YOUTH ENGAGED: The current youth don't unquestioningly accept the teachings or practices of Hinduism. They need explanations of why certain things are done in certain ways. Being proactive with lots more explanations of why, what and the significance of each prayer or ritual is required. Easier access to information will lead to a better understanding and greater involvement of further generations.

IMPACT ON CAREER: I never really took Hinduism into consideration when I chose my field of study and career. However, as I have grown older the importance of Hinduism in the form of Mother Sarasvati has greatly influenced my appreciation of education and my intention to continue teaching. I know the value of education and its importance to wisdom and creating a good life for one and all. My main goal in life, which I always try to impart to my students, is that one needs to be a good corporate citizen and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole. Thus, I think Hinduism's values of fostering good people has definitely contributed to this perspective.

In 1981 the community performed the stone-laying ceremony for the Benoni Siva Alayam. Just four years later, after a massive effort by the Tamil community, a grand kumbhabhishekam was held to consecrate the temple, with a Siva Lingam in the main shrine.

Since the construction of the temple, the Mathar Sangam has engaged in fundraising, temple administration, logistics during large festivals such as Sivaratri and Kavadi, and the preparation of meals during festivals. The Mathar Sangam in particular spearheads any prayer festival dedicated to Mother Goddess, such as Sarasvati and Lakshmi pujas and the Mariamman festival. They provide counseling and support to bereaved families of devotees in times of death. They also feed over 300 homeless people at least three times each week at the temple.

The Sangam is currently coordinated by Mrs. Savanthalai Govender, who is also a longstanding member of the School Board. Mrs. Govender explains that the newly elected committee members are now planning activities for the next twelve months. All activities will have a focus of strengthening the temple administration and membership, and empowering and assisting the Benoni womenfolk in the area.

At about the same time the Mathar Sangam was formed, the Benoni Tamil Youth Group was created to provide assistance to the school board by promoting activities such as songs, dances, musical and religious plays and encouraging children to take part in Tamil *eisteddfods*—festivals of literature, music and performance competitions—held locally, regionally and nationally.

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The Temple Today

The Benoni Tamil School Board, originally founded to teach Tamil, currently administers the temple and all its activities. It has three elected trustees, who serve for five years, and 21 council members elected biennially, many of whom have dedicated their lives to the school and temple. A seven-member executive committee manages day-to-day operations. The president is Mr. Poobendaran Govender.

Anyone visiting the temple sees that karma and bhakti yoga, service and devotion, are abundantly in evidence. The humility and caring nature of the priest and temple officials create an ambience of inclusion and spiritual vibrancy.

In an interview, Govender told us attendance has steadily grown over the years, both at the weekly Sunday services and at important festivals. One often finds devotees immersed in singing bhajans, Devarams and other devotional songs to the various Deities. Festivals are well attended, sometimes exceeding 7,000. They are noted for their elaborate preparation of prasad [see sidebar, right]. These special foods—sanctified by having been offered first to the Gods—are served afterwards to thankful devotees.

Govender explained that Tamil classes continue, both for adults and for children, especially as the South African schools do not offer any Indian language as a subject. The BTSB recently purchased two

Worship: *(clockwise from left) Guru R. Vengataraman, chief priest; Mathar Sangam, the school and temple's women's group; the final arati for the Goddess*

Of Festivals and Food!

The many auspicious events celebrated by the temple include Thai Pusam Kavadi, Deepavali, Sivaratri, Karthigai Deepam, Tamil New Year, Ganesha Chaturthi, Navaratri, Purtassi, festivals to Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Mariamman, and guru pujas. Special food dishes accompany these, especially the Purtassi and Mariamman festivals. Purtassi, name after the Tamil month of Purtassi (September/October), honors Lord Venkateswara. Observing the "fasting prayer," devotees abstain from meat, fowl, fish, eggs and alcohol. The festival's prasadam includes rice, dal, several seasonal vegetable curries, urundai, fried vada and fruit.

Urundai—commonly known as gool-goola—is made from a thick, sugary batter shaped into small balls and deep fried. In some variations, this popular sweetmeat is stuffed with mashed lentils or channa dal prior to frying. The equally popular South African vada is a savory prasad made from split peas soaked overnight in cold water, ground into pulp and seasoned with spices, green chillies and herbs such as coriander, salt and spring onion, then shaped into a small ball, pressed into a disk and deep fried until reddish brown.

The Mariamman Festival

Goddess Mariamman's is grandly worshiped during the Tamil month of Adi (July/August), prior to spring in the southern hemisphere. Legend has it that once an entire community in India was plagued by measles, which caused untold misery and death. A mysterious lady, believed to be a form of the Goddess Mariamman, appeared and cured the ill by feeding them porridge and applying a paste made from lilac leaves and turmeric. Ever since, this festival has been celebrated in Her honor throughout the rural areas of South India. Lilac leaves and turmeric are still used today by the older generation to treat measles, though the younger generation avail themselves of modern medical treatment.

The main prasadam item for the Mariamman prayer is a drinkable porridge made from maize meal soaked in water and fermented for a week in a lactic acid process which does not generate alcohol. (Maize, an African staple food, is widely grown in South Africa. The Indian indentured laborers adapted to eating this porridge soon after they arrived here.) After fermentation, the porridge is placed in three pots decorated with turmeric paste and dots of kumkum. A garland of lilac leaves is tied around each pot, and yogurt, chopped lilac leaves and sometimes chopped onions are sprinkled into the porridge.

Other prasadam items unique to the Mariamman festival are mixed vegetable curry; a mixture of boiled and braised seeds, consisting of peanuts, channa and other dals; and sweet-rice balls sprinkled with coarsely ground rice and lilac leaves. A prized delicacy is koli-katta, a sweet made from steamed rice flour. The rice is soaked overnight in cold water and ground on the morning of the festival. The resulting paste is mixed with sugar, dill, sesame seeds, cardamon powder and sweetened condensed milk, then roasted in a pan with butter. The roasted mixture is covered with a linen cloth and steamed over a pot of water, then removed and shaped with the palm into a cylindrical cookie which fits the width of the hand. The fingers are curled over and pressed into the cookie so that the impressions of all four fingers are visible. The cookie is then left to cool, to be offered as prasadam to the Amman Deity.

Prayers are offered with bhajans and mantras to Mariamman/Shakti and other forms of the Mother for a bountiful harvest. Vegetarian families hold a single mid-morning puja, culminating in the serving of brunch. Non-vegetarians hold a morning puja, where the porridge and vegetable curries are served, followed by an afternoon puja and non-vegetarian meal.

Celebrating Saraswati Puja

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The Mathar Sangam

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minibuses for the transportation of children to and from the Tamil classes.

A small hall was added to the temple in 1994, followed by a boardroom for the committee meetings and quarters for the resident priest's family and assistants. As attendance increased, a need was felt to expand still further. In 1997, in line with the twelve-year kumbhabhishekam cycle, consecration ceremonies were performed for the newly built Mariamman Shakti Temple, the Navagraha enclosure and the bell-tower.

But even this was not enough, especially at large festivals such as Thai Pusam Kavadi and Sivaratri. Adjacent land was acquired and consolidated into the temple grounds, which now occupy a 4,000-square-meter block enclosed by a perimeter wall and bordered by four streets. In 2009 a large hall was built to host weddings and other events, such as festivals of Tamil music and poetry, and a kitchen was constructed to prepare meals for devotees during the large festivals.

The Head Priest

Much of this development followed the 1986 arrival of Guru R. Vengataraman from Chennai. Now head priest, Vengataraman is of the Smarta sampradaya tradition and is well versed in puja, mantra chanting and ashtottara for all the Deities. Besides leading all the puja ceremonies, he performs weddings, house and car blessings, funeral rites, memorial services and Navagraha (nine planets) prayer, which is quite popular in South Africa, as it is deemed to ward off misfortune and smooth out life during the year. Guru Vengataraman is particular about the correct pronunciation and enunciation of words, chants and lyrics, whether in Tamil or Sanskrit, during prayers and bhajan renditions, which are led by himself or his wife, Ramanyammal, who also teaches Tamil and offers singing lessons.

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Guru Vengataraman recalls that when he arrived in 1986, the attendance for weekly service was quite low. During his visits to homes to perform house prayers, funeral rites and memorial services, he stressed the importance of households visiting the temple on a weekly basis. During the major festivals and Sunday services, he also explains the significance of the festivals and gives short discourses on *Tirukural, Vedas* and *Puranas*. Through his efforts and those of the BTSB, Sunday service and festival attendance has grown over the years. His overall observation is that the South Africa Hindu community is very strong in karma and bhakti yoga, as evidenced by their attendance at major festivals, their bhajan singing and their performance of rituals, but the understanding and appreciation of the concept of Brahman, and the identity of atman with Brahman, is still in its early stages. However, social media is exposing people to these more mystical teachings via YouTube, talks, quotations from Hindu scripture and short lessons by various Hindu scholars.

Center of activity: *(clockwise from left) School Board logo; preparing for the parade of kavadi carriers at the base of the Ardhanarishvara statue; temple priest Guru R. Vengataraman presides at the wedding of Sarah Huverajh and Suveer Himathram*

The Crowning Murti

Although the Siva Alayam was technically finished and consecrated in 1985, there was a nagging feeling in the community that some aspect of the temple was incomplete. Siva, the main Deity, stands in the central sanctum, with Ganesha and Murugan enshrined nearby. However, most temples in South Africa have not only the main Deity but the Deity's consort as well—in a temple dedicated to Lord Murugan, His murti would be accompanied by His two consorts, Valli and Devayani. Likewise, a Radha murti would be installed in a Krishna temple. The Benoni congregation felt their temple was missing Siva's consort, Parvati.

During the early 1980s, the South African Tamil Federation, the umbrella body for the country's Tamil-speaking Hindus, established connections with the Tamil community of Mauritius, leading to the frequent exchange of dancers, singers and other performers. The then president of the Benoni Tamil School Board, Karthigasen Moothsamy, was also a member of the South African Tamil Federation and closely involved with the Siva Temple at Grande Bassin, Mauritius. The BTSB, wanting a landmark which would stand out from the surrounding buildings, appear to have taken inspiration from the beautiful 108-foot-tall Siva murti consecrated in 2007 at Ganga Talao in Mauritius [see: bit.ly/TalaoSiva].

Benoni is only about three miles from the O. R. Tambo International Airport—South Africa's main airport and the busiest in all of Africa. Most aircraft fly very low over Benoni when arriving and departing, and the temple officials wanted the murti to be clearly seen from the air. Thus they decided

to erect a 72-foot Ardhanarishvara (Siva-Shakti) murti—half male, half female, portraying the fact that Siva-Shakti is indeed a one Being, even though commonly depicted by separate male and female murtis.

The mammoth task of constructing the statue was undertaken in 2011, with the goal that it be completed in time for Sivaratri in 2013. Local engineers were hired to ensure that the foundation and structure complied with South African building regulations, and temple builders were flown in from Chennai to manage the construction. The contractors had to work around the temple's daily activities and festivals without disruption. To the delight of the temple officials and devotees, the colossal achievement was completed just in time—two days before Sivaratri in 2013—and consecrated immediately. The total cost came to slightly over US$150,000. For the grand abishekam to consecrate the murti, the Mathar Sangam threaded a garland nearly 100 feet in length, and a helicopter flew overhead, spraying quantities of flowers over Ardhanarishvara.

Conclusion

From its tough beginnings a century and a half ago, the Indian community of Benoni now thrives in the 21st century, in part because of the success of the Siva Alayam temple in preserving religion and culture generation after generation. Their recent outreach to other Hindu groups has informed and inspired their own efforts in a manner which makes us conclude that the future of this community and its temple is bright.

phillip rodriguez

lg photographers

Carrying Kavadi for Murugan

The temple's yearly festival of Thai Pusam attracts thousands of devotees

The highlight of Siva Alayam's festival calendar is Thai Pusam Kavadi in honor of Lord Murugan. This occurs during the Tamil month of Thai (January/February). Hundreds attend each of the festival's first nine days; then more than seven thousand come for the 10th and concluding day. Many devotees fast for these ten days—which here means abstaining from meat and alcohol, though some fast on fruit or water alone. On this tenth day they will carry kavadi, a decorated arch in honor of Lord Murugan (photo below) and an offering of milk, in procession.

Devotees prepare their kavadis by sprinkling decorating them with marigold flowers blessing the with turmeric water (opposite page, top left). Those observing a vow of silence tie a cloth over their mouth. Participants stand in neat rows with their kavadis, a coconut, betel nut and betel leaf, camphor and incense. The temple priest and his assistants then invoke shakti, the divine power, in each kavadi by performing arati, breaking the coconut and lighting the incense. Each devotee prostrates in front of the kavadi, then lifts it upon his or her shoulders along with a milk offering (opposite page, center photo). Some will pull a small chariot housing the Deity instead of carrying a kavadi. The most ardent do so via ropes or chains attached by hooks to their skin (opposite page, top right).

Some devotees go into trance, voluntarily or triggered by fervent drumming, cymbals and singing. In other instances trance occurs when a helper light camphor in front of the devotee and applies a dab of holy ash to the devotee's forehead while reciting a mantra. Commonly the devotee will go a bit limp and then start dancing to the rhythmic music. Some in trance have their tongue, cheeks or other parts of the body pierced with small spears. All the devotees then circumambulate the temple (opposite page, bottom) and an adjacent block three times, a distance of 2.8 miles. Upon their return, the milk is offered to Lord Murugan at His shrine within the temple.

all photos: lj photographers

CONSCIOUSNESS

Edgar Mitchell's Samadhi in Deep Space

How a nine-hour lunar walk and a return to Earth transformed a fighter pilot's consciousness forever and put him on the path of self-discovery

By Ellen Mahoney

From July 1969 to December 1972 the world watched with anticipation, excitement and sometimes fear as twelve courageous astronauts walked on the moon during six historic Apollo missions.

Going to the moon and walking on the lunar surface took exceptional skill and fortitude for the select moonwalkers. Each astronaut had trained for years with NASA. Many were test pilots, and nearly all were in the military. Being able to fly to the moon, set foot on it, and return home was a profound and even mystical experience for many of these space-faring astronauts. For Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell it was life changing.

Mitchell was the Lunar Module Pilot for the Apollo 14 flight, which lasted from January 31, 1971 to February 9, 1971. He traveled to the moon with Commander Alan Shepard and Command Module Pilot Stuart Roosa. Seeing Earth from space, as he sped toward the moon, was a tremendous, life-altering experience for him. In his book *Psychic Exploration* he wrote, "The first thing that came to mind as I looked at Earth was its incredible beauty. Even the spectacular photographs do not do it justice. It was a majestic sight—a splendid blue and white jewel suspended against a velvet black sky." Once on the moon, there was much more to absorb. Mitchell and Shepard walked on the lunar surface for nearly nine hours over two days. They completed many science experiments, collected nearly one hundred pounds of moon rocks, and made the longest moonwalk on foot of any Apollo astronaut. Shepard made headlines for hitting an "otherworldly" golf ball up there, but Mitchell's return home to Earth provided him a transcendent experience that forever transformed him.

Return to Earth

After Mitchell had completed his major tasks on the moon, the ride home was, by contrast, a time of relaxation and reflection. He now had time to sit back in the spacecraft and just peer out the window as a cosmic sightseer—and the view was magnificent. In a 2016 video he said, "I was on the way home and was observing the heavens and the Earth from this distance. (I was) observing the passing of the heavens. As we were rotating, I saw the Earth, the sun, the moon, in a 360-degree panorama of the heavens."

And because there is no atmosphere in space, Mitchell said everything looked ten times brighter than on Earth. As he stared out the window, an unforgettable feeling of ecstasy and unity washed over him. He felt connected to the stars on a subatomic level with his body, his crew, and even his spacecraft. In his book *The Way of the Explorer* he wrote, "It occurred to me that the molecules of my body and the molecules of the spacecraft itself were manufactured long ago in the furnace of one of the ancient stars that burned in the heavens about me." He said every time he looked out the window during that three-day trip back to Earth, he had this incredible, overwhelming feeling of joy.

Moon walk: *(left) Iconic image of Edgar Mitchell exploring the lunar surface; (right) in his official NASA portrait*

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"It occurred to me that the molecules of my body and the molecules of the spacecraft itself were manufactured long ago in the furnace of one of the ancient stars that burned in the heavens about me."
–Astronaut Mitchell

What in the World?

Trained as a scientist, with degrees in aeronatics and astronautics, Mitchell felt driven to find out what exactly had happened to him in the spacecraft. The experience had been highly visceral, unlike anything he had ever known, and he wanted to gain an understanding of it. He delved into books and the brains of scientists, looking for insights. When his conversations with scientists didn't yield satisfying answers, he turned to people in other fields, such as anthropology, spirituality and religion.

Finally, individuals from Rice University in Houston, Texas, told Mitchell about a concept he had never heard of called *samadhi,* an ancient Sanskrit word describing an intense, heightened state of consciousness, an inner connection with things and a feeling of oneness with the universe. This one word, he felt, best explained his tremendous experience. A few other words, too, helped define what had happened to him: *metanoia* (a transformative change of heart) and *satori* (sudden enlightenment). He often said that his experience could be explained as an *epiphany,* a moment of sudden inspiration or insight.

In a 1993 interview with **Hinduism Today** magazine, Mitchell offered that his deep-space samadhi could also be likened to the kundalini force, which can sit dormant in the first chakra at the base of the spine until it is awakened. "Yes," he said, "that's exactly what I was experiencing, the primordial energy of the universe, the primal and subtlest energies." Other astronauts, he said, told him they had similar spiritual experiences. He was the only one who really wanted to talk about it.

Whatever it was that had happened to him, Mitchell felt wholly and utterly transformed by that three-day journey home and soon began to make sweeping changes in his life.

A Whole New Life

Completely absorbed in the mind and consciousness as his compelling new frontier, Mitchell had no further interest in the military or the exploration of space. Within about a year of his return from the moon, he retired from a twenty-year career in the Navy—the last six years of that period being with NASA. He has often said he went from "outer space to inner space." Unfortunately, his fascination with this new exploration impacted his relationship with his wife of 21 years, and she divorced him.

He started to meditate, and continued the practice for the rest of his life. In the introduction to his book *Psychic Exploration* he defined meditation in scientific terms: "Studies of yogis, Zen masters, transcendental meditators, and people of other traditions are demonstrating that meditation produces qualitative and beneficial shifts in psychophysiological condition. Alpha and theta brain waves are two physiological correlates being found for psychological stages of meditation, along with changes in breathing, heartbeat rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, and various other metabolic correlates." Mitchell would have been concerned about all these metabolic issues as a moonwalker because NASA mission control was constantly monitoring his body as he explored the lunar surface. At one point, while walking more than a mile to the mission destination of Cone Crater, the heart rates of both Mitchell and Shepard soared; the two were told to turn back for their safety and unfortunately they were unable to reach their destination.

