

HINDUISM TODAY

October/November/December, 2017 US\$7.95

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



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(Cover) Mirabai dances and plays music with Krishna in a Rajasthani-style painting; (above) A 108-foot tall statue of Lord Siva at Solophok Chardham—a temple complex in Namchi, Sikkim, with replicas of the pilgrimage destinations of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Dwarka and Rameshwaram plus the twelve Jyotirlingam temples of India.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2017 • THE HINDU YEAR HEMALAMBA, 5119

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USA Contacts: Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, letters@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), October/November/December 2017, Volume 39, No. 4. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-877-255-1540; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-7032, ext. 103; subscribe@hindu.org; advertising: 1-888-464-1008, ads@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy, a nonprofit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. **International Contacts:** In Malaysia: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Kovind Enterprise, No. 17, Jalan Ungu U9/29, Sunway Kayangan, 40150 Shah Alam. Tel: 016-380-2393; E-mail: silveraraj05@yahoo.com. In Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Blk 210 #06-326, Pasir Ris Street 21, 510210. Tel: 9664-9001; E-mail: dsam55@gmail.com. For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail letters@hindu.org. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

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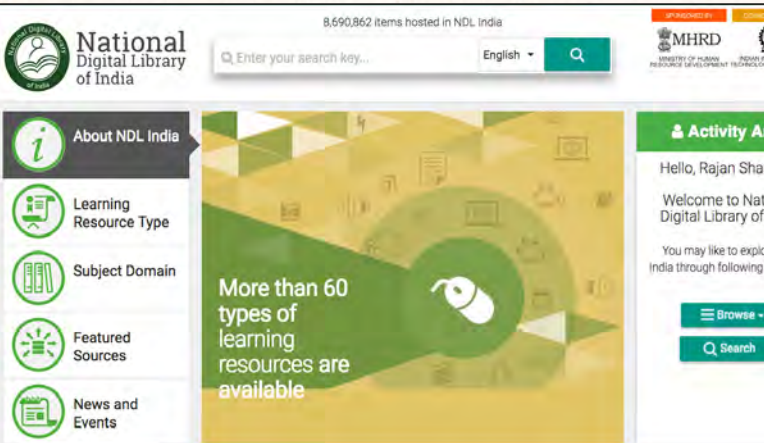


The Great Wall of India

Discover Rajasthan's Kumbhalgarh Fort, a World Heritage Site and a 23-mile long architectural wonder. ... Page 54



GLOBAL DHARMA



Online repository: The screenshot shows the Digital Library's front page, sidebar and search field. After signing up with a name, email and password, the entire database is yours for the searching. The NDL focuses on technology, science, humanities and agriculture. Visit this great library at bit.ly/Digital_Library

INDIA

Temple Lands Returned

IN A CONCERTED EFFORT TO restore temple lands to their rightful owners, the Tamil Nadu state government has recovered 5559 acres of land owned by 789 temples in the last six years.

The Times of India reported that in July, 2017, documents presented in court showed that vast areas of temple land had been wrongly transferred to private persons during the implementation of the Updating Registry Scheme (UDR).

Government officials told The Times of India that when land records were being automated at that time, data entry operators—with or without connivance of government officials—forged documents, changing the name on the patta, or deed, in favor of individuals with names of Deities and temples. For example, lands held in the name of "Siva Nataraja" (a temple Deity) could be easily transferred to an individual of the same name.



Tirupati of Southeast Asia: Throngs of devotees wait in anticipation as the doors of this Klang temple open after being under construction for eight long years

RESOURCES

India Puts 6.5 Million Books Online, for Free

THE NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY of India added 65 million books to their web library during June, 2017, in an initiative from the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. All these books are free to download or read online. Including textbooks, audio and video content, this one portal offers over 8.6 million items in all—a massive collection of learning resources that gives students a powerful advantage at no cost.

The publications and media sources appear endless, though the site is not yet perfect—clicking on certain articles may bring

up an empty profile page. Also, some material is sourced from other libraries or agencies, so you must request permission.

The search feature is fast and accurate, based on keywords from the title of the publication and the author or any profile keyword. The experience is similar to a Google search but yields more clearly defined results. Results from YouTube show up for video content just as if you searched using Google.

This database is a treasure trove for students who need to research a particular subject, author or field of study. Kudos to India for empowering students everywhere!



Vast vistas: Land is slowly restored to temples as the rightful owner

The properties are mostly agricultural lands, but also include residential and commercial plots, some being used as tourist hotels.

Thousands of acres of temple lands still remain in private

hands, but a senior official of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department counseled, "This is an ongoing process, and steps are being taken to restore temple lands."

MALAYSIA

Worshipping for 100+ Years

AFTER EIGHT YEARS OF RENOVATION, the Sri Sundararaja Perumal Temple of Klang, Malaysia, ceremoniously reopened its doors in April of 2017 to 100,000 devotees.

The largest Vaishnavite temple in Malaysia, it is often referred to as the "Thirupati of Southeast Asia" after its famous namesake in Andhra Pradesh, India.

Built in 1890, it is one of the oldest Vaishnavite temples

in Southeast Asia. In 2008 it became the first temple in Malaysia to receive the ISO 9001 certification for efficient administration.

The extensive restoration of this iconic 127-year-old structure cost approximately US\$2.3 million. Devotees are enthusiastically looking forward to another 100-plus years of worship!



TEMPLE ANNIVERSARY

Uniting India and Canada

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER Justin Trudeau, alongside Sri Mahant Swami Maharaj, head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, performed arati at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto last July, 2017, at what is considered Canada's most prominent Hindu place of worship. Trudeau joined the celebratory event marking the 10th anniversary of the mandir. The ceremony was attended by more than 7,500 devotees.

"The relationship between our two countries is truly a special one. It's a relationship our government and our ministers both deeply value and actively cultivate," Trudeau said during his speech. The PM went on to say he wanted to "recognize the

importance of the bond between Canada and India. The more than one million Canadians of Indian origin have made countless contributions to our national fabric."

Canada's PM participated in the abhishekam ceremony in the main temple and also the arati, officiated over by the spiritual head of BAPS. At one point, Trudeau turned to the guru and said, "Please keep Canada in your prayers."

He also pointed out the temple's dashabdi, 10th anniversary, coincides with Canada's 150th year of merger, by which the British colonies of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were united into one Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867.



Peaceful alliance: Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visits the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir to celebrate its 10th anniversary on Saturday, July 22, 2017. Trudeau mentioned the temple's significance, saying it is "without a doubt one of Canada's architectural wonders with its intricate stone and wood carvings."

SOCIAL SERVICE

Empowering the Disabled

THE SHREE RAMANA MAHARISHI Academy for the Blind (SRMAB), based in Bengaluru, India, is the humble creation of a group of selfless, dedicated visionaries who were inspired by the life of Sri Ramana Maharishi (1879–1950), the Hindu sage of Arunachala, Tiruvannamalai. SRMAB was founded in 1969 with the motto, "Service to Humanity is Service to God."

Focused on the ideal of a participative, rights-based, barrier-free society, the Academy strives in many ways to break down the social barriers typically faced by differently abled persons. By providing them with education and many other needed services, it creates opportunities for them to integrate into the societal mainstream as self-reliant members and live life to the fullest.

Its multifaceted activities provide services in the field of health, education and socioeconomic rehabilitation to people from urban and rural areas. People with disabilities are empowered so that they can actively participate in community events and are able to contribute to

society. The academy provides education along with accommodation, vocational training and rehabilitation, livelihood support, and social empowerment to persons with disabilities. All services are provided free of cost.

The academy's newsletter, which can be read at their website, is written largely by the children themselves. The founder and president, T.V. Srinivasan, explains that this "not only improves their communication skills but also allows them to speak to you directly about their school."

Dance and music were introduced as extracurricular activities in 1973. In 1982, using the touch-and-feel method, the Academy introduced classical dance, which has become a means of introducing students to audiences worldwide. Since 1983 the Academy's students have toured India, UK, US and Italy. In India alone they have performed in some 2,000 shows.

The membership's hard work, commitment and single-minded devotion to the cause have made SRMAB the success it is.