In addition to meditating, Mitchell became a peacenik. Though he had spent many years in the military and was a fighter pilot—as was his younger brother, Jay Neely Mitchell, who was serving in the Vietnam War while Edgar was walking on the moon—war and fighting now went against his sensibilities. The beauty and fragility of Earth, as seen from hundreds of thousands of miles away, changed how he felt about our planet. In his memoir, *Earthrise,* he wrote, "I could see how incredibly beautiful our blue-green Earth looked against the black sky. It was my home. I suddenly felt very protective of Earth and started to see everyone on the planet in a more sacred way." He felt convinced war was wrong and hoped our politicians and leaders could also see Earth from his deep-space perspective. He believed they would have a new perspective, hopefully a peaceful one.

Mitchell was quoted in an April 8, 1974 *People Magazine* article: "You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics looks so petty."

Other Apollo astronauts have agreed. Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins stated in a 2009 NASA interview, "The Earth must become as it appears: blue and white, not capitalist or Communist; blue and white, not rich or poor; blue and white, not envious or envied."

Mitchell's moon mission made him more aware of sustainability issues. Growing up on a farm, he understood where food comes from. Although he did not become a vegetarian after his moon mission, Mitchell said he developed an increased awareness of how food is processed and what kinds of foods he

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consumed. In a 2016 video on sustainability produced by the Eternea research organization, he said, "From space it is obvious that everything on Earth is interconnected. We all breathe the same air, use the same water, and we all share the planet's resources."

An Avid Interest in Consciousness

Edgar Mitchell is known for his life work in unraveling questions about the mysteries of life and consciousness. His 1971 samadhi in space triggered an intense drive to investigate consciousness and unexplained issues such as extrasensory perception, telepathy and clairvoyance.

Mitchell's initial interest in paranormal topics developed during the 1960s, when he became fascinated by the ESP research done by Duke University parapsychologist Dr. Joseph Banks Rhine. The Apollo 14 moon mission gave him a unique opportunity to indulge his scientific curiosity. During his personal time on the spacecraft he conducted four private experiments with four individuals back on Earth, testing whether ESP might bridge up to 240,000 miles of space. Using numbers assigned to the five standard symbols (circle, cross, wavy lines, square, star) of ESP Zener cards, he conducted two tests on the way to the moon and two tests on the way back. The four individuals on Earth were to try to write down the symbols in the same order Mitchell thought about them.

Back on Earth, the results of these deep-space ESP experiments were analyzed by Dr. J.B. Rhine, parapsychologist Dr. Karlis Osis of the American Society of Psychical Research, and by Mitchell himself. He said the data was difficult to evaluate because lift-off from Earth had been delayed, affecting the timing of the tests. In *Psychic Exploration* he wrote, "The results were statistically significant ... because the number of hits was amazingly low. The statistical probability of scoring so few hits was about 3000:1." He explained that this negative ESP effect was called psi-missing, which in itself offered evidence for the power of psi (psychic phenomena): the striking difference from chance results showed that something was happening, even though the effect was not what was expected. In *Way of the Explorer* Mitchell wrote, "The results of our in-flight effort suggested that there was some kind of communication being achieved during the experiment that wasn't through the conduit of conventional transmission." A report of his findings, "An ESP Test from Apollo 14," was published in the June, 1971, issue of the *Journal of Parapsychology.*

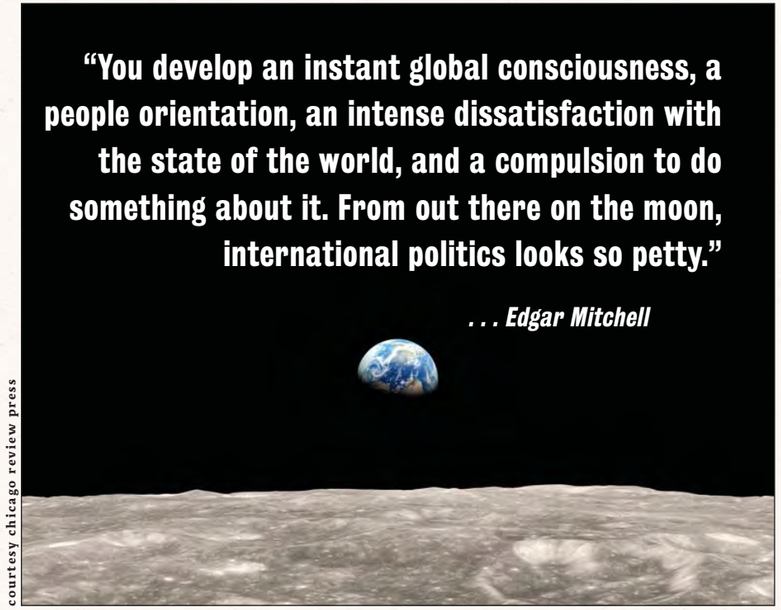
"An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. Thou art That."

–Upanishads

Mitchell's research into consciousness took him around the planet, searching for answers from all sorts of people including shamans, psychics, and spiritual healers. Along with changes in his lifetime, his circle of friends and colleagues was changing.

In 1972 he met two unique individuals, American healer Norbu Chen and Israeli psychic Uri Geller. Chen had studied Tibetan Buddhism and ancient shamanistic practices. At one point Chen tried to help Mitchell's mother, Ollidean, with her failing eyesight. Mitchell said his mother's eyesight was corrected at first but then reverted back. Geller is best known for being able to bend a metal spoon with his mind. His psychic abilities were studied at the Stanford Research Institute in Palo Alto, California, in the early 1970s. Mitchell was fascinated by Chen and Geller (whose abilities and claims were criticized as well as applauded) and wrote about both individuals in his books *Psychic Exploration* and *Way of the Explorer.*

In 1973 Mitchell founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) to further research the fundamentals of consciousness. *Noetic* comes from the ancient Greek term *nous,* which is best translated as "inner knowing" or "intuitive consciousness." The IONS website (www.noetic.org) describes Noetic Sciences as "A multidisciplinary field that brings objective scientific tools and techniques together with subjective inner knowing to study the full range of human experiences." Since its founding, IONS has focused on key subjects such as mind-body interactions and the intersection of science with spiritual experience. Today IONS is located in Petaluma, California. Its current areas of research include consciousness and healing, extended human capacities, and worldview transformations.



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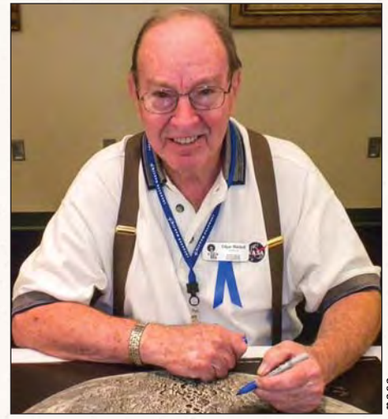

nasa

Landing at sea: *(left) Navy divers assist the three Apollo 14 astronauts out of their Command Module moments after it fell into the Pacific Ocean on February 9, 1971; (right) Mitchell mapping his historic 33 hours on the moon.*

We Are Not Alone

Edgar Mitchell is widely known for his outspoken views about extraterrestrials and his belief that we are not alone in the universe. He discussed these concepts on radio and television shows, in Internet videos, and in speeches and books, remarking that he and the other eleven Apollo moonwalkers were, in fact, extraterrestrials from Earth visiting a different heavenly body.

The seed for his interest in UFOs and extraterrestrials was planted early. He grew up in Roswell, New Mexico, and the nearby city of Artesia. On July 8, 1947, he opened the *Roswell Daily Record* to find a headline in big bold letters: "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region." (RAAF was the Roswell Army Air Field.) The story captured the boy's attention, and he wondered if a UFO had truly crashed. But the next day the newspaper came out with a new story, saying the crashed "UFO" had actually been a crashed weather balloon. He seemed to accept this explanation at the time, focused on preparing to start college in the fall at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Increasing Scientific Interest

Though many people accept and are open to the ideas that Mitchell put forth about life in the universe beyond Earth, he has sometimes been ridiculed for his beliefs. Mitchell never deviated, however, from what he believed to be true. Today, with large space telescopes helping us see how incredibly vast the cosmos is and finding more and more Earth-like planets, more and more people are open to the idea that we are not alone in the universe.

Science and math are integral in this exploration. Many scientists use the widely known Drake Equation to evaluate the possibility of life in space. Written in 1961 by Harvard astronomer Dr. Frank D. Drake and often cited by famous astronomer and astrophysicist Carl Sagan, this equation is a method for estimating the number of possible extraterrestrial civilizations in the Milky Way galaxy. It has inspired scientists to explore the possibility of sentient life beyond Earth.

Dr. Drake has also been a key figure in the SETI Institute (an acronym for the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), which was founded in 1984 in California. The SETI Institute explores the origin and nature of life in the universe and is sponsored by a number of organizations such as NASA, the National Science Foundation and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Seth Shostak, a senior astronomer for SETI, believes we will find ET life in the not-too-distant future. And in a 2014 Tyson Series video, "Are We Alone in the Universe?" astrophysicist Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson said, "It would be inexcusably egocentric to suggest that we are alone in the cosmos. The chemistry is too rich to declare that. The universe—too vast."

A Visionary

Edgar Mitchell was a unique space explorer who came from a family of pioneers. In a matter of only one hundred years, his great grandparents crossed the US after the Civil War in covered wagons in search of a better life out west, his father was born when the Wright brothers made their first flight—and he walked on the moon. He was and continues to be a visionary for this planet, shining an important light on the great mysteries of consciousness and the cosmos. In *Psychic Exploration* he expressed his wishes for our planet: "Humanity must rise from man to mankind, from the personal to the transpersonal, from self-consciousness to cosmic consciousness." It's exciting to know there is so much yet to explore and understand.

Ellen Mahoney is a professor of journalism at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She helped Dr. Edgar Mitchell write Earthrise—My Adventures as an Apollo 14 Astronaut. *She is the author of* Gandhi for Kids. *Contact: evm@infionline.net*

WORSHIP

Who Is Allowed in Our Temples?

One devotee's call to end racism and allow those who genuinely adopt and follow Hinduism to freely enter our hallowed places of worship

Sheela Venkatakrishnan lives in Chennai with her mother, visiting temples often and helping Hinduism Today *magazine with translations and article research.*

hinduism today

On a recent july day in south india, i was witness to an incident which evoked many questions: Who is Hindu? Who is Saivite? Who decides these things? Here I attempt to express my feelings and thoughts surrounding what occurred, hoping to find solace for my aching heart and, ideally, contribute to finding a resolution to what seems to me to be a critical issue in the Hindu community.

In my hometown of Chennai, I was visiting an ancient Siva temple with two monks who had traveled thousands of miles to worship at this renowned pilgrimage destination. One, brown-skinned with Tamil features, was clad in the orange robes of a sannyasin. The other, wearing the yellow robes of a yogi, was white-skinned, light-eyed, obviously not Tamil or even Indian. A small group of us waited eagerly to have darshan of the Gods in this famous temple in the presence of these two monks from the Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii. A special ticket can give access to the inner shrine, nearer to the Lord. But on this day no access would be permitted for the yogi. The priest denied him entrance. If he could not go in, how could any of us? So, we had our darshan from the outer mandapam. The priest took our offerings to the Lord, performed arati and brought out the flame for us.

Was there any change in the countenance of the two Sivathondars from Kauai? Not one bit. No onlooker would have known what was going on. Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, had trained them well. "Wishing for a situation to be otherwise would be reluctantly dancing with Siva," he taught. Do not cause a commotion, he would counsel. Accept the immediate situation calmly and then work thoughtfully to make improvements. Had this happened to another group, there would be a high possibility of arguments, starting as mumblings, building in intensity as onlookers contribute their two-paisa worth, perhaps resulting in negative media coverage. But there the two monastics stood, in humble acceptance of the moment. Difficult as the situation outwardly was, my heart could only smile at this lesson I was receiving from Gurudeva.

Following the activities of this small order of monks on one of the Internet's first blogs, "Today at Kauai Aadheenam" (aka TAKA) has always left me with a sense of awe. How can so much get done by so small a group? Living their ideals in their secluded monastery, giving so much more than they receive or even need, they understand the highs and lows of family life and are able to direct and guide those of us who seek support. Their hearts, arms and doors are open to all who approach, allowing the approacher to set the boundary of association—no questions asked, no pressure exerted, no expectations forced, no interference attempted, no prophecy made. Always direct, living by Gurudeva's guideline of thinking, speaking and doing only what is "true, kind, helpful and necessary," they perform their role with a perfection and grace I am blessed to witness.

We speak of model villages and model towns. Well, here is a model which can serve any aspect of life—yes, any. Look here to see how a family lives, supporting each other through performing each assigned task to the best of one's ability "and a little bit more," as Gurudeva would smilingly say! Growing vegetables, making cheese, building worktables, landscaping gardens, invoking the Gods every three hours around the clock, performing sadhana individually and as a group, creating digital and print publications—there are few areas that their prana does not touch and serve as an ideal to follow.

Sit in on a group meeting and watch as each member is given the same importance, irrespective of length of beard or shade of grey. "Consensualocracy" is the key for any decision, not democracy or autocracy or any other win-lose form of resolution.

I leave it to you, dear reader, to feel the pull at my heart when someone from such a sampradaya is denied entry to Siva's shrine in my presence! He who has devoted his life to Siva. He who is striving each day to realize Siva—and once realized, to merge completely with Him. Yet I, by virtue of an Indian birth, am permitted to come and go in this temple as I please!

The sign outside the shrine reads, "Non-Hindus are not allowed inside." Who decides who is Hindu and who is not? Perhaps the management would be more honest if the sign read "Hindus-by-birth only may enter." Is the existing sign a subtle way of saying you can be a Hindu only by birth? But then, what of the white-skinned children of white-skinned Hindus—now into the third and fourth generations? And what of those Tamils and other Indians who have converted to some other religion? To represent this temple's policy with complete accuracy, perhaps the sign must omit any reference to Hinduism and simply read, "You may enter only if your skin, eyes and hair are of the approved color."

If I cannot see the ideals of *Anbey Sivam* (God is love) or *Sarvam Sivamayam* (All that exists is God Siva) practiced at Siva's Feet at His temple, then where can I? Are these mere babble? Do they mean nothing to temple priests and managers?

Two years back, when a devotee from Australia visited, we were not even let into the queue. I went around to the officials at the many counters for tickets, archanas, prasadam, then to seva groups and priests, asking what we could do to get this blue-eyed devotee in. Nobody could help, and we could not go in that day. She was staying at a hotel near the temple and would take her offering each morning and stand there, pouring out her heart to the One who hears it all. And hear her He did, for on the penultimate day of her stay, a gentleman who claimed to have seen her every morning, said something to somebody in charge and took her in. No prize for guessing who he was.

Farther back, I accompanied the mother of one of the monks to this same temple. The guard stopped us from entering. Some others around us started mumbling too. I found myself looking directly at the guard and saying, "This is her name. She has offered her only son to the service of the Lord as a monk. She does an atmartha Siva puja every morning. What more can she do to deserve to enter the shrine?

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Who goes there?: *Two guardians protect the gates of Kapaleeshwarar Sivan Temple in Chennai, South India.*

If she cannot go, I don't think anybody standing here can either. Stop me also." And I moved away from the line. Hearing my comments, the people around me said in unison, "Let them in. Let them in!" The guard, almost shame-facedly, submitted and left us in peace!

Still farther back, I was in Madurai for my M. Philosophy degree. Each weekend we would go the Meenakshi Temple. I was sometimes accompanied by a Christian friend, an Anglo-Indian. She would wear a salwar-kameez with dupatta and have a bindi on her forehead. Armed with a ticket for special darshan, we were allowed to go in as close as anyone else holding such a ticket. Yes, a brown Christian can enter freely.

At the Chidambaram Temple, the doors are opened as wide as space itself, true to the very form of Siva that this temple personifies. But in some temples the intensity of discrimination between Hindus-by-birth and Hindus-by-choice has increased over the years. Each time I have been left wondering—what have I done in this life to be permitted to enter the inner shrine? My birth? It did not seem fair. I consoled myself by saying this birth is a response to my karma, not limited to this life alone. But how could the priest, who served Siva each day, not see the purity of this yogi, glowing with the power of his sadhana, sparked by the love of his guru, fueled by his devotion to the hallowed Kailasa Parampara of the Nandinatha Sampradaya?

As I write this, I feel the sting of a slap on my cheek. Wake up! Enough of staying in the stupor. There is a fine line between contentment and complacency. Which side of the line are you on? How much are you taking for granted?

I—and all Hindus—have a choice to make. Do we turn the other cheek, attempting to ignore the situation, and keep turning it until Siva-knows-when? Or do we attempt to protect others from feeling the same sting? I choose the latter. I pray these words will serve to support those who have undertaken the great responsibility of becoming a Hindu by choice so they may be given full access to their religion, to their temples, to their God.

A dear friend from Kauai shared, "To me and others, it doesn't feel like a choice, any more than being female, male, gay or whatever. When you finally discover what you are, there is no choice involved. What is someone to do who finds himself born into a religion whose beliefs are unacceptable to him (or into no religion at all) and who, after years of searching, finally discovers the religion of his soul in Hinduism? Should he be forced to go through life outside of religion? Or should he be allowed to prove himself and then be brought formally into Hinduism by a Hindu priest through the namakarana samskara (as was the case with this yogi)—and thenceforth be accepted everywhere as a true Hindu?

Our Gurudeva explained that many Hindus have been reincarnating in the West, often to white parents, karmically impelled by their fascination with Western ways. Indeed, it was perhaps the Hindus first reincarnating into white bodies who managed to change America's mass consciousness—working from within, so to speak—so that finally the immigration laws were changed to accept people from India. Western youth's mass rejection of the Christian worldview indicates that some of these are Hindu souls searching for their religion."

I appeal to all Hindus, to God and Gods, to the priests that serve Him, to heads of maths and aadheenams, to leaders like Shri Narendra Modiji, to HRCE, to the management committees of local temples, to thondars and bhaktars who have tasted the grace that flows from the garbhagriham. *Yaam petra inbum peruga ivvayagam* – "May the world partake of the bliss that I have obtained." I truly want this for everyone. Help me make that happen! Stop for a moment and contribute to a resolution of this issue. Not just in your professional capacity, but at a personal level of being a true Hindu. Ask yourself, each of you, whether you are prepared to experience life as a Hindu-by-choice in your next birth. All Hindus are equal; some cannot be more equal than others.

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

The Benevolent Narmada River

A Tribute to one of India's Holiest And Most Ancient Waterways

excerpts from a photographic odyssey by hari mahidhar, with a flowing tribute to narmada by vithal c. nadkarni

HARI MAHIDHAR

Raw beauty: After passing through the smoky cascades at Dhuandhar, the Narmada flows westwards past jagged marble cliffs toward Panchavati.

Over 2,000 years ago, the cartographer who composed the magisterial atlas called *Periplus Maris Erythraei* knew this river as Nammadus. Two centuries later, Ptolemy referred to the Narmada as Namade. The Narmada was around when Asia and Australia were fused into a single landmass. At that time there were no Himalayas. Nor was the Ganga even a flicker in the eyes of the Creator. That was also when great hordes of dinosaurs used to flock to the sandy banks of the Narmada to lay their eggs in communal nests. Then catastrophe hit the Jurassic world: the Indian tectonic plate collided with the Tibetan Plateau and Australia broke off from Asia, like a biscuit, to float off into the southern seas, as did Madagascar and Africa. Through all these cataclysms, the Narmada continued to flow serenely. She grew even longer and stronger. To the millions who believe in her transformative magic, the Narmada is the holiest of holy rivers. Legend links her birth to the sweat that emerged from Shiva, the Supreme God. That makes the Narmada so holy that merely looking at her, let alone by actually bathing in her, devotees are said to be cleansed of all their sins! Such is the purifying power of Mother Narmada that even Ma Ganga supposedly incarnates herself as a black cow to visit her elder sister Narmada. The Ganga does this once a year just to wash off the "sins" piled up in her waters by her devotees! The Narmada needs no such cleansing. This may explain why the "Sinless River" (*Narmada* literally means "Harbinger of Joy") is worshiped throughout her 1,312-km length—from the point of her origin to her merger into the ocean. This pilgrimage along the river is called Narmada Parikrama, which is a cultural and spiritual spectacle of enduring sociological significance. Benevolent rivers like the Narmada hold shifting mirrors to our world. They give us back a fluid landscape that allows the spectator to sample the dazzling variety of cultures found in India. The Narmada basin is a region of great scenic spectacles and mind-blowing biological diversity. The seeker can marvel at everything here—from proto-human rock art galleries and Neolithic settlements to imposing fortresses and temples, Jain icons, churches, mosques and gurudwaras, not to forget wild forests and their colorful denizens.

All this and more has been captured through the all-seeing eye of Hari Mahidhar's digital camera and the brilliant prose of Vithal C. Nadkarni in Benevolent Narmada, *from which we offer choice excerpts on the following pages.*

PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR

Magic Mist

My own tryst with the narmada occurred at Bhedaghat at high noon. It was at a place 19km from Jabalpur, where the river falls over marble rocks in a spectacular waterfall called Dhuandhar. The roar of these smoky cascades is heard long before one actually sees them. That explains why the Narmada is also called Rewa, or the River that Roars. The Narmada reverberated with the noise of millions of water birds in earlier times. Adi Shankaracharya evokes that ecological glory in his Sanskrit hymn *Narmada Ashtakam*. The reformist-philosopher, who lived in the 8th century ce, describes the river's "resolute shores" as "resounding with the cacophony of lakhs of birds (Nira-tira-dhira-pakshi-laksha-kujitam)." The master composed the hymn on the banks of the Narmada at Omkareshwar, the Om-shaped island renowned for its Linga of Light shrine. Today there are hardly any birds, but plenty of people milling around on the concrete promenade facing the roaring waters.

As I lean over the wet railing to pose for a selfie, I have an epiphany: even at its zenith, the sun here feels as cool as the moon! Is this the glareless sun that the 13th-century mystic Jnandeva evokes in his Marathi masterpiece, *Pasayadan?* (The legendary playback singer Lata Mangeshkar has sung this for modern times.) My euphoria vanishes when I look around. A plastic bottle with a blue label, a symbol of our "use-and-throw" culture, winks from the rocks below. In that vaporous environment there are other signs of life, too: through the misty shroud I can make out the silhouette of a pond heron standing still on a ledge. It is waiting for unwary fish and flies, like a wet Ninja, with infinite patience. More startling is the sight of people horsing around on the rocks behind the waterfalls. They seem blissfully oblivious of the consequences of their actions as they go around stomping all over Ma Narmada with their feet. "Blame the river herself for all this," said Bhartrihari in his *Niti-Shatataka*. "She shouldn't have come out of heaven in the first place!" The moral of Bhartrihari's verse for the 21st century is: descent into "self-pollution" has a thousand faces. To imagine the plight of the Narmada today, we would have to multiply that thousand by a billion! To imagine the impact on the lives of the millions who directly depend on the Narmada, one would have to look at the darker side of "devotion" and "development." This, however, was not the focus of Hari Mahidhar's six-year odyssey. His is a celebration rather than a requiem for the river.

Sheer elegance: *(top) School kids cross the bridge over the Narmada at Tilwaraghat, 15 km from the Jabalpur–Nagpur Highway. Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were immersed here. This was also the venue of the 1939 All-India Tripuri Congress session. (above) A map of the Narmada River, flowing east to west; (left) pilgrims take photographs of Dhuandhar Waterfalls at Jabalpur.*

PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR

A Journey for the Soul

Narmada's sacred landscape seems inseparable from her physical presence. Rising as a small stream in the central highlands of the Indian peninsula, she flows from east to west in the company of her two brothers, the Vindhya and Satpuda Hills. Three km from the source, she drops 30 metres at Kapildhara waterfall and loops further through Mahadeo Hills to take a second fall at Dhuandhar near Jabalpur. Then heading west through the wide Narmada Valley, she falls 274 metres in 483 km through two more waterfalls and numerous rapids before reaching her 27-km-wide estuary near Bharuch.

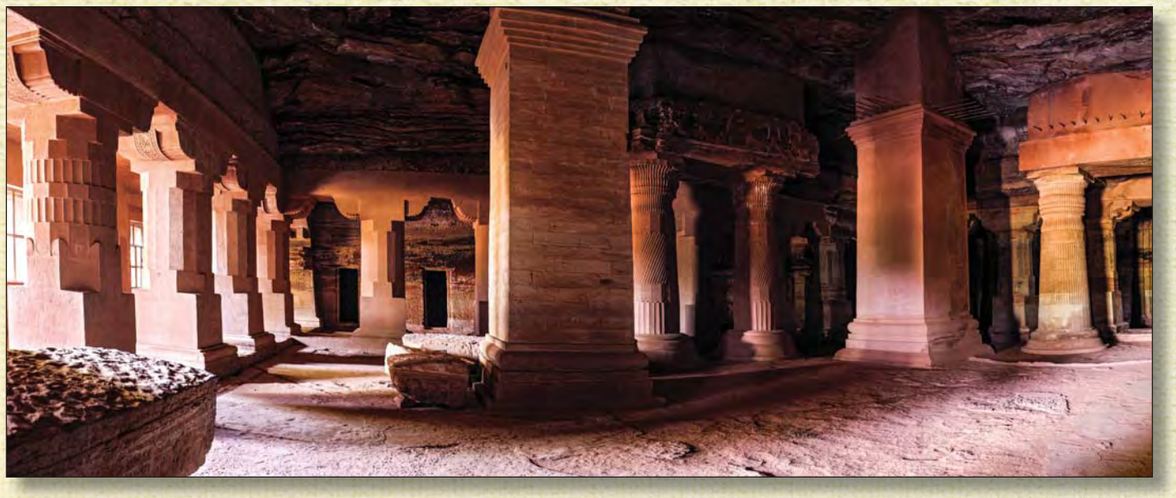
As we saw earlier, the Narmada is the only river in the world that is circumambulated in her entire length of 1,312 km. This great circumambulation is the Narmada Parikrama. Call it a journey of the soul, for the soul, by the sole; it entails walking along the river from her origin to the finish in the sea and crossing over to the other side and walking right back to the beginning.

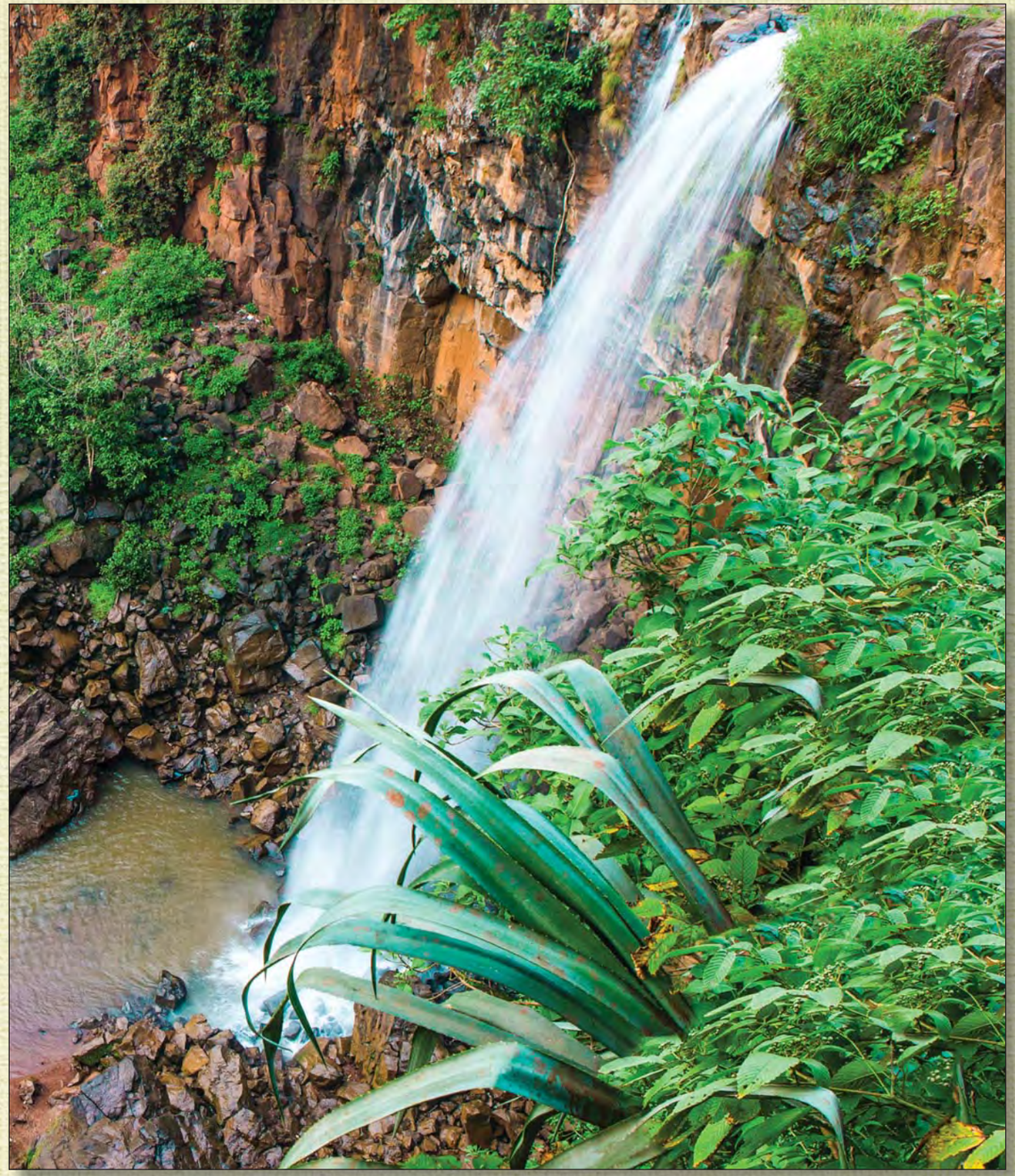
It is, however, not just a matter of plodding along the Narmada on one's feet. "Everybody does that kind of pilgrimage (Tirath ko sab kare)," the poet Manrang says. "But if your passions live, how can you cross the ocean of existence?" Mental purity or the right attitude is therefore of the essence. Nor should all this put off the potential Parikramavasi (pilgrim). Ma Narmada's compassion for her children is said to be so vast that she will supposedly save you even if you don't actually see her, and merely think of her (Smaranajanmajam papam hanti)!

Nor does the Narmada's power stop there. So, if thinking of her zaps sins gathered over a lifetime, looking at her sacred waters is said to be three times as potent, and bathing in them a thousand times more effective. The faith of Narmada's pilgrims is therefore astounding indeed. They are on the road for 3 years, 3 months and 13 days, carrying their meagre belongings on the back; subsisting on alms and the kindness of strangers.

Some start their pilgrimage from Bharuch to Amarkantak and back along the opposite bank. Some go from the source to the sea along the southern bank with a return journey along the northern bank. For Bharati Thakur, the entire journey of 2,624 km began with a single step. The social worker calls it an "inner journey" in her travelog. "I had to leave the comfort zone of my social network of limited boundaries (simit parivar). In return I got connected to a boundless world (aseem parivar), a veritable Family of Man."

The Narmada has inspired many such river pilgrimages, each with its own set of rules and rites, all of which continually add to benevolent Ma Narmada's reputation as a bestower of limitless boons upon those who depend on her bounties.





Sand and sandstone: *(top left) Renowned sand artist Sudarshan Pattnaik (in orange) sculpted these twin faces of the rivers Narmada and Tawa during a river festival held at their confluence, known as the Bandrabhan Sangam; (above) ever so gracefully, the waters of the Narmada fall from a rocky precipice into an idyllic pond; (left) Bagh Caves lie barely 150 km from the world-heritage site of Ajanta. Like Ajanta, the frescoes at Bagh depict religious as well as secular Buddhist themes. A copper-plate inscription of King Subandhu records a donation made for the repair of the sandstone caves in the 5th century CE.*

Mind-Born Maiden

The narmada is intimately bound to shiva, the primordial Great God (Mahadeva) also worshiped as Great Time (Mahakala), and as the first guru (Adinatha), who raised humanity from its animal roots with the gift of yoga. Geologically, too, the Narmada is arguably the oldest river on Earth. "Compared to the Narmada, the Ganges is but a child (Ganga toh bachchi hai)," says Vinayak Peshwa. The geologist is an eighth-generation descendant of Baji Rao Peshwa I, who served as prime minister of the fourth Maratha ruler, Chhatrapati Shahu, in the mid-18th century. Dr Peshwa did his fieldwork on the Narmada and Sone river basins from Jabalpur.

Anthropologically, the banks of the Narmada yield the earliest known traces of South Asian hominids. The Narmada is therefore the very cradle of civilization and the nursery of a mind-boggling variety of cults and cultures. But mythic origins of the river occur in a space beyond mundane time. Here magic reigns supreme. Trapped in a terrible famine, people, rishis and the gods beseech Supreme Shiva: a drop falls from the moon diadem of the Lord with Three Eyes, and from this immortal elixir springs a miraculous being—a girl-child, blue-hued as the lotus, with an electrifying effulgence that eclipses the luminescence of the gods.

That moment is recorded in the inscription of the Kalachuri King Yashodharman Vishnuvardhan which calls Narmada "the Moon-born," or Somodbhava.

Other traditions across the world also reflect this intimate symbolic relationship between water and women: deities like Artemis or Aphrodite of the Greeks, for instance, arise from the waters, as do the river goddesses of India.

PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR

Abode of Divinities: *(above) At Devnala, 20 km from the Dindori-Mandla Road in Madhya Pradesh, is this huge natural cave capable of accommodating 1,000 people. The spring water here bathes the stone Nandi and Sivalinga (closeup, right) as it feeds into the Narmada. (left) Pilgrims worship at the Mai-ki-bagia temple complex, the traditional starting point of the great circumambulation of the Narmada River. (upper left) Narmada, the Goddess, 11th century. This stone icon, carved for royal Kalachuri patrons in the 11th century and recovered from Tewar village near Bhedaghat, is now located in a modern temple at Kamaniya Gate, Jabalpur.*

The River of Unity

Another legend links the birth of the narmada to the twin tear-drops that fell from the eyes of Brahma, the Creator of the Universe. One cosmic tear led to the formation of the river Sone, and the other yielded Narmada. In yet another mythic version, the Narmada was born out of the sweating form of Shiva lost in meditation on one of the seven peaks of Mount Rikshavant (present day Amarkantak in the Satpudas, which lies at the transection of the Vindhyas and the Maikal Ranges). The Narmada is therefore referred to as Shankari.

The Narmada–Shankari's holiness is believed to be so pervasive that every rock and pebble in her stream is said to turn into a divine Banalinga. The belief gives rise to the Hindi saying, "Narmada ka har kankar Shankar (Every rock in the Narmada becomes Shiva)." "If this is Ma Narmada's impact on inanimate stone, just imagine what miracles she must be showering upon us living, breathing human beings," Pandit Nilu Maharaj, the chief priest of the main Narmada shrine at Amarkantak, says.

This could also explain why the revolutionary theologian Adi Shankaracharya put so much emphasis on daily worship of the river and her stones. "By doing so, the farsighted acharya turned these seemingly humble stones into icons of great geographical and religious unity for India at an extremely turbulent moment of her history," explains Parivrajak Swami Gyanananda Saraswati, founder-president of the Shankaracharya Vedic Research Centre in Varanasi.

The formal (saguna) worship of the Narmada also needs to be backed by enlightened conduct as well, cautions Lakshmidhara, the 12th-century author of *Krityakalpataru*. For if a tirtha alone were enough to sanctify, wouldn't all the fishes, frogs and crocs living in holy rivers such as the Ganga and the Narmada be instantly purified? The *Puranas* therefore advise aspirants to "always bathe in the earthly tirthas as well as in the tirthas of the mind and heart." Only then can they hope to reach the supreme goal of merging with the Universal One, as the Ma Narmada does by embracing the sea.