Success on many fronts: (top) The SRMAB celebrates their silver jubilee, marking their 25th anniversary of selfless service in the name of Ramana Maharishi; (above) one of the school's many dance troops during a performance.



WORLD EVENTS

International Yoga Day

THE 2017 CELEBRATION OF International Yoga Day may have surpassed any prior level of communal and governmental participation around the globe.

Since its inception in 2015, June 21 is celebrated as International Yoga Day in countries all over the world. The idea was proposed in 2014 by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the United Nations General Assembly, he said, "Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action, restraint and fulfillment, harmony between man and nature, a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with

yourself, the world and nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help in well being. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day."

For the twelve days leading up to this year's Yoga Day, the Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN) launched a bevy of life-size mascots to help spread yoga and wellness awareness to children. The mascots, and the flash mobs they starred in, connected with families by providing entertainment and interactivity. They appeared at malls, public places, events and recreational tourist areas in Delhi, Lucknow and Haryana. Watch a delightful YouTube video of one



spontaneous yoga mob at bit.ly/YogFlashMob.

Baba Ramdev, popular hatha yogi and co-owner of mega-business Patanjali Ayurved, set a Guinness World Record in Ahmedabad for having the greatest number of people performing yoga at one time. Each of the 54,522 yogis was electronically monitored as they entered the space, far exceeding the 2015

count of 35,984 yogis that PM Modi guided in the performing asanas on the 2015 inaugural day.

Ramdev's 2017 mega event was held simultaneously at five grounds, including those belonging to Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation, the Gujarat University and the Ahmedabad Education Society. The grounds had 100 entry points, 100 giant LED screens and 10,000 volunteers from Patanjali Yogpeeth Gurukul.

.....
Uniting the world through yoga: (above) The family-friendly mascot of Yoga Day poses with a group of young people. The mascot yogis were a part of a large flash mob party that went around to public places, danced spontaneously and raised awareness about the upcoming holiday; (left, inset) a close-up shot of over 50 thousand sets of mudras being performed by history's largest yoga session; (left) Ramdev and others guide the monumental crowd for each yoga asana.



BRIEFLY...

THE 2016 AUSTRALIAN CENSUS, released in July, 2017, revealed that the Hindu population in the country increased by 533% in the last 25 years, while Buddhists rose by 200% and Muslims increased by 160%. At the same time, the numbers of people declaring themselves Christian declined from 88% of the population in 1966 to 52% in 2016. About 29.6% of respondents said

they had no religion, an increase from 22% in 2011, and a large jump from one percent in 1966.

IN JULY, 2017, A FEDERAL JUDGE rejected a motion to dismiss a lawsuit claiming California treats Hinduism unfavorably compared to other religions in its public education standards and framework. The suit was filed in February by California

Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials, a group that promotes the accurate portrayal of Hinduism in schools, and three Hindu parents suing on behalf of their children. "I'm pleased that the Establishment Clause claim has survived, because it's actually kind of the heart of what we're fighting over," plaintiffs' attorney Glenn Katon said in an interview. "The main thing we're fighting over is the depiction of Hinduism in the California education standards and framework, which we claim is disparaging toward Hindus."

Global Dharma
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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.



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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

A Call to Teach Hinduism

Taking an active educational roll to help others decode and deepen their Hindu Identity

BY SHAWN BINDA

I AM HINDU, AND I AM ALSO Canadian, born and raised. My cultural background is Caribbean, with parents from Trinidad and Tobago. I have never been to India, nor do I speak any of its native languages. The core of how I choose to identify myself is that I am a Hindu first and foremost, as the foundation for all other parts of my character.

Identifying as a Hindu does not always come naturally to Hindus living in a place where our religion is not the dominant one. For me, coming to this point took time, self-reflection and a deep yearning to understand my religion.

For the past five years I have been involved in teaching Hinduism to teenagers and young adults every Sunday. I conduct classes at our mandir in Pickering, Ontario, for anyone interested. We cover related topics, have discussions and, most importantly, create an open environment for questions.