Streaming Humanity: *(counterclockwise from left) Bridges connecting the banks of Narmada at Mandla, Madhya Pradesh, built solely for pedestrians during the Maha Kumbh held in 2011 to celebrate social harmony; the railway line to Omkareshwar, which passes over a multi-arched bridge on the Narmada; a boat ride at Maheshwar is an attraction for tourists and devotees (a teenager is captain of one of these boats which he calls Jal Pari, or the Water Nymph); during Pitri-Paksh at Chandod Ghat, the head is shaven to honor ancestors.*

PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR

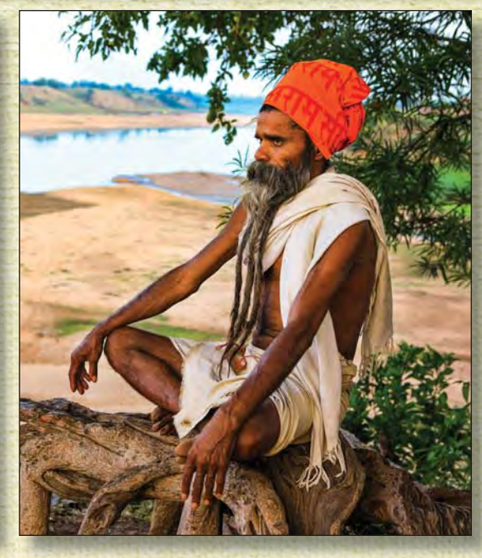
Rousing River

The birthday festival (jayanti) of the narmada, which started on a modest scale in the late 1970s at Narmadapur, Hoshangabad, has grown into a Mega-Fest today. Donation of Lamps (Deepdaan) and Narmada Abhishek (anointing of the River Narmada) with milk and flowers are two of the spectacles that illuminate the night-long festivities. Eight km east of Hoshangabad is the confluence of the burgundy-colored waters of the Tava River with the blue-hued Narmada. The exquisite Narmada temple at Bandarabhan at the confluence is noted for its rousing Narmada Jayanti festivities. Devotees offer milk and flowers to the river at Gwarighat as auspicious red-hued saris and stoles are strung across the banks to mark the emergence of this holiest of holy rivers upon the Earth.

Poets and philosophers have often compared the flow of the Narmada to that of Time. "Even in Einstein's equation, Time is a river," says the renowned physicist Michio Kaku. "It speeds up, meanders and slows down. (Like the river,) it can have whirlpools and it can fork into two rivers." So if the river of Time can be bent into back upon itself like a pretzel, then Time Travel cannot be ruled out. Is that why the pilgrim on the Narmada Parikrama turns around to go back from the sea to the source of the river in the hills?

Energy—spiritual and electrical: *(Right) Devotees gamboling in the sacred waters at the Abhay Ghat, which is designed for safety with a water-breaker wall. (lower right) a sadhu meditates seated on a throne of ficus roots. (below) A conclave of mountains seems to cradle the Sardar Sarovar Dam and the Narmada Canal. Vindhyan ranges are on the left and those of the Satpudas are on the right. The hydroelectric power generated here is shared between the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. (below left) A devotee worships the Narmada with holy fire. The fire god, Agni, and the divine river Narmada are closely associated. The most dedicated of devotees circumambulate the entire river in a rigorous act of worship, parikrama, which is offered to both Divinities. No other river in India is singled out for such an honor. According to epic mythology, the practice of going around the entire river was started in ancient times by the Saptarishis, seven holy sages, namely: Bharadwaja, Yajnyavalkya, Durvasa, Vamadeva, Vashistha, Vishwamitra and Jamadagni.*

PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR



Waters of Creation

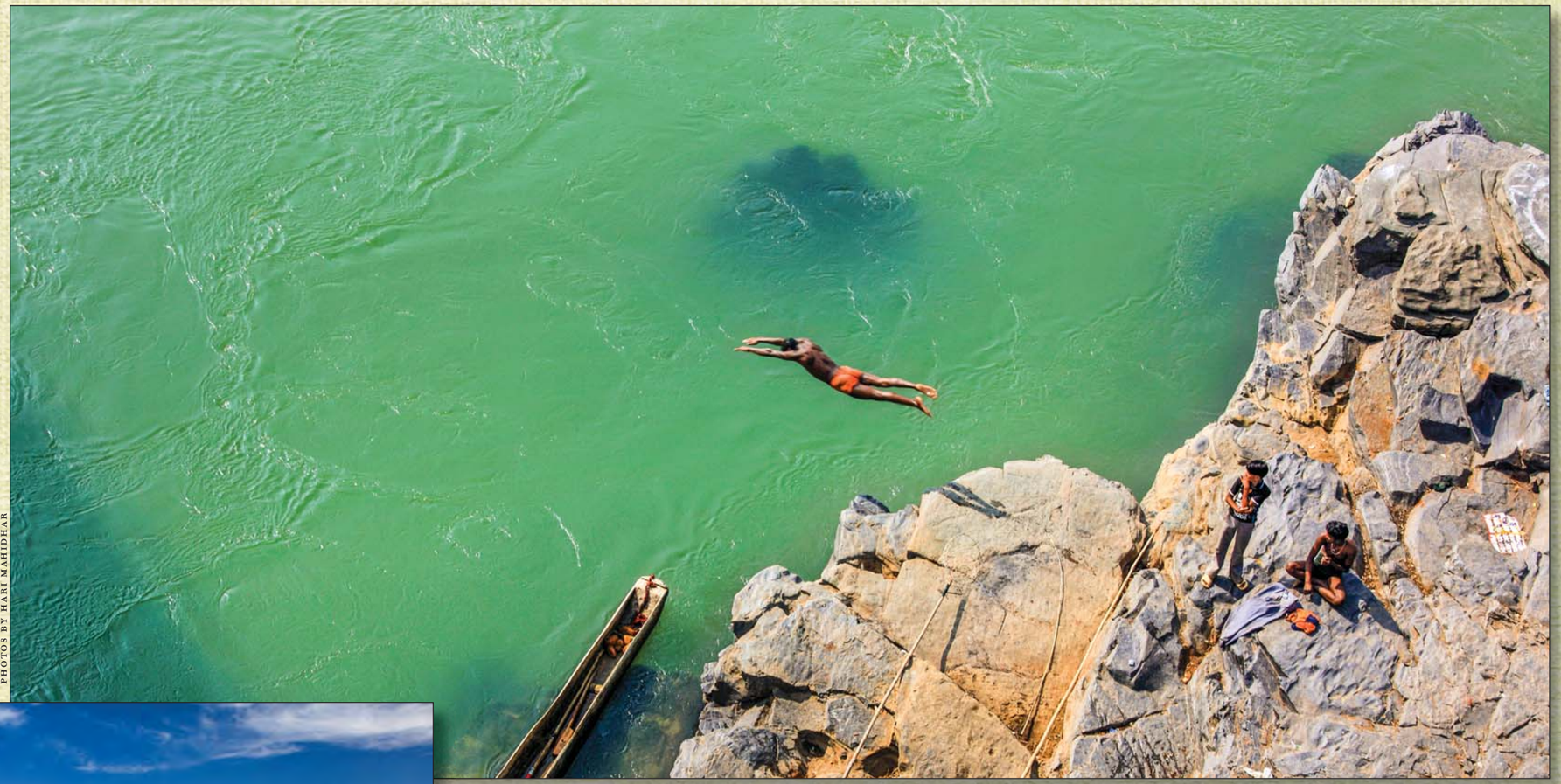
The barman ghat of the narmada supposedly takes its name from Brahma the Creator, or Prajapati. He is only the first in a long line of glorious preceptors—such as Manu, Parashara, Vyasa, Atri, Yajnyavalkya, Angira, Bhrigu, Markandeya, Vashistha, Vishwamitra, Bharadwaja, Kapila and Agasthya—who lived and meditated in these hallowed environs. According to another folk belief which we heard during our travels, Barman may be related to the ritual of granting of boons (Bar Mang) that is supposed to happen after the sighting of a holy cistern called Brahma Kund.

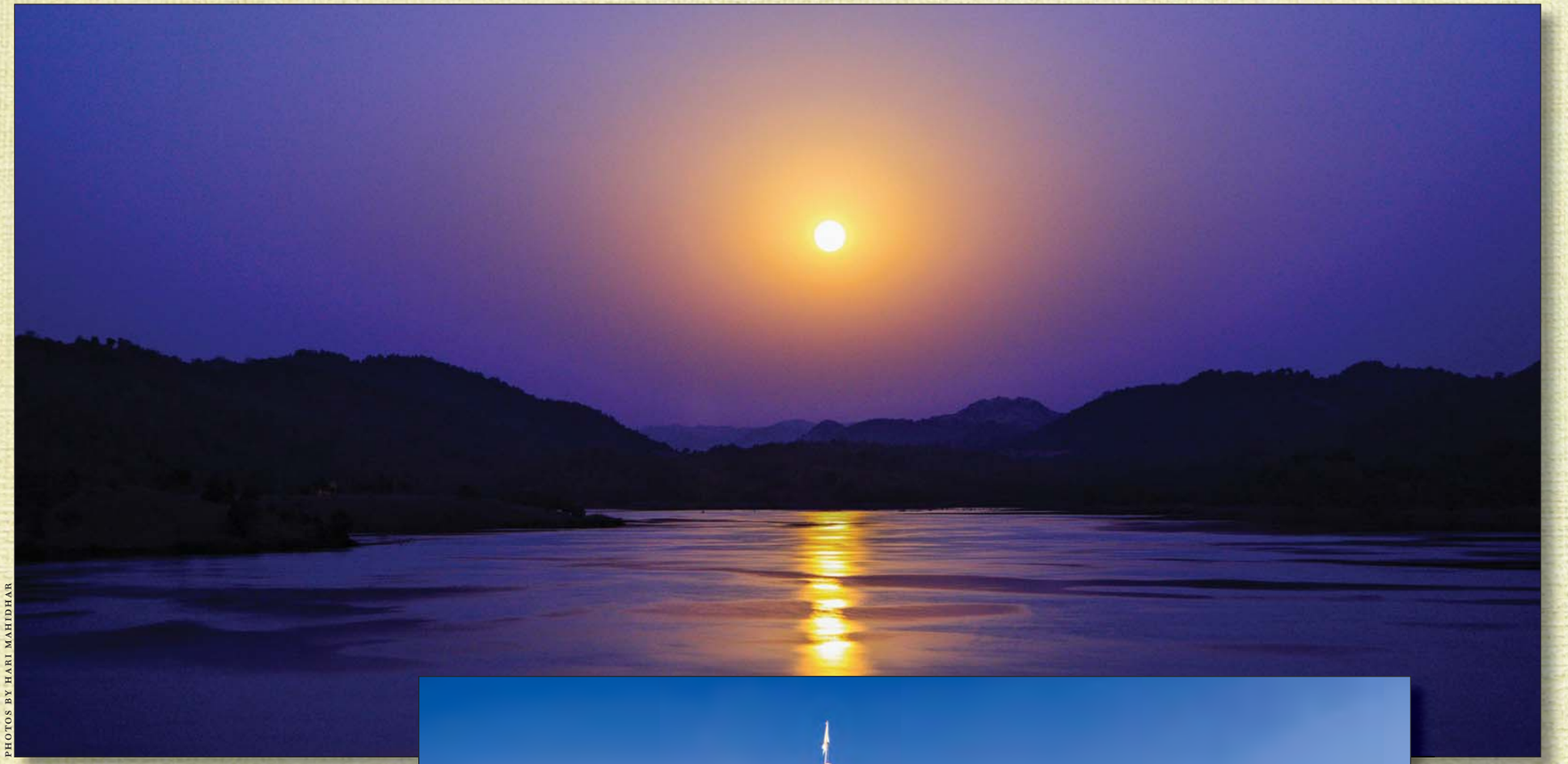
The myth of the Progenitor praying at Barman Ghat also resonates with the story of the grandfather of gods, who sports on the waters of creation. Closer to our times, the story of how the deep waves of water spontaneously created the first specks of animated life has been sung in a poem called "The Temple of Nature" by Erasmus Darwin, the grandsire of the father of the Theory of Evolution, Charles Darwin.

In popular imagination, the Narmada is also worshiped as Muktidayani, the Liberating Mother. She is supposed to provide her devotees an escape from the mortal coil and an end to the ceaseless cycle of birth and death. As a destroyer of sin, the river is said to be as invincible as the weapon of Indra called Vajra in the *Padma Purana*. In the myth of the liberation of waters, as narrated in the *Purana,* Indra repairs to the banks of the Narmada to cure himself, with penance and purification rites, of the sin of killing the Brahmin enemy of the gods, Vritra.

Sport and spirit: *(clockwise from right) A local fisherman dives courageously into the emerald river waters at Barman Ghat; a family enjoys the aerial view of the Dhuandhar Waterfall on the Narmada from their cable car cabin; the river invites holy rites, such as this greeting of the dawn with mantra, yantra and tantra at the Sethani Ghat.*

PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR





PHOTOS BY HARI MAHIDHAR

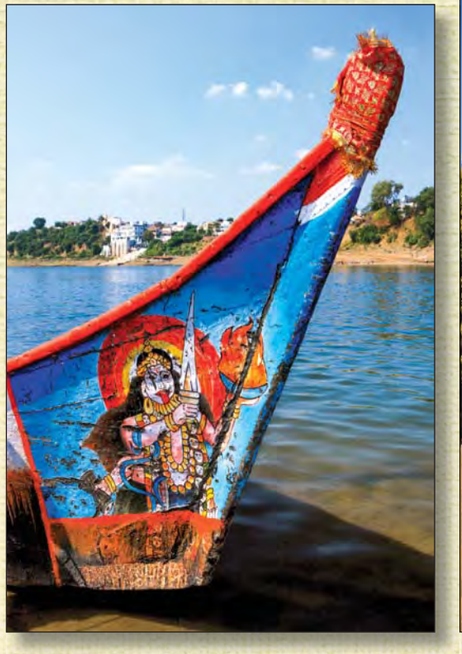
Melting into Brahman!

Hidden in the names of the world's rivers is ***nadi*, the indian word** for river, This may sound strange, but it's true, suggests the German paleolinguist Richard Fester. As examples he cites the names of the German river Nidda and the Nida from central Poland, as also the Norwegian *nid* and English *nidd* from North Yorkshire. *Nada/nadi* vibrates thus through rivers big and small.

Yet, Narmada stands apart from them all, possibly because she is the most primordial stream of all. She has been flowing on serenely through earthquakes and landshifts that altered the planet forever; the Narmada witnessed the creation of the world's tallest mountains and our largest rift valleys. The river promises to flow on into the future as well. She is likely to flow on as long as the sky, the sun and the moon endure, because the Narmada is more than just a river. She is an elemental force of nature personified, the Great Grandmother of Rivers.

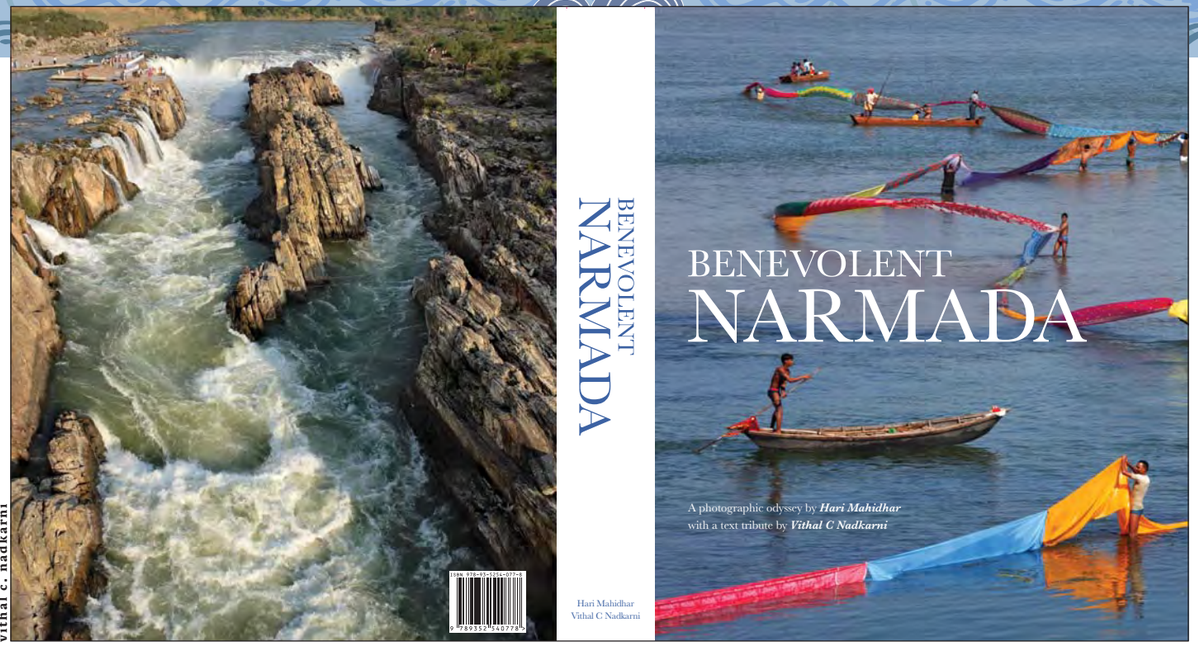
As our boat heads back to the shore guided by three teenagers, I remember the sepia portrait of the three boys splashing into the Narmada at the beginning of this book. What if they turned out to be the very saviors now guiding us back to the safety of the Narmada's waters? The threat of impending danger also reminds us of Bhartrihari's famous *Nitishataka* verse about exits and endings. Here is how Swami Vivekananda translated it: "O Mother Earth, Father Wind/Friend Light, Sweetheart Water/Brother Sky, here take my last salutation/With folded hands... I am melting away into Brahman,... cleansed of delusion/through the power of your good company." O Maiyya Narmada, we would like to add, with folded hands, too.

Returning to the source: *(counterclockwise from top) Moonlit waters; during Pitri Paksh, boatmen at Chandod decorate their craft with traditional colorful motifs; the riverside temple at Nemawar, located in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh, about 128 km from Indore. Venerated as the navel center of the river, Nemawar is a pilgrimage place of great antiquity, particularly renowned for its Liberation of Ancestors Festival, also called Pitru-Moksha or the Dark Night of the Spirits.*



Hari Mahidhar is a celebrated photographer from India. He pursued press photography with a Hindi daily at the age of 22. Shifting to Mumbai, he became one of the world's most sought-after industrial photographers. He has taken part in many group shows and held solo shows at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, in 2012, and at Fine Arts Gallery, Kolkata, in 2013. He has several books and catalogues to his credit, such as those of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (former Prince of Wales Museum); the Air India art collection and Churches of Goa. He is brand ambassador for Sony India.

Vithal C. Nadkarni has worked as a senior editor and columnist with *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times*. He is a recipient of the Washington DC-based Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship and is a fellow of the London-based 21st Century Trust. *The Serpent Within*, a collection of his writings, is jointly published by CSIR and Wiley Eastern. He is deeply interested in classical music, art and Indian culture. He avidly practices yoga and is working on a monograph on icons of peace from the folk bronze tradition of India.



BOOKS

Flowing Since Time Began

The inside story on Hari Mahidhar's stunning photo-biography, a massive work in which our reviewer collaborated with his magic pen

By Vithal C. Nadkarni

***Benevolent narmada* is a gift of** love and reverence by Hari Mahidhar, one of India's most distinguished photographers, to the oldest and the holiest of the sacred rivers of India. This writer got the opportunity of providing the textual tribute to this opulent 304-page coffee-table book under mystifying circumstances. But let us first start with the genesis of the book with Mahidhar.

His "Aha" moment came when Mahidhar bought a book at Mumbai airport during one of his trips as a successful industrial and commercial photographer. This was the Ganga's source-to-sea saga, shot and narrated by Italian photographer Aldo Pavan. Thames and Hudson, named after two iconic rivers, had printed the tome subtitled *Across the Sacred Waters*.

The Wakeup Call

Mahidhar paid Rs 4,000 in September of 2007 for the volume, which served as a wakeup call to him. If an Italian had gumption enough to document the massive cultural aura of the Ganga in an alien land, what held back an Indian like Mahidhar, who had the additional merit of having spent his boyhood and teens on the banks of the Narmada at Jabalpur? More enticing, the great river had remained unlimned except for some travelogs (illustrated with drawings), and a couple of adventure books laced with stock photographs. Also, millions of pilgrims flocked to the river for the spectacular ritual known as *parikrama* or *pradakshina* (circumambulation) of the Narmada. This happens to be the only river in India with such an extensive pilgrimage. Yet, no one had yet done a source-to-sea photographic saga worthy of the river's mindboggling diversity.

Mahidhar felt it would just be a matter of time before another foreigner breezed by to mock at our collective apathy by showing off their photo-biography of our (desi) Narmada. On the debit side, everything seemed to militate against such an odyssey: the sheer scale of the logistics involved, for example, and the complexity of terrain and cultural and ecological diversity, all seemed insuperable. On the plus side lay the opportunity of being virtually the first person to show off the monumental cultural and natural heritage of this most mystical of our great rivers. Of course, this called for Herculean amounts of resourcefulness to make most of the limited forays 'stolen' from a busy professional schedule. The alternative was to lose oneself in the rat race with no promise of self fulfilment. In retrospect, it seems like a no-brainer to have taken the plunge, without second thoughts or sponsors. As you handle the pages, you realize what a big decision this was.

The Long Saga

The book that Mahidhar eventually ended up photographing took six years. He published it himself (with short essays and captions contributed by yours truly) and became its stockist/distributor as well. It was, therefore, a labor of love nourished with large dollops of personal sacrifice and self-discipline.

As a lad, the photographer, whose family owned a flourishing marble and tile business, had personally experienced the bounteousness of this great river, whose name literally means, "harbinger of joy" in Sanskrit. Another popular name of the river is Rewa or the "noisy one," and also Shankari because of the birth-myth that links the river's divine descent to the Supreme God, Shiva, also known as Shankar. Mahidhar had also been entranced by her mind-boggling cultural aura, the seemingly endless cycles of fairs and festivals, the socio-religious pageants conducted on the banks of the river. The Narmada originates in Amarkantak in the state of Madhya Pradesh at the verdant trisecting point of the Satpuda, Maikal and Vindhyan mountain ranges, and flows westwards through three states for 1,312 kilometres, before draining into the Gulf of Cambay and into the Arabian Sea, 30 km west of Bharuch in Gujarat.

Glowing tributes: *(left) Back and front covers; (above) the book release function of* Benevolent Narmada: *(left to right) Vithal C. Nadkarni, Asha Sheth, Sabyasachi Mukerjee, Director-General, CSMVS, Pheroza Godrej of Museum Society of Bombay and photographer Hari Mahidhar*

Mahidhar could easily have finished his book by concentrating on the river's milieu at Jabalpur. But he wanted the grand prize; a pristine source-to-sea adventure to be sampled with all those untested (and untasted) risks that towered over the distant promise of potential reward.

When Serendipity Struck

In hindsight, our collaboration was most serendipitous. I came looking for a world-class photographer to document my own collection of votive folk bronzes. I wanted to share them with the world through images and the mother lode of stories, myths of them that I'd garnered as a peripatetic writer over the years spent in all sorts of situations (all this is better reserved for my forthcoming book called *Icons of Peace*).

In enviable contrast, Mahidhar had already made four presentation copies of his beautifully crafted book with rudimentary captions. He also had been able to present the first (out of four) copies to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi when the latter came to Mumbai for an election rally in November 2014.

To cut the story short, Mahidhar and I ended up with a barter. I would write the text for his book on the Narmada and he would photograph my *Icons of Peace,* otherwise known as *Panchayatanas. Benevolent Narmada* won the support of the Vasant J. Sheth Memorial Foundation and the Museum Society for its public launch in October, 2016, at Mumbai's premier museum, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS). In her introductory speech, Asha Sheth, the chairperson of the foundation, said she was amazed to discover that the Narmada was elder to the Ganga, not just in terms of age, but also in terms of religious priority. It's not for nothing that devotees believe that so potent and pure is the Narmada, that even the Ganga has come to the elder river once a year in the form of a black cow to shed her sins.

As the granddaughter of the founder of Benares Hindu University, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Asha Sheth said she was conscious of India's inclusive heritage that prompts us to invoke our divine rivers during bathing and ablution. Then we call for the sanctifying presence of the waters from the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri by chanting this verse: *"Gange cha Yamune chaiva Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmade, Sindhu, Kaveri jalesmin sanidhim kuru."* For we believe that wherever there is water, there is Ganga, and the Yamuna and also the Narmada and the Sindhu or the Indus. The latter serves not only as the root for the very name of our country India, but also stands in as a unifying synonym for the all-embracing ocean.

The same feeling occurs in Western/Occidental tradition as well. At the end of his memoir *A River Runs Through It,* for instance, the American writer Norman Maclean says, "Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time." What an image this is: a gurgling stream cut from the primordial flood running over rocks hewn from the very basement of time.

This description perfectly fits the River Narmada. She was flowing when the continents of the world were fused together in one mass. Archaeologists say the Narmada-Son-Tapti lineament probably evolved some 4,000 million years in the Archean age on the super-continent called Pangea. There was no India at that time. But there was Narmada. The Narmada was flowing when Pangea broke off into Gondwanaland. She was flowing when a meteor struck the Jurassic world; when the Indian tectonic plate collided with the Tibetan plateau, which threw up the Himalayas and led to the formation of rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna.

No wonder our rishis praise the Narmada as the great survivor that out-lasted seven world-endings! Of all the seas and rivers of the world, she alone shall survive the future end of the world, they proclaim. Let us therefore also hail this most dependable and perennial of our lifesavers!

In her review of the book, Sumedha Raikar-Mhatre writes, "*Benevolent Narmada* grants precedence to the visuals of people-to-people exchanges. Its core lies in the humbling experience of Parikrama (3 years, 3 months and 13 days afoot) that the river offers as a treat. In Nadkarni's fluid prose, it is a journey of the soul by the sole; a transformative walk along the river from its origin to its finish in the sea; encouraging devotees to leave behind narrow concerns and immerse themselves in an *aseem parivar* (boundless family), subsisting on alms and the kindness of strangers."

Benevolent Narmada, 304 pages, hardbound, 95x95," ISBN 9789352540778. Contact Hari Mahidhar (harimahidhar@gmail.com) or Vithal Nadkarni (vithalcnadkarni@gmail.com) to purchase the book or for further inquiries.

Vithal C. Nadkarni *is a senior consulting editor and columnist with the Times of India Group of Publications. He is also a fellow of the London-based 21st Century Trust and a recipient of the US-based Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship.*

daniel martinez/upinewscom

DISASTER RELIEF

Hindus Respond to Hurricane Harvey

Sewa International joins others of Houston's 200,000-strong Indian community to help one another and their neighbors in the wake of unprecedented flooding

Heeding the urgent warnings, Gitesh Desai and his family—each carrying just a backpack—fled their Houston home as Hurricane Harvey flooded it with five feet of water on August 25, 2017. The family lost its precious collections of books and all the memorabilia on the first floor. Yet, when called at his hotel and asked how he was doing, he promptly responded, "This isn't about me. There are many poor fellow Houstonians who need help from people like me. That is what I am trying to do through Sewa International."

Gitesh is president of the Houston chapter of that relief and development organization. His normal role is to facilitate its responses to disasters overseas. Now he found his own family in the middle of the costliest natural disaster in recent American history and himself directing volunteer efforts from a local hotel room.

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Texans knew they were in trouble when the weather forecasters started predicting rainfall in feet instead of inches. Rain from the slow-moving storm pounded Houston and other parts of Texas for a week. The area's bayous—normally languid rivers meandering through the flatlands—burst their banks, drowning entire neighborhoods under several feet of water, affecting one in four Houston residents. An estimated 200,000 homes were destroyed or damaged in the state—50,000 of them in Houston. A million cars, abandoned to the floodwaters, were ruined. The Texas governor's office estimated the economic damage at $180 billion and predicted rebuilding will take five years.

A report by Ramesh N. Rao, a professor at Columbus State University and member of Sewa's media team, estimated that one in six of the area's residents of Indian origin was directly impacted, including 10,000 forced to evacuate. A group of 247 students newly arrived from India to attend the University

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of Houston were trapped for two days in flooded apartments without electricity, food or drinking water as the winds howled outside. They were rescued by a group of Sewa volunteers, accompanied by the Consulate General of India in Houston, Dr. Anupam Ray.

Sewa International (sewainternational.org/) is associated with Sewa Bharati (*sewa* means service), which started in India in 1979 as an NGO under the auspices of the RSS. The organization (see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seva_Bharati and rashtriyasewa.org) undertakes disaster rescue, relief and rehabilitation, development and many other social service projects. The Sewa movement has been involved in numerous relief programs, most recently the devastating floods in Gujarat in July, 2017, which inundated 800 villages and displaced two million people. Sewa International, founded in 1989 and headquartered right in Houston, has 41 chapters in the US and is active in 20 countries.

Their institutional experience and local presence made the agency the natural leader of relief efforts, joined by 25 national and local Indian-American organizations. Almost immediately, the Arya Samaj sent a check for $50,000. Volunteers and more donations came from the India Cultural Center of Houston, Hindus of Greater Houston, Hindu American Foundation, BAPS and many other organizations. Masala Radio in Houston managed to broadcast throughout the storm, passing on pleas for help to volunteers on the ground.

During the initial rescue and relief efforts, Sewa fielded 800 to 1,250 volunteers a day, including some of those stranded students from India who became inspired to help after their own rescue. Another 200 supported the efforts remotely, efficiently directing rescues from as far away as California through social media networks such as WhatsApp.

Sewa also joined with other faith organizations, including churches, synagogues and Buddhist temples. One Buddhist temple became a distribution center for relief supplies after Sewa helped it recover from the flood. Sewa distributed supplies provided by the Red Cross. Sharply criticized in recent years for an overemphasis on fundraising, high administrative costs and poor on-the-ground performance in actual emergencies, the Red Cross has responded in part by reaching out to local organizations like Sewa to get effective help to those in need.

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The deluge and aftermath: *(Clockwise from above left) Floodwaters in this Houston neighborhood were high enough in areas to completely submerge cars; one colossal mess as flooded homes are emptied of ruined furniture, appliances, rugs and sheetrock; flooded interiors must be stripped immediately and dried out to forestall the growth of ruinous molds; volunteers of all ages pitched in*

The American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin contributed both medical assistance and money to the effort, and the Environmental Protection Agency—perhaps realizing any Indian-American effort would include a large number of doctors—provided medicines to prevent waterborne disease, a common consequence of polluted flood waters.

Sewa's volunteers sprang into action as the extent of the disaster became apparent, even though many, like Gitesh, were victims themselves. Similarly, other religious organizations, including the Salvation Army and the Indian Muslim Association, rallied their members to help. The Sikhs helped in force, even though two of their own gurudwaras had to be evacuated because of flooding. All realized the disaster was far beyond the capacity of the Coast Guard, police, fire and other governmental rescue services.

Volunteers waded door to door through standing water to find those in need, and organized boats to evacuate the neediest. In the first week and a

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half, Sewa delivered 1,000 hot meals a day to various shelters in downtown Houston and four suburbs—Cypress, Katy, Pearland and Sugar Land. Indian business owners provided ten trucks of food and supplies for 5,000 displaced people.

Kavita Tewary, project coordinator for Sewa's Houston chapter (who had to be evacuated with her family), expressed the enormous emotional and physical energy that has gone into these rescue and relief efforts. "Our volunteers will need to go through therapy sessions," she explained, "as they have seen so much trauma, and looked into the faces of people who are desperate, tired, afraid, and bereft, and who need help immediately." Though her own home was not inundated, the area suffered much water damage. When she was able to return, she found out that she could not turn the water on for long, nor do laundry, etc, because the pumping stations and other public facilities were still flooded.

She described the situation: "There is debris piled high on both sides of the road, all over. Traffic is snarled. Families are crowded in apartments, and many are desperately looking for alternate living accommodation." Schools have reopened, but children whose homes were destroyed or severely damaged find themselves under tremendous pressure to keep up with lessons, tests and the ordinary demands of school life. A friend's child, Tewari told us, leaves for school at 7:30 am and cannot get home before 8:30 at night because the family had to leave their home and are staying with friends far away. The parents are struggling to meet the demands of work, parenting and rebuilding their homes.

As Houston enters the relief phase, nominally a three-month period but here expected to extend to five months due to the widespread devastation, thousands of flooded homes will continue to need cleanup efforts for many days and weeks to come. In response, Sewa International is fielding cleaning teams, each with a minimum of six volunteers. Each team is going around Houston to help the residents remove damaged drywall and other debris.

With the massive cleanup going on in the city, big stores like Home Depot and Lowe's were running out of housecleaning and rebuilding supplies. Sewa International's San Antonio chapter loaded two big vans with safety gear and building supplies and drove them down to Houston.

Welcome to the Great Lake of Texas: *(left top) Almost 250 newly arrived University of Houston students from India were stranded in their apartment complex for two days without food, water or electricity; (center) the local Indian community arranged delivery of food and evacuation of some; (bottom) two of the students being delivered to higher ground*

Sewa started counseling services and opened medical clinics to help families cope with the disaster. They organized activities to keep children engaged as parents struggle to put their homes and lives back in order. The agency is also helping families deal with flood insurance and building contractors. Experienced volunteers are helping stricken families apply for the Federal Emergency Management Agency aid that the US Congress recently approved. FEMA requires homeowners to file the form for aid consideration within 60 days of the disaster. Some attorneys have offered free consultation to anyone affected by the floods. They answer questions on insurance contracts, leasing contracts, and contracts with construction and clean-up companies.

As of October, 2017, Sewa International's goal is to raise one million dollars and help clean and rebuild 1,000 homes. They have raised about half that so far, and have removed debris and damaged walls in about 500 homes. Rebuilding will begin once the homes dry out enough to forestall mold growth. To volunteer or make a donation, go to sewahouston.org

Reporting by Ramesh N. Rao, Virginia, and Sivakamasundari Shanmugasundaram, Michigan.

Rescued....

getty images/scott olson

and Rescuer....

jon shapley/houston chronicle

Fleeing the flood: *(top right) An Indian-American mother and child (center, in pink parka) are rescued in a fan boat; (middle right) Sergeants Radha Patel (at right), Paul Fernandez and Michael Tran of the local constable's office rescue a wheelchair-bound elderly woman on August 27; (below) volunteers serving at the Humane Society comfort displaced dogs; Sewa kitchen workers fed thousands*

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all photos: saliem moeslan

SURINAME

A Festival for the Whole Village

A Hindu observance in Suriname which illustrates the gradual melding of village-oriented tribal customs with Vedic traditions

By Karan Gokoel, Suriname

Suriname, a beautiful tropical country on the northeastern coast of South America, is the continent's smallest sovereign nation, home to a population of over half a million. Though small, it is one of the world's most ethnically and culturally diverse nations—a bricolage of the many cuisines, languages and lifestyles brought by its peoples' Indian, Chinese, Javanese and African ancestors. No one demographic group has a majority in the country, but East Indians are the largest ethnic group, forming 27 percent of the population. Most are descended from 19th-century workers from the Indian states of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. At over 22 percent, Suriname's proportion of Hindus is the third largest of any country in the Western Hemisphere—the first being Guyana and the second being Trinidad and Tobago.

During Navaratri, a special ritual known as a *gram dew puja* is performed by many Hindus in the country. Their ancestors brought it with them from Mother India, having performed it long before any Hindus arrived in South America. Navaratri is a festival for praying to the nine forms of the Goddess Durga over nine nights. It is observed twice a year, around March/April and around September/October. During these nine days,

Hindus clean their homes and fast, or at least follow a stricter diet, to purify their mind, body and soul, and many Hindu groups in Suriname gather to perform the gram dew puja, which focuses on the well-being of the entire community. The word *gram* means "village," and *dew* refers to the village Deity. Aside from being a puja for the whole community, this puja differs from the regular daily prayers in that it does not address the traditional Vedic Gods. Rather, it beseeches blessings from the local Gods and Goddesses who are guardians of each particular village. This puja is an example of India's tribal practices having long ago blended with Vedic ritual. It is said that in the past people used to offer meat and alcohol to the village Deities, and therefore this puja was traditionally held outdoors under sacred trees.

Today, Hindus in Suriname perform gram dew puja inside temples. Being predominantly vegetarian, they offer symbolic meat in the form of fruits and red-colored water, also known as *dhaar*. These village Deities are not represented with murtis, though in different communities many are seen as Bhairava or Kshetrapala, forms of Lord Siva who are associated with the protection of the land.

At the Shri Sita Ram mandir in Suriname, the gram dew puja takes place on a Sunday

Seeking blessings: *(far left) The officiating couple perform the initial puja with help from the local priest; devotees gather in the mandir's main hall for worship; (clockwise from top right) The event continues outside with a puja, and an offering is placed in a hole dug into the earth; young girls are brought to the temple to be honored; devotees make their way outside and are provided offerings to give to the land; the Shri Sita Ram mandir*

during Navaratri, as it has for much of the mandir's 30-year existence. The outside of the mandir is decorated with bamboo flagpoles with various colored flags—red for Hanuman, Durga and Kshetrapala, yellow for Siva and Rama, and white for Surya. A couple from the community—in this case Mr. and Mrs. Maniram—begin the puja by performing all the rituals with help from the local pandit. Facing east, the couple make offerings of sandalwood, vermilion, sugar, rice, flowers and more to the various Gods of the temple. The pandit recites Sanskrit verses from the *Devi Saptashati* that honor the Goddess. This portion of the puja lasts about two hours and culminates with a homa. Durga is given special importance and is offered a coconut along with an array of sweets, including sweet roti, mohanbhoog, ladoo, bacove and others. This emphasis on Durga worship illustrates how the Vedic and tribal traditions have mixed. Following an arati within the temple, the group proceeds outside for the continuation of the event with the traditional village offerings of dhaar, flowers and a small portion of rum.