Until I started teaching the youth in my community about Hinduism, I didn't realize that identifying as a Hindu does not come easily. Yes, I can certainly say, "I am proud to be Hindu"—which many young people my own age were apt to do when we were growing up—but I used to say that without understanding what it fully meant.

By teaching Hinduism, I came to understand our Sanatana Dharma in a deeper sense. While our pujas and rituals form a fundamental aspect of our religion, I came also to see the way Hinduism impacted my everyday life, from the minute I wake up to when my eyes close at night.

As I grew up, I realized that the teaching of Hinduism was lacking in my own community. Yes, we had a mandir where we would congregate for satsang, bhajans and discourses by our resident panditji, but the direct engagement of individuals was lacking. This current model of temple worship in North America is something I have encountered in my travels to many mandirs in Canada and the US.



While teaching Hinduism to the teenagers in my community, I would get many comments after class expressing the desire that the classes go longer so the students could ask more questions. I realized I had struck on something that resonated with this group: their desire to learn more in order to decode and deepen their Hindu identity. I realized that it was the direct engagement

with all the youth in my classes that made Hinduism interesting. Through this interaction, Hinduism became something tangible, something real and something that could have an actual influence in their lives.

As attendance grew over the years, many younger students started to ask why I didn't have an Instagram account or a website where my lessons could be posted. I told them there were already many different online resources dedicated to this. However, they continued to urge me in that direction and I finally decided to extend my own style of teaching to a broader audience. I started a YouTube channel to talk about Hinduism, explaining various philosophical concepts and, more importantly, trying to understand how one can incorporate Hinduism into a daily lifestyle. The channel launched in February of 2017, on Vasant Panchami.

I make no claims to be a pandit. I just want to show the youth of this generation that maintaining a Hindu identity is possible, provided we understand what it means to be Hindu and the reasons why we do the things we do. Hopefully these videos will inspire more people to think about what it means to be Hindu in the 21st century and beyond. Hinduism has many things to offer the world, and we must all do our part in ensuring it continues for years to come. See: bit.ly/hindu-lifestyle

SHAWN BINDA, 35, is the host of Hindu Lifestyle and is active in his community, teaching youth at the Durham Hindu Heritage Centre in Pickering, Ontario, Canada. Email: sb@shawnbinda.com



One God, Many Divinities

A guide to the complexities of Deity images in Hindu temples and the nature of our temple consecration rites

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

RECENTLY I GAVE A TALK AT THE Maha Kumbhabhishekam for the Enfield Nagapooshani Ambaal Temple in London. Since many present at the event were new to Hinduism, I began with a basic introduction to the temple itself. Here is my message.

One's first visit to a Hindu temple can easily give the impression that Hinduism has a multiplicity of Supreme Gods. That can be a natural assumption, given the many shrines and holy images one encounters. However, it is not correct. While Hindus do believe in many Divinities, all believe in a One Supreme Being. A verse from Hinduism's oldest scripture, the *Rig Veda*, is often quoted to express this idea. In Sanskrit it states: "Ekam Sat, viprah bahudha vadanti," and in English it reads "Truth is One; sages describe it variously."

In a Hindu temple it is not uncommon for the Supreme Being to have more than one shrine. In each of these shrines God is depicted in a different way, such as male, female, both male and female, dancing or blessing. At the Enfield temple, in the main shrine we encounter the Supreme Being in the form of the Goddess Nagapooshani Ambaal, following a tradition from Nainativu, an island near Sri Lanka's northern peninsula. In this London temple, the Supreme Being is represented in four other forms as well: Sivalingam, Lord Nataraja, Dakshinamurti and Bhairava. We might find a parallel in a Christian church where Jesus is worshiped on the cross, in a manger and with the apostles. Jesus is a one Lord, but with different forms and meanings. Seeing his multiple images, we do not conclude there are multiple Christian Lords.

Like the Abrahamic religions, Hinduism believes God has created great divine beings to perform various functions. The Abrahamic traditions call these archangels; Hindus call them Lords, Divinities or Gods—while not mistaking them for God! Most Hindu temples have side shrines dedicated to some of these great beings. The Enfield temple, for example, contains shrines to Lords Ganesha, Muruga and Anjaneyar. These divine beings are secondary to the main Deity, just as archangels, such as St. Michael, are secondary to the Supreme Being in Abrahamic faiths.