Several more tall flags are placed in the ground and adorned with sandalwood powder and vermillion. At this point the fruits and vegetables representing meat are offered to the earth beneath the flags, followed by the offering of sugarcane rum. This last part is done without drawing too much attention, as it is an old practice that often meets with disapproval.

Once the gram dew puja has been completed, the mandir hosts young girls from the village, sitting them down inside the temple for the community to worship them and offer them sweet rice, money and presents. This is done in acknowledgment of their innate purity and innocence. Some devotees will touch their feet and wave arati lamps before them. The whole event ends with *prasadam* for the village, with everyone sitting down together for a vegetarian meal of rice, roti, daal, soups and chutneys.

Nowadays the village's population is diverse, with people of many different religions and ethnicities. Yet Hindus in Suriname continue to perform these blessings with good wishes for everyone in the village. This puja has proven itself a wonderful way for the local Hindu community to cope with problems it may face throughout the year and to come together in hopes of prosperity, good harvests and for general progress in religious and spiritual activities.

The gram dew puja is a striking example of the dynamic nature of the Hindu religion, demonstrating that while specific rituals and practices do change due to place and time, the spirit of the religion endures with the same devotion and goodwill that it has always embodied.

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EUROPE

Exploring Italy's Hindusphere

Italy's thriving Indian community and strong yoga scene demonstrate that the Sanatana Dharma is making inroads even into the bastion of Catholicism

By Lavina Melwani

It was the most unlikely encounter. In the midst of a massive crowd of international tourists at Italy's Leaning Tower of Pisa, I came across a thin, non-assuming Hindu gentleman from Chennai, smilingly selling home-made samosas and kachoris from a tote bag dangling from the handles of his bike! The samosas were flying and were gone by the time I met him—he just had a few kachoris left. His sold-out samosas were just one sign of how popular Indian food had become here. Heading to St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, I encountered Hindu and Sikh vendors selling everything from statues of the pope to printed t-shirts. While I enjoyed dinner at a sidewalk café in Rome, a Sri Lankan man came around selling roses to make a living. When I bought a leather bag in a colorful market, the merchant was a Bangladeshi. In Venice I bought tiny earrings made of Murano glass, sold by a Hindu from India. The man who assisted me with road directions in Rome was a Pakistani who worked in an Italian restaurant. And in the public square sat a Hindu sadhu (or at least someone dressed in saffron robes) offering to take pictures with tourists for a few Euros or dollars!

People from the subcontinent are everywhere in Italy, working in agriculture, academic life, tourism, trade and as yoga teachers. I encountered Indians from Rome to Venice to Sienna. Italy's desi universe is thriving—though far under the radar of most travelers. The Bureau of Labor's statistics show there are well over 150,000 Indians in the country.

The small seaside town of Lavinia, in the Anzio region about 50 kilometers from Rome, has acquired a new name: 'Love-India!' This name is used informally even by the Italians because of the town's large Indian population. With thousands of Indian migrants, the town has many Indian restaurants and Indian grocery stores. It is a place of temples, gurudwaras and prasad, bhangra and Bollywood.

I did not have an opportunity to visit the Hindu temples scattered across Italy, but the website of Unione Induista Italiana—the Italian Hindu Union—gives a great look at the varied temples and devout Hindu communities that exist in around the nation. There's a national religious organization, the Sanatana Dharma Samgha, which represents all the Hindus living in Italy who recognize themselves in its values and ideals. Hinduism has been officially acknowledged by the Italian government as a religious denomination. Diwali, the festival of lights, is recognized in Italy as the official Hindu religious activity.

Italy's temples include Mata Gitananda Ashram in Altare, Shree Nav Durga Mandir in Polesine Parmense (PR), Sanatan Dharm Mandir in Arzigano, Shri Hari Om Mandir in Pegognaga, Vaishno Mata Mandir in Novellara, Om Hindu Mandir in Rome, Durga Maa Mandir and Shiv Shakti Mandir (both in Catania) and many more; a virtual tour is available at bit.ly/HinduItaly.

Like any avid tourist, I visited many of the must-see spots of this beautiful country—the magic of Tuscany with its verdant vineyards, fig and olive trees and luxurious villas; the shimmering watery poetry of the magnificent floating city of Venice; the rich art treasures of Florence; and the fabulous ruins and intricate history of Rome.

But throughout my travels, as I enjoyed the cuisine and museums, I always kept my Indian-antennae up to spot South Asians in their new habitat and see what they were up to. Indians were everywhere, though not in large numbers—they were in the dough, in the ingredients and in the toppings of the Italian pizza! I met Indians from all walks of life—farmers, promoters of Italian culture and tourists visiting the country.

I visited the Indian Embassy in Rome and met with the then ambassador, Anil Wadhwa, seeking the official account of the Indians in Italy. "Italy is a country with whom India has had very deep commercial and economic ties," he told me. "Our road map for the future is focused on the economic side—investments, cutting-edge science, technology and design. We also have traditional areas of cooperation in leather, textiles, gems and jewelry."

Migrant Tales

Rome alone has over 1500 Indians, including dancers, academics and yoga teachers, and I spoke with several. Their individual stories help give the larger picture.

Sanjukta Das Gupta, who earlier taught at Calcutta University in India, moved to Italy when she married an Italian colleague. She now teaches at the Department of Oriental Studies at La Sapienza University of Rome, the first Indian historian to do so.

"The best part of Italy for me is that I live amid so much visible history," she says. "Almost every road takes you to some site dating back to ancient times." She speaks of Italy's Indians in several groups: migrant laborers, mainly from Punjab and now working mostly in north and central Italy; restaurant workers, mainly Punjabi and Keralites; religious migrants, mostly Catholic priests and nuns, again mainly from Kerala; the "international set," people working in the various UN organizations; students; and spouses, Indians married to Italians. These are mostly Indian women married to Italian men. Italian men often come back from India with a wife.

Statistics indicate most of Italy's Indians are farmers from the Punjab, doing exactly what they did back home—farming—though many have added cheese-making to their skills. They are spread all over—in the north, around Rome, in the Lazio region, and also down south in Naples, Bari and Sicily. The rural areas are home to 80 percent of the Indian population. These dedicated agricultural workers have become a mainstay of Italy's cheese industry. Punjabi films are played on Sundays in such areas.

Italy has taken in a large number of refugees, so the South Asian presence is quite

ambili abraham

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India, Italian style: *(clockwise from opposite page) the "plow" position performed near Rome's famed 2,000-year-old Colosseum—the largest amphitheater ever built, said to have held 80,000 spectators; Ambli Abraham's Bollymasala Dance Company celebrate the completion of their show before a packed Italian audience; street scene in Novaro in northwest Italy; Mata Gitananda Ashram in Altare*

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The Italian-India scene: *(left top) Serena and Rohan from London are married in a "destination" wedding in sunny Tuscon; (left bottom) a Punjabi souvenir seller at the Vatican; (opposite) a Chennai native selling samosa at the Leaning Tower of Pisa*

noticeable. You can't miss the Bangladeshis selling everything from tourist trinkets to roses on the sidewalks, and there are many Pakistani tour guides. Indians are also a big part of the tourism industry. Whether at the Trevi Fountain or the Vatican, you can't miss the Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis selling tours and souvenirs to the tourists.

Italy's breathtaking natural beauty has made it a wedding destination, and big Indian weddings have been held at Florence, Milan, Rome and the Positano and Amalfi coasts. My extended family, 14 of us, came here for one such wedding, staying at a charming villa in Tuscany. Through the villa owner I met Balbir Singh Sangha, a Sikh chef. Sangha, who came from Hoshiarpur in the Punjab in 1989, started here as a farmer while learning the language. He went back home for an arranged marriage and now has children in their 20s. Gradually he got into cooking and for the past 20 years has worked in restaurants in Rome and Tuscany. He now cooks everything Italian—though food at home is always Indian food cooked by his wife. Were people in his village surprised when he first left for Italy? Singh laughed, "Everyone is leaving for abroad—now our Punjab is getting empty!"

Italy's Hindus, though less numerous than the Sikhs, are also thriving. There are several temples in Italy and more under construction. Ambassador Wadhwa told me local governments have given land for temples, gurudwaras, and even cricket stadiums. In addition, the Indian government promotes Indian culture through festivals on the beaches in the tourism season. A Kathak dance performance by Shovana Narayan drew a crowd of 1,200 in the town square, renamed Wadhwa.

While visiting the Indian Embassy, I met Vishnu Kumar Soni, an exporter of scrap metal to India. Soni is one of the ardent devotees helping to build a Sanatan Dharma Mandir in Lavinio. There are already two temples in Rome and there has been a good response to the building of this new temple, he says. "Hindus from different parts of Italy come together in Lavinio for jagrans, Krishna Janmashtami, Navaratri and a week-long Diwali festival."

Soni came many years ago as a tourist, liked it and decided to stay. He returned to India to get married, then brought his family to Italy. "Rome is a mini India," he says. "The agricultural work is done mostly by Indians; almost 95 percent of Indians here are in agriculture. The young Italians are not into agriculture or construction, but our people are ready to do any kind of work, and are already comfortable in agricultural activities from India." He points out that Lavinio—Love India—has a large enough South Asian population to support 16 Indian and 11 Pakistani grocery stores.

Bollywood filmmakers have discovered some of Italy's breathtaking locations. Many Indian films have been shot in a place called Matera, famous because the houses are in rock caves in the hillsides and look ancient. Indian actor Kabir Bedi has acted on Italian television and has a strong following in the country. Italians enjoy Indian cinema. The "River to River" Indian film festival is in its 16th year in Venice. This is the passion of Selvaggia Velo, the festival's founder. When I contacted her, she shared her motivation: "Indian films hardly get a release in Italy, and this festival is one of the only places where you get to see them. It all happened by chance—I liked India and cinema and decided to put the two things together. So with study and dedication, passion, intuition, and many other things, now we have just finished our 16th edition!"

Ambili Abraham, an Indian dancer whose father worked at the Indian Embassy in Rome, has built her career in Italy on the Bollywood craze. She started studying dance at the age of five and now runs a dance school in Rome. For the past 16 years she has held classes and workshops all over the country. Her Bolly-masala Dance Company teaches her graduate students to become teachers themselves. Most of her students are Italians, but some are young Indians, adopted by Italian families, who are in search of their roots.

Abraham has often been on Italian TV and is reputedly the one who brought Bollywood dance to Italy. She says, "I have been blessed; my students give me lots of love and respect. Italy is now my second home. My main aim is to make my students love the Indian cinematic world and make Italians understand the power of Indian cinema." She told me that another Bollywood dance school, the Bollywood Club, was recently opened in Rome by an Indian-Italian couple.

lavina melwani

The Italian Yogis

Yoga and meditation are also big Indian influences in Italy. When the International Day of Yoga is celebrated worldwide, Italy's participation is among the most enthusiastic.

Roshni Shekar, who came here from Kerala almost thirty years ago, now promotes yoga and meditation to Italians. She met and married her Italian husband in India, then they moved to Italy. Today they have two children—Maitreya Quircio, 23, and Flaminia Bhavani Quircio, 20.

A direct disciple of Swami Vishnu Devananda, one of Swami Sivananda's most famous disciples, Shekar keeps the tenets of Hinduism vibrant. She recalls, "He was the one who started the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres, with more than 50 yoga missions worldwide. I did my teacher's training courses at the Sivananda ashram, Neyyar Dam, Trivandrum, Kerala." For 25 years she has taught yoga in Rome. She says, "Our center is named after my guru—Centro Yoga Swami Vishnu (cyswamivishnu.org). My students are mainly Italians, but there are a few other nationalities as well. I also teach at the United Nations World Food Program."

Her husband and children have also taken teachers training through the Sivananda program and have helped teach at her center.

"My guru's mission was essentially to spread peace through yoga, so our center has done voluntary work in the high schools in Rome for the past eight years," she says. "We take demonstrations, theory classes and practice classes to give a correct overall view of yoga to the young." For the past three years, Shekar has also taught yoga, as a volunteer, to inmates at the Rebibbia women's prison, where her classes are well received. Every year they also raise funds through various cultural activities to support animal organizations in India and help in the support and care of street animals.

Shekar explains hers is a raja yoga lineage—the classic, traditional yoga, emphasizing the study of metaphysical theory, the study of ancient philosophical texts, and a detailed study of physical yoga theory as well. One Saturday each month they offer a free class on Vedanta to all who want to attend. She told me, "We regularly hold two-day seminars and week-long retreats following the rigorous discipline of the ashrams in India. We also take a yoga vacation to Greece every June so people can practice yoga, study and have a sea vacation. I also visit other cities, when invited by yoga centers, to give lectures and conduct seminars."

Shekar credits yoga with keeping her balanced in spite of having lived so many years outside of India. She says, "Being a yoga teacher, I am a deep believer in God and gurus. I firmly believe in the wider aspect of God, not in a limiting or limited way. I realize more and more that all that unites is yoga, and anything that separates is not yoga.

"Teaching in Italy was not easy when I started 25 years ago. Yoga was not well known then, and most students would come for physical benefits only. Now a lot of people come for spirituality. Italians are warm, loving people, very family oriented, very easy for Indians to connect with, as they share these qualities with Indians. Also, Italy is the mystic heart of the West, and the Italian land has that sacred power which India has."

Little wonder then that the International Day of Yoga draws thousands of Italians to practice yoga on that day, including lots of schools. Yoga organizations partner together and hold gatherings in the central square as well as musical events in the evening.

Ayurveda, too, is gaining ground in Italy. In a recent Ayurveda conference in Milan, over 100 experts came from around the world to discuss this ancient science of well-being.

Tourism in both directions is thriving. "I think Italians feel a natural affinity towards Indians, and vice versa," Ambassador Wadhwa told me. "Italians like the spirituality—like the Indian people—the food and the color. And Indians find Italian designs fascinating. The cities are beautiful; there is a lot of history and art here. Both countries are abundantly rich in art and history, so there's a natural affinity."

Both Italy and India have natural beauty, a rich and ancient culture and strong, family-minded people—an ideal foundation for a strong connection. The Hindus living in Italy are building temples, sharing community activities, working hard and becoming good Italians while maintaining—and spreading—their Indian culture.

Lavina Melwani is a New York based writer for several international publications. She blogs at Lassi with Lavina.

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HEALTH

Nurturing Babies and Mothers

Midwife nursing, often sidelined by modern medicine, remains alive and well for women who value holistic care before and after birth

By Vatsala Sperling, New York

all photos: danaraj chandrasegaran

Many women believe they have no option but to rush to the hospital to give birth, then have the child snatched away to the nursery. This is a modern phenomenon. A more holistic approach is available and preferred by others. Ratnavathy Sivalingam-Chandrasegaran, a Malaysian mother with her first baby, hired infant-care nurse Meena to help nurture her infant boy, Kiranapathi. Observing Meena's handling of her baby, Ratna was impressed that this ancient knowledge has survived the centuries through women who have devoted themselves to infant care. Ratna hopes her experience will inspire other mothers, and Meena agreed to an interview for this article.

I was delighted when **Hinduism Today** asked me to help bring Ratna's concept into article form. I had just read about the passing of a famous obstetrician who had inspired me as a young girl in Chennai. In 1974, at age thirteen, I read a newspaper review of *Birth without Violence*. The author, Dr. Frederick Leboyer, was a French obstetrician who wanted to restore natural dignity to human birth.

I ran to my mother, asking, "If we have been having babies since the beginning of time, why do women go to hospitals to give birth?" Mother answered, "Hospitals are a new phenomenon. Even though we live in present times, we can still follow our tradition and culture." In caring for our family, she placed strong emphasis on Tamil, Sanskrit, ayurveda, a vegetable garden and a whole-food diet.

Mother told me, "Your grandmother was born at home in Madurai. As a young girl in the late 1800s, she observed home births. Madras Medical College was founded in 1885 and Christian Medical College in 1907, and their graduates worked for the British. But Western medical science was still young. Our native ayurvedic, unani and siddha physicians took care of serious illnesses, epidemics and accidents, while midwives tended to women during pregnancy and childbirth. For 45 days after delivery, midwives visited the house to care for mom and give the newborn a daily massage and bath."

Mother elaborated, "Nuclear families were unknown in those days. Multi-generational extended families and the entire neighborhood helped new mothers, but midwives were the stars around childbirth. Their training began at a tender age by assisting senior midwives. They learned to birth breech babies, twins and triplets, supervise stillbirths, cut the cord and dispose of the afterbirth. They learned to handle various complications and unexpected events associated with childbirth, like hemorrhage, stalled labor, cord around neck, and low-birth-weight babies. They knew the signs that showed whether or not the baby was thriving at birth. They learned about hygienic and sanitary practices, food, rest, breathing and pushing techniques for the mothers. They tended to newborns in birthing rooms dimly illuminated only by oil lamps.

"Midwives never discriminated on the basis of religion; they conducted births in Hindu, Muslim and Christian homes. They were respected and paid well in cash and kind. They always responded to emergencies, any time of day or night. But when I was born in 1921, women were being told that hospital births were safer, and many were becoming afraid to give birth at home. Luckily, your grandmother found a good midwife and birthed me at home. She firmly believed that birth is a natural process that does not require medicalization. She was there for the birth and nurture of all six of my children, staying with me for 45 days each time. She trained me and told me to pass along this information to my own daughters and any woman willing to learn."

I watched through the 1980s as my married sisters delivered their babies at home. My mother supervised the birthing and nurturing of eight grandchildren. After I moved to the US, when I was about to give birth to my son Mahar in 1998, I also avoided medicalization and doctors. My sister Bhuvaneshwari supervised Mahar's birth and nurture, staying with me for six months and teaching me how to care for him.

So when I was asked to help on this story, I was curious to find out what aspects of infant nurturing have survived since my grandmother's time in the late 1800s.

A newborn gets the best: *(left) Ratnavathy with her first child, Kiranapathi; (above) Meena trained in India and works as an infant-care nurse in Malaysia; (right) using the traditional method of supporting the infant on top of her legs, Meena gives the infant direct, warm skin contact during the oil massage and bathing.*

FROM INDIA TO MALAYSIA, 2017

Ratnavathy (R): *Meena, please tell us about yourself.*

Meena (M): I was born in Madurai and named Pandimeena. I am 45 years old, married, with two children and a granddaughter. I wanted to educate my children, so I came to Malaysia 20 years ago. I have been an infant nurturer ever since.

R: *What attracted you to infant nurturing?*

M: During my childhood, my grandma and mom used to do this very well. Observing them, I was interested in learning. I would bathe my neighbor's babies, sometimes taking over from my grandmother as well. As I grew older, I was hired to do this and have been doing it from the age of 16. I did not get a formal school education. Instead, I spent all my time learning about the proper preparation of food, about the traditional medicines and infant care. This career comes from my heart and brings real job satisfaction.

R: *Did your grandma train other young women for this profession?*

M: Infant nurturing has been a tradition passed from one generation to the next in the same family. Traditionally, they did not train others; however, my mother encouraged me to train all who are interested.

R: *Today very few people believe in traditional practices. They go to hospitals and follow the doctor's orders. How do you continue getting this work?*

M: In Malaysia, while they may give birth in the hospital, people of Indian origin believe the baby should be cared for and given baths according to traditional methods. I am called to bathe a child at home. The mother likes my work and refers me to her friends. Word of mouth keeps me going. Malaysians are modern people, but for infant nurturing they rely on traditional methods.

R: *Do non-Hindus use your services?*

M: Most mothers of Indian origin living here prefer this bathing process. That includes Hindus, Christians and Muslims. But I have never been asked by any Chinese or Malay Muslim mothers.

R: *Are you present when these mothers give birth?*

M: No. Three generations ago, women conducted home deliveries, but today the babies are born in hospitals.

R: *Before birth, do you visit the mothers and advise them about various aspects of the upcoming birthing process?*

M: Today people rely on their doctors for almost everything. But they will ask me about their diet and any issues they may face during pregnancy. Some women get swollen legs during the last weeks of gestation. If asked, I suggest that they drink hot water with some butter mixed in. I also tell them to drink water boiled with cumin seeds. These drinks help reduce swelling.

all photos: danaraj chandrasegaran

R: *What do you say for diet?*
M: Before delivery, there are no food restrictions. I ask mothers to eat well-balanced, healthy, fresh foods, and to drink plenty of water to avoid constipation. Some pregnant women vomit whatever they eat or drink, and then stop eating for fear of vomiting. I encourage them to eat simple foods in small quantities. Fasting during pregnancy will adversely affect the growth of the baby. I recommend interesting and appetizing foods. For proper growth and development of the fetus, mothers should take plenty of curry leaves, not just as a garnish. The leaves should be washed, sun-dried and powdered with pepper and cumin seeds. This powder and some ghee are mixed with rice and given with meals. They should eat lots of okra, gotu kola and greens. Milk and egg should be given to the expectant mothers. Vegetarian mothers should make sure to get sufficient protein from legumes, nuts, seeds and dairy. I also advise that they exercise and stay active till the due date. Exercise and good nutrition are key to birthing a healthy child. Much of this is pure common sense, based on the traditional knowledge of foods and body movement.

R: *What about sleep and rest?*
M: Before delivery, pregnant woman can sleep whenever necessary. But after delivery they have to care for a child. They should make it a priority to sleep whenever the baby is sleeping. Sometimes new mothers do not do that. When the baby is sleeping, they do household chores or care for older kids, and they do not get the rest they need. Lack of rest makes mother cranky, and that affects the baby.

R: *With an unplanned pregnancy, the mother can feel depressed, afraid and tied down. What do you tell such women?*
M: I do understand that not all women are happy about their pregnancy. I encourage them to remain hopeful regardless of their circumstances. They have to at least try to have a positive attitude for the baby's sake.

MOTHER'S MILK

R: What is your advice for lactating mothers?
M: Once the baby is born, the mother must follow some dietary restrictions in order to reclaim her pre-pregnancy weight and figure, become strong and fit, and sustain lactation for the growing baby for the next few months. Nursing mothers should completely abstain from mangoes and jackfruits. I have seen babies develop dysentery when mothers eat these fruits. Nursing moms must follow a strict diet for the first thirty days. However, a small amount of restricted items will be cooked into a lentil soup concoction and fed to the mother during the first 30 days to ensure that the baby does not experience negative reactions later from these foods. But then the restricted foods are avoided until the mother stops nursing.

After the bath: *Meena blowing gently on the ears and navel ensures they are dried and will be free of infection. The baby is dressed after the massage and bath, ready to go back to his mother*

R: *Except mango and jackfruit, can lactating mothers eat other fruits and vegetables?*
M: Mothers can eat oranges, papaya, guava, melons and other fruits. I ask them to avoid dark green leafy vegetables, because when new mothers eat these, the baby passes green colored stools and that makes mothers quite nervous. Mothers can eat drumsticks and moringa leaves. Greens can be re-introduced, beginning with small quantities, about a month after birth.

R: *Are there other restrictions?*
M: Bengal gram (garbanzo beans, chickpeas, besan flour), mochakottai (lima beans) and brinjal (eggplant) should be strictly avoided. I have seen that when mothers eat these, the baby gets eczema. I recommend only certain types of fish for the same reason. Shark, stingray and crab help lactation. For vegetarians, I recommend a daily intake of water boiled with black pepper and cumin seeds. They should have garlic and turmeric every day to build immunity, reduce inflammation and avoid infections. I also use a recipe from my grandmother and mother to prepare a special medicine, *kayakalpam*, at home. We

Tools of the trade: *(clockwise from top) grinding a calumus (sweet flag) paste to apply on the infant; aromatic incense burning near the child; non-acrid sambrani (frankincense, of which there are many varieties and grades) for incense; brass "sanggu" baby feeder to get medicine and food into the mouth; coconut shell with homemade black pottu (for forehead dot)*

dry-roast and powder 21 ingredients including cumin, black pepper, fennel, long pepper, liquorice, nutmeg, ginger and other herbs. We add garlic pulp, sesame oil and some palm sugar and make small balls that are stored in a jar for the mother to take each morning on an empty stomach. Kayakalpam is tasty and helps with digestion, gas, bowel movements, weight loss and lactation, firms up the internal organs, reduces inflammation and helps control hair loss after birth.

R: *What is your breastfeeding guidance?*
M: Hospitals promote bottle feeding, saying it is safe for the infant and easy for the mother. But I recommend breastfeeding, and I teach new mothers how to do it, just as I learned from my mother. Immediately after birth, the baby should be allowed to nurse and drink colostrum. This builds its immunity and helps form the attachment with the mother.

I teach women about feeding posture, hygiene, care of the breasts and how to avoid infection. It is very important to wear a clean support garment. Sometimes immediately after birth the breasts get too full of milk and become swollen, painful and hard. This pain and discomfort can be relieved by wrapping the breasts in a warm water compress, gently massaging them with warm oil and cleaning around the nipples to clear the milk ducts. Once the baby establishes a nursing routine per his hunger needs, the breast discomfort will calm down. Mothers need not be afraid. Breastfeeding also helps moms lose weight and achieve hormonal balance.

R: *What do you advise do you give to mothers with less milk?*
M: I recommend eating a rich diet. I ask them to stay relaxed and keep trying. For non-vegetarians, I recommend plenty of fish and eggs; for vegetarians, rasam and a chutney made from toor dal and garlic. Regarding wet-nurses, people prefer formula milk instead of engaging a wet-nurse.

R: *How do you help when babies reject breast milk?*
M: I ask the mother to fast and cleanse her system and to avoid stimulants like excessive teas, coffee and strong-smelling spices and herbs. Fasting eliminates toxins from the body, so her milk may become palatable to the baby. If the baby is introduced to artificial milk immediately after birth, it begins to enjoy the rich taste and easy flow of milk from rubber nipples and does not want to exert itself by sucking on the mother's nipples. It begins to reject mother's milk. On encountering this problem, people often turn to formula milk, but it is better to fast and keep trying. Eventually, the baby may begin to relish mother's milk. Restrictions are lifted when the mother stops breastfeeding. Mothers who do not breastfeed do not need to follow a strict diet.

R: *What do you recommend for weaning?*
M: I suggest giving the child about a teaspoon of moringa-leaf juice—or make a paste of "should-not-be-named-ointment," (sweet flag, calamus leaves and roots) with asafoetida, and apply this paste on the nipples. The baby tastes this and is turned off the breast. He can now begin solid foods. If possible, though, it is best to continue breastfeeding till the baby cuts his first four teeth. During the early days of teething, he can get upset stomach and become irritable. If he is still nursing, his suffering is reduced. Sweet flag is a very important medicine. Jatika, oak galls and sweet flag are

all photos: mahar asher sperling

From India to USA to Costa Rica: *(left) Vatsala Sperling with Alessandro Jose; (right) mother Yalixa Rodriguez Soto nurses her boy Alessandro as a neighbor's daughter, young Mari Cruz, gets to know the newest member of the extended family.*

all ground together, and the wet paste is applied on the baby's stomach.

R: *Why not call the ointment by a name?*
M: It is a popular Indian belief that naming the herb makes it lose its effect. Back home, when they mix common salt in medicines, they believe if we call it by name, the medicine will not heal.

INFANT CARE

M: A healthy mother and child usually return home by the third day. I begin caring for the baby as soon as it is brought home.

R: *Do you do puja or visit a temple before you visit the baby?*
M: No temple visits for the baby are allowed during the first thirty days. I just lift the child and pray to our family Deity, Goddess Amman, for the health and long life of the baby and then bathe the kid. We do pass the camphor arati around the baby each day to cleanse the aura and then throw the camphor outside the home by the road.

R: *What is your bathing procedure?*
M: When I am called for infant nurturing, on the very first day we only use water, just warm enough to be bearable to the hand. There is no massage with oils or any other substance. From days three to seven, on alternate days the hair and body are bathed one day and then only the body is bathed on the next. We use baby shampoo and baby soap. In India we used to grind bolet beet, white turmeric and gram flour and use that for the first body bathings. For the head, only soapnut. Starting on the seventh day, we mix sesame, coconut and castor oil for the massage. Water used to soak uncooked rice and later boiled as well as a decoction of boiled betel leaves, basil, Indian borage, balloon vines, etc,. are added to the bath water. This is very beneficial to the baby's health.

From a safe distance we let the infant breathe a little smoke from incense made with dried omam, garlic peels, benzoin and some turmeric. This improves digestion, keeps away flu and wards off negative influences. From the 16th day onward, additional herbs are added to the water. A string of tiny black-and-white beads is worn around its neck to ward of negative energy. Black and white bangles and beaded sweet flag bangles are worn on the wrists. The smell of sweet flag helps reduce vomiting. The bangles are removed one by one daily until the 30th day, after which the baby is taken to the temple.

R: *Do you use any other medicines?*
M: I have using a traditional medicine for years, just as my grandmother did. We take neem leaf, basil leaf and French thyme, crush them in a mortar and filter it in a clean white cloth. By giving extracts of these during the first 30 days, we make the child capable of absorbing other herbal medications later in life, like the special herbal medicine from Kerala. That is the reason that we should give Tamil medicines after birth.

R: *What are some other dos and don'ts?*
M: You must use lots of water during the bath. But no water is ever allowed to enter the ears and nose. This takes some skill. You can also shape the nose carefully by massaging with oil from the lower to the higher end. During the massage and bath, we stretch, flex and exercise the baby's limbs. We also pour a bit of cold water on its private parts. We call this "shock water;" it helps allay the development of fear and makes the child adapt to temperature changes later in life. Gas, distended belly, comes from the mother eating wrong foods while nursing and needs to be corrected.

R: *What are the advantages of the traditional method of placing the infant on our legs for massage and bath as compared to using a basin?*
M: Babies bend, stretch and adjust to the contours of our legs. Skin contact allows us to balance the baby on our legs and focus completely so it feels nurtured, safe and warm—not cold and isolated as it does in the basin. You have to be lean and flexible to do this properly. In Indian villages even grandmothers are able to sit on the floor and bathe the baby on their legs. The care-givers must learn to take care of their own health first; only then can they help others.

R: *What about all the concerns for evil eye and bad influences?*
M: Traditionally the child should not be brought outside after 6pm. My grandma said babies are so pure that they can be affected by the slightest negative influence. So many people may pass by—hygienic, unhygienic, evil eyes, evil impacts, bad vibrations, sick aura. All these affect the child. That is the reason why we adults returning home after 6pm should sprinkle ourselves with turmeric water and wash our hands and legs before coming in, and then pass a camphor flame around the child. This will ensure that negative influences do not enter the house.

Hatha yoga from birth: *During and after the bath, the nurse bends and exercises the baby's limbs to lengthen muscles, compress the abdomen, and develop flexibility and full range of motion through the joints.*

R: *How long do you continue nurturing?*
M: I have nurtured some babies continuously for five months, for families who do not want to change the hand that is comfortable to the baby. The baby comes to know your touch. If the child has only a single caregiver for the first three months, it is less likely to contract illnesses. Others engage me for one to three months. Families have different needs. When we transfer care to another, it is mandatory to be there to help the baby adjust to the new nurse. When I am with a family, I teach one person how to nurture the infant so that he/she can continue the process when I stop working with them. It is good if they can nurture and bathe the infant daily at least until it begins to hold its own head up. Ideally, the baby should be nurtured for six months.

R: *Do you think different regions in India have different techniques?*
M: The fundamentals of infant nurturing techniques are universal, but in a big country there may be differences in a few methods. In a brahmin household, for example, the mother's food and the baby's first solid food will be vegetarian. Others include eggs, meat, chicken and bone broth for both mother and baby. However, both follow the same principles for nurturing the baby.

R: *Are you happy in your work?*
M: Yes. Just the other day, the first child I ever bathed in Malaysia greeted me. She is a college student now, and she wants me to nurture her baby when she has one. This gives me immense happiness.

R: *Meena, you have so much knowledge, I am grateful to have found you. What about other women? Who teaches them?*
M: Some families have elder women who teach their daughters. If they have no one to help, they call me. I contact the mother at the first trimester. I visit her from time to time and certainly by the time she is ready to deliver, I am on hand, available to offer help and support. Because almost all births happen at the hospital, complications are handled by doctors; but when the baby gets home, it needs round-the-clock care. These days many mothers live alone, separated from their mothers, and that is where I play a role as an infant nurturer.

R: *What problems do we face in preserving our ancient system of infant nurturing?*
M: Our system is not book-based. It is passed down from one generation to the next. Some youngsters do not want to learn from their mothers. If youngsters don't learn infant nurturing, this art could be lost in one generation. In my view, loss of this knowledge would be a big loss for the babies themselves. If people want to go to the hospital for childbirth, that is their wish. But once the baby comes home, they can still adopt traditional ways to nurture infants. We have the time-tested methods to give babies the best start in life.

Conclusion, by Vatsala Sperling

In recent years our family—my husband, Ehud, son Mahar and I— started visiting Costa Rica to initiate a reforestation program. Until the late 1970s, this country's agricultural society required large families. Children were needed and valued. Some women might have 17 or more children, starting at a very early age. All deliveries were at home, with no medical intervention except help from a midwife.

Young mothers were supported by huge extended families. Young and old helped care for infants. But the modernization that happened in India over a couple of centuries came to Costa Rica at a very fast pace. In just over fifty years, industrial food, TV, electricity, tap water, hospitals and universal education arrived. Educated women now work outside the home. Even in villages, kids are born in hospitals and midwives are unheard of. Consequently the knowledge of natural childbirth and infant nurture was lost in just one generation.

Having graduated from a homeopathy school, I began seeing clients in Costa Rica. A new generation of moms with hospital-born babies wanted to try homeopathy for kids. They began asking me questions about infant nurturing using natural methods. I gave a demonstration on infant nurturing as I had learned. I explained the superiority of breast milk over formula and the advantages of weaning with fresh foods cooked at home rather than packaged baby foods from the supermarket. I showed them how to massage the baby and give it a daily bath.

Thus has this knowledge, rooted in ayurveda, survived through matrilineal transmission—despite hundreds of years of Islamic and British rule in India—to reach us today. We are spreading this knowledge in Malaysia, a Muslim country, and in Costa Rica, a Catholic country.

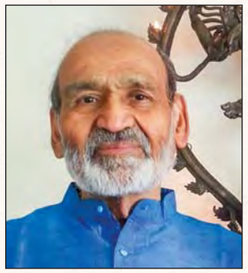
Across centuries, locations and cultures, mothers have always wanted to know how to birth babies safely and how to nurture and sustain them during the first delicate early days and weeks on Earth. This is one of humanity's universal needs. This is what nature intends mothers to do, so the human race can continue to thrive, like other animals and plants who do not have a medicalized birth process and who know inherently how to nurture their young. Nonhuman species live naturally and transmit their knowledge nonverbally. But we humans require instruction for sustaining the natural ways of being. Thankfully, from grandma to ma, from Meena to Ratna, from me to a few Costa Rican mothers, and through other unsung midwives around the world who carry on this work, the ancient knowledge of infant nurturing is continuing across centuries and continents.

OPINION

Confronting Superstition & Rationality

It is time that our gurus and sages refresh our secondary scriptures

BY BHAGAWANDAS LATHI



Religion is often deemed irrational, while science is thought to be rational, because it can verify and reproduce results. Abrahamic religions do rely on irrational faith, but not Hinduism, which, like science, includes verifiability and reproducibility.

Rational Foundations of Hinduism

Hindu sacred literature is classified either as *shruti* (that which is heard) or *smriti* (that which is remembered). *Vedas* (wisdom) and *Agamas* (descent of truth) are the shruti, the unchangeable, timeless and universal truths based on the mystics' experiences of ultimate reality in transcendental states of consciousness. Shruti, derived from such mystical experience, is considered authoritative only for supra-sensory (*atindriya*) truths. These are truths beyond our senses and reason, such as the nature of Ultimate Reality, God, soul, world, liberation and the means for liberation.

Shruti is not considered authority in the intra-sensuous domain, that is, matters within the range of reason, senses and perception where science is the authority. Shruti cannot controvert or contradict facts of empirical or rational experience. Shankara, in his commentary on *Bhagavad Gita* (ch18-vs67), states that even though a hundred shruti texts may declare that fire is cold or dark, they have no authority in the matter, unless it has some other implied meaning.

Secondary Scriptures (Smritis)

Hinduism's secondary scriptures, called smriti, derive from human insights and experience. Written by learned sages and seers, they preserve the course of culture and tradition about the right human conduct, legal and moral codes, proper goals of life, interpersonal relationships, duties and obligations of rulers, and of various professions and individuals, etc. Its literature consists of epics *(itihasa)*, mythology *(puranas)*, law books *(dharmasutras,* e.g. *Manusmriti)* and works dealing with household ceremonies, the disciplines and techniques of theater and dance, music, song and pageantry, yoga and sadhana, metaphysics and ethics, art, sciences and astrology.

Smriti scriptures, unlike shruti, are subject to revision with respect to changes in time, place, customs, traditions and new knowledge. Unlike shruti, smritis can sometimes advocate force in order to safeguard dharma, the social order and justice. A ruler's duty (dharma) is to safeguard people, the nation; and justice may involve violence against criminals or aggressive foreign powers. It is in this context the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is a smriti, has to be understood.

In **Hinduism Today's** April/May/June, 2017, issue readers Sai Ravi Kiran and Himanshu Vyas have asked pertinent questions regarding what is proper religion and what is superstition. Such issues confuse many Hindus, but do have clear-cut, satisfactory answers. These questions squarely fall in the domain of smriti, since they belong to the area of culture and tradition. Here, good sense, ethics and practicability should be our guide. Too many old traditions eventually become superstitions because they fail to change with time.

Clean the Attic of Your Old Home

Coincidentally, Swami Bhaskarananda Saraswati in the same issue says: "Any religion can be compared to the attic of an old home. Unless the attic is regularly cleaned, it gathers dust and cobwebs and eventually becomes unusable. Similarly, if a religion cannot be updated or cleaned from time to time it loses its usefulness and cannot relate anymore to changed times and people." Swami clearly implies updating smriti, as seen from his last sentence referring to "changed times and people." Hinduism has neglected its attic cleaning for centuries because it had been enslaved by alien cultures. Today there is no such excuse. Unfortunately, Hindu monasteries have lost much of the public support they had in old days. Yet, they must collaborate to meet this challenge, perhaps by forming a council of gurus.

Hinduism and the Spirit of Science

The truths of shruti flow from mystical experiences. Even though they are supra-sensuous (transcending reason and the senses), they are verifiable through experience by any person willing to follow the hard discipline needed to realize transcendental states of consciousness. Timeless truths of shruti have been experienced and proclaimed by mystics from all times, all religions, and all parts of the world, as attested in the anthology of mystical writings compiled by Aldous Huxley. Shruti truths are verifiable and repeatable. Smriti scriptures, dealing with worldly topics, customs and traditions, are subject to change based on new knowledge. Thus, Hindu scriptures do not conflict with science and technology, but enhance and complement them in the sphere of the supra-sensuous domain beyond the purview of science. They give science balance and purpose.

Irrationality Vs. Rationality, Time for Refresh

The late Prof. Frits Staal (1930-2012), a Sanskrit scholar, wrote: "A common Western prejudice has it that the West is rational and the East is irrational. It would be no exaggeration to say that in the realm of religion the situation is the exact opposite. In general, the East is rational; the West irrational." The scriptures of Abrahamic faiths make no distinction between supra-sensuous and intra-sensuous domains. All are combined in one book which is then claimed as the "word of God," from which not a single word can be changed ever, even if it contradicts observed facts, reason or new knowledge. History is replete with the slaughter of hundreds of thousands who did not accept the irrational views embodied in these books.

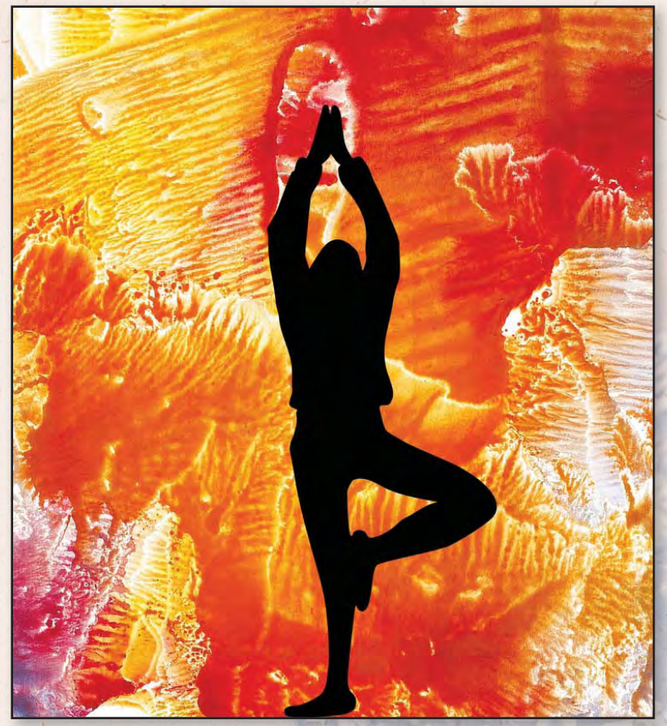
Hinduism is not imprisoned in the iron cage of irrational and unverifiable dogmas and revelations of dead prophets. It is as fresh and timely as one wants it to be. But this requires refreshing smriti. This must be undertaken with urgency by respectable Hindu gurus, using good sense, ethics and practicability as their guide.

bhagawandas lathi, 83, *professor emeritus, is a pro-active Hindu & author of nine electrical engineering books.* lathibp@hotmail.com

Hindu Heritage Endowment

A Balanced Approach to Giving: Simple Solutions for Life's Financial Challenges

The two hurdles we hear most when it comes to giving are lack of resources and a desire to put family first. We can help! Read on to see how these obstacles are easily overcome.



Obstacle: Family Obligations

I have children and grandchildren to worry about, and they come first.

Solution: Estate planning attorneys can explain the various methods available to fulfill your philanthropic desires without jeopardizing your family's security. The easiest approach is to remember us through a gift in your will or living trust. This gift supports our future work and you can change your mind at any time.

Obstacle: On a Budget

I am not rich. There is only so much money to go around.

Solution: Rather than make a gift of cash now to support our work, consider the following giving options. Bonus: they also offer important tax savings for you and your family.

Stock. For gifts of appreciated stock that you have owned longer than one year, you receive an income tax charitable deduction for their full fair market value—not the price you originally paid for them.

Life insurance policies. You can donate a policy you no longer need or simply name Hindu Heritage Endowment as the beneficiary.

Retirement plan assets. Highly taxed when left to heirs, this makes an excellent charitable gift after your lifetime.

Real estate. You can donate your home now and still live there for the rest of your life.

We can help you identify a gift to fit your goals. Contact us today to learn how you can make a big impact on Hindu Heritage Endowment.

Strengthen your family's future and continue your support of Hindu Heritage Endowment by downloading the pdf file at www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml.

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July to September Endowment Contributions

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment

Anonymous	USD156.54
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	137.77
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00
Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Hitesvara Saravan	84.00
Jai Sivakumara	324.00
Other Donations	30,000.00
Total	30,815.06

Iraivan Temple Endowment

Kalai Bala	90.31
Frank Burkhardt	30.00
Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	27.14
Amey Surendra Gangal	22.00
Dinesh Kumar Jayaram	13.54
A. Paranthaman	4.45
Jayaram Rajaletchumi	22.58
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Indrani Shanmugasundram	22.58
Anonymous	33.00
Other Donations	30,000.00
Total	30,316.60

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

Thirujnanam Arnassalon	24.02
Juhivaasana Koothan	5.97
Anil Kumar	27.00
Ashwini Maureemootoo	11.90
Saroja Maureemootoo	6.02
Anonymous	95.90
Jogendra Mooroogen	6.02
Vidyadevi Mooroogen	6.02
Shanmugam Muthuk	29.65
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Chinmayie Rajasankara	40.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	108.00
Shanthi Suresh	251.00
Sornavanita Sutherman	20.00
Total	681.48

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund

Mukund Acharya	299.00
Rajeev Agarwal	299.00
Hemakheshaa Naatha Batumallah	87.00
Sandeep Bhatnagar	300.00
Gunavadee Caremben	8.98
Somasundaram Caremben	8.98
Sukanta Caremben	8.98
Srinivasan Chandrasekaran	300.00
Jaydeep Chaudhari	299.00
Joy Garg	300.00
William S. Kise	299.00
Navin & Prem Kumar	299.00
Sourabh Lashkery	299.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen	8.98
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	8.98
Udeyadeva Moorghen	8.98
Yugeshwar Muralidhar	299.00
Anonymous	798.00
Prepageran Narayanan	300.00
Deepak Nautiyal	299.00
John Scott	299.00
Muthukumar Shanmugam	30.55
Rajiv & Vibha Singh	299.00
Sai Singh	120.00
Ramachandran Sitaraman	299.00
Hemavalli Sivalingam	144.42
Javanya Skanda	114.75
Suganth Srichandramohan	300.00
Shanthi Suresh	499.00
Kirankumar & Nandini Topudurti	299.00
Total	6,935.60

Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund

Vel Mahalingum	17.96

Hindu of the Year Fund

Rajendra Giri	121.00

Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment

Anonymous	30.00
Gowri Nadason	124.21
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00
Bala Sivaceyon	20.00
Total	267.21

Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	17.96
Gowri Nadason	124.21
Rajeswary Ramamoorthy	225.00
Aran Sambandar	108.00
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00
Matthew Wieczork	18.00
Anonymous	238.36
Other Donations	4,800.00
Total	5,600.53

Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund

Lim Hock Leong	9.00

Iyarappan Temple Trust

Krishanth Rajasooriyar	45.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Total	96.00

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam

Anonymous	324.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Total	375.00

Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund

Rajendra Giri	121.00
Anonymous	324.00
Total	445.00

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund

Valley Neonatal Associates Inc.	700.00
Anonymous	7,000.00
Raj & Damayanthi Bharathan	350.00
Manny & Vinothini Yogarajah	350.00
Total	8,400.00

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment

Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00
Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	44.92
Total	119.92

Hinduism Today Production Fund

Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00
Thom Drinkwater	50.00
Prabhakar C Ghosh	90.00
Hiranya Gowda	93.00
Anonymous	11,071.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	5.97
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	1,400.00
Aran Sambandar	108.00
Total	13,092.98

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund

Benevity	120.00
Rohit G. Bhatt	101.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.99
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	688.86
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Matthew Wieczork	36.00
Total	1,432.60

Hindu Education Endowment

Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	100.00

Hindu Press International Endowment Fund

Hiranya Gowda	63.00

Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund

Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Total	1,575.00

Saiva Agamas Trust

Hitesvara Saravan	21.00

Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment

Anil Kumar	18.00

Positive Discipline Endowment

Vinaya Alahan	33.00

Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund

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Srinivas R. Madaboosi	300.00
Total	333.00

A. Shanmugam Family Fund

Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00

Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund

Rajadeva Alahan	102.00

Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund

Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund

Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	114.50
Anonymous	1287.06
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Lorraine Jackson	10.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	950.17
Michael Kempinski	1,080.00
Ashwini Maureemootoo	1.51
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	30.55
Sumathi Raja	150.00
Aran Sambandar	162.00
Ramai Santhirapala	51.00
Andrew Schoenbaum	10.00
Peter Smith	-25.00
Gananatha Subrahmanyam	19.32
Anba Dayananden Valayten	11.68
Vayudeva Varadan	42.00
Sahunthala Vinothachandran	1,008.00

July to September Endowment Contributions

Michael Wasylkiw	648.00
Total	6,324.79

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment

Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00

Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund

Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund

Bala Sivaceyon	20.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	20.00
Total	40.00

Taos Hanuman Fund

Anonymous	36.12

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment

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Hindu Literature Fund

John & Abha Wiersba	153.00

Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund

Hiranya Gowda	153.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00
Total	213.00

Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00
Total	63.00

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund

Anonymous	33.00

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment

Anonymous	831.18
Marlene Carter	162.00
Rajendra Giri	121.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Purany Ponniah	100.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	10.00
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00
Total	1,475.19

Kodiswara Satguru Malaysia Travel Fund

Siva Jothiswary Selvanathan	89.12

Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund

V.N.Rhor Beach Investments LLC	150.00
Arun Ramakrishnan	100.00
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00
Total	286.00

Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund

Kodiswara Selvanathan	89.12

India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund

Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.99
Hiranya Gowda	99.00
Manogaran Mardemootoo	60.61
Kulagan Moonesawmy	17.96
Total	180.56

Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment

Anonymous	169.79
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.99
Dheeraj Handa	11.00
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00
Natraj Narayanswami	22.00
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
Total	580.78

Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment

Anonymous	36.12

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Ishani Chowdhury	80.00
Anil Kumar	27.00
Michael Zimmermann	5.00
Total	112.00

Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment

Raj Padman Padmalingam	25,000.00

Panchangam Endowment Fund

Anonymous	300.00

Digital Dharma Endowment

Anonymous	48.18
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	68.88
Anonymous	270.90
Total	387.96

Insurance Premiums

Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Total	3,003.00

Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment

Other Donations	600.00

Total Contributions	$140,463.70

Funds at Market Value, Sep 30, 2017

Total Endowment Funds	$15,612,314.68
Grand Total	$15,612,314.68

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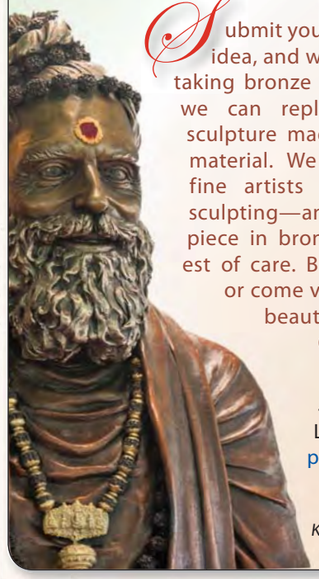

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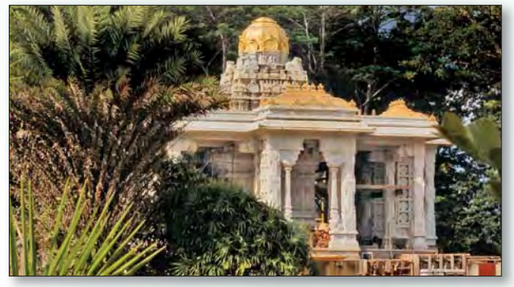

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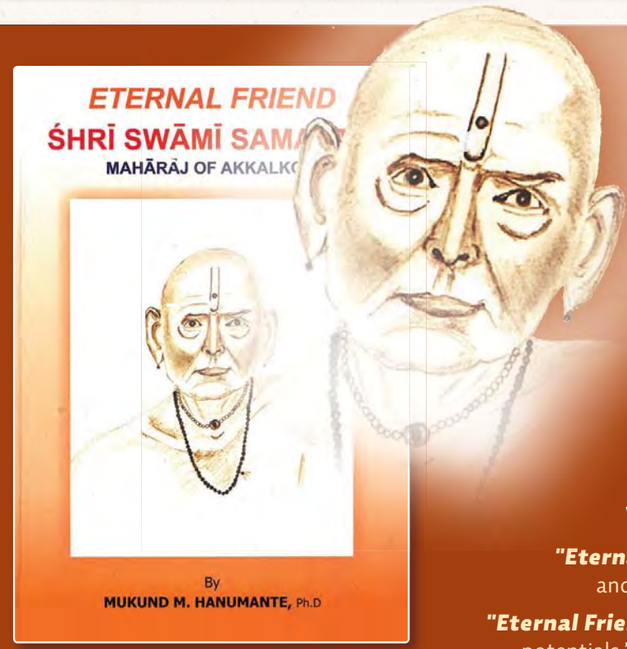

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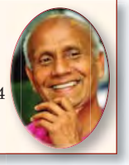

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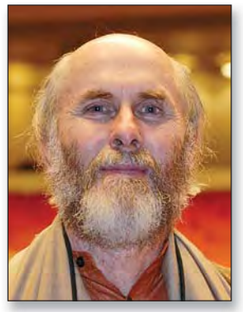

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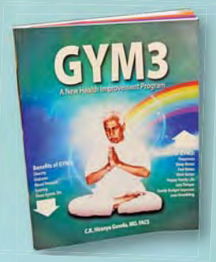

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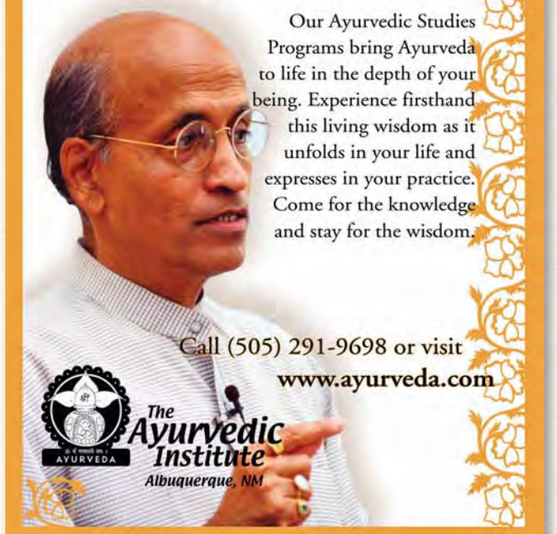

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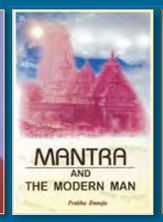

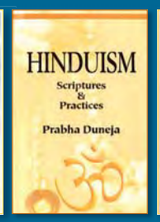

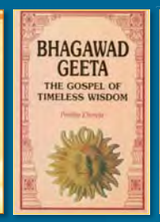

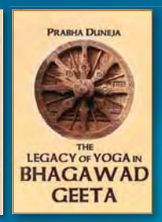

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India in Details

India can be exasperatingly arcane, complex and convoluted, even for Indians, let alone the rest of the world. So it's not easy to find a source of insider insights that really make sense. Our editors are fans of the work by Karolina Goswami, a young woman originally from Poland who now lives in India with her Indian-born husband Anurag, a successful furniture designer. She has created a vibrant YouTube channel called "India in Details," producing scores of videos, ranging in length from two to fifty-five minutes.

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Karolina is not afraid of tough issues. Her well-conceived topics range from India's pitiful misrepresentations in world media to its brilliant innovations and inventions. She touches on some rarely discussed matters, such as the nation's expansive modernization and the sanctuary it has offered throughout history to those in need. Her balanced analysis sheds a welcome light on topics like comparative rates of poverty, women's safety, why India's cows are considered holy and waste and violence in India as contrasted with major Western countries.

She is not a neutral observer, something she admits in one of her most popular pieces, "Why I Love India." Because of her personal experience with both Western and Eastern thought and culture, she has an uncanny eye for exposing misconceptions, fake news and known hypocrisies, explaining them in ways Westerners can easily grasp.

These videos inform, challenge, surprise and inspire, all the while being presented with artistry, clarity, intelligence, confidence and not a small dose of charm. While it is easy to criticize peoples, cultures and nations, Karolina's videos eschew contemporary currents of journalistic criticism and negativity. Instead, she offers a personal, down-to-earth take on a land that she regards with deep affection, a land of temples and IT centers, of rush-hour cities and rustic villages. A land, she says, like no other.

india in details

See her YouTube channel:
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India through Karolina's eyes: *(clockwise from above) Karolina Goswami gives an introduction to one of her many videos; Mumbai, India's largest city, at night; Karolina travels through different parts of India seeing things for herself; in one video we learn why India's sacred cows are so highly revered; in another Karolina explains Diwali, the festival of lights*

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