Over fifty churches in the greater London area are named St. Michael's Church. Who is St. Michael? He is not, in fact, a saint but the chief among angels, patron of warriors, mariners and the suffering. Three other archangels—Raphael, Gabriel and Uriel—are often glorified; London has churches dedicated to both Raphael and Gabriel. Some Jewish traditions



recognize as many as ten archangels. These beings, like the Hindu Divinities, function as helpers of God, fulfilling specific responsibilities. A Christian or Jew worshipping St. Michael or Mother Mary is not worshipping a second Supreme God, but rather an elevated being who enjoys God's grace. Similarly, in a Hindu temple we have a one God, but many blessed and heavenly Divinities, helpers of the Creator of all.

In understanding the nature of God and Divinities in the Hindu temple, there is a third factor to consider. The Hindu religion is not a single, homoge-

enous faith; it is a complex family of faiths that, while similar, are also different one from the other.

Most obviously, the three main denominations worship the Supreme Being by a different name. To Saivites, God is Siva. To Vaishnavites, God is Vishnu; and Shaktas venerate the Supreme as Shakti. In many temples, especially in the diaspora, these traditions overlap. Thus, in the Enfield temple, which is of the Saiva denomination, there is a major shrine to Lord Vishnu, the form of the Supreme Being worshiped by Hindus of the Vaishnava denomination. While this presence of seemingly distinct Supreme Gods can confound outsiders, Hindus know what is being represented, and rather enjoy the inclusivity of it all. There are few sharp lines in this elastic, all-embracing family of faiths. At the same time, the strictest of Vaishnavites would not have an image of Siva in their temple, and the most traditional of Saivites would never allow a Krishna in theirs.

This blending has been fostered by Hinduism's fourth major denomination, the prominent Smarta Sampradaya. This liberal Hindu stream of philosophy, culture and tradition brings together, on personal altars and in public temples, all three major forms of the Supreme Being—Vishnu, Siva and Shakti—as well as secondary Divinities, especially Ganesha, Surya and Muruga. All are seen as equal reflections of the one Saguna Brahman, and any one of them may be worshiped as the Supreme Being. In some temples following this ultra-inclusive pattern, one may even find altars to Jesus, Mother Mary, Mohammed or Buddha.

Another subtlety Hindus enjoy that could confound non-Hindus regards gender. While philosophically God is beyond gender, He/She is commonly represented as male or as female, or both. Hence the Goddess is revered not only in Shaktism, but in Vaishnavism and in



Consecration: Thousands of devotees gather on September 10, 2010, at the Sri Maha Kaliamma temple opening ceremony to witness and get blessing at Serdang, Malaysia, as priests on the temple tower pour sanctified water over seven golden spires.

kumbha, a water vessel, and *abhishekam*, the rite of pouring kumbhas filled with sanctified water over the copper spires (which resemble inverted kumbhas) on the crown of the temple. Kumbhabhishekam names the formal inauguration of a new temple and its periodic reconsecration, usually at twelve-year intervals, following renovation, extensive cleaning and renewal.

The English term for such a ceremony is *consecration*, meaning "to make sacred." For such a blessing to be holy, God's presence must be invoked. At a mahakumbhabhishekam, this is done through priestly disciplines and sacred fire ceremonies called *homa* or *yajna*, conducted in a temporary structure called a *yagasala* built just for that purpose. Fire is used in many religions in one form or another. In Hinduism it is believed that fire can be seen in the heavenly inner worlds. By lighting a fire, intoning sacred chants and ringing a bell, we invite benevolent inner-world beings to come and bless all present. These blessings build in intensity and accumulate over a number of days in the water pots near each sacred fire. On the final day, the water in the pots is poured over the temple spire and bathes the various Deities and objects being made sacred. This holy ablution occurs at the high point of the ceremony. It is preceded by days of ceremonies and followed by a month of special daily rituals.

Significance of Deity Images

Our third topic is the use of statues in Hindu worship. As part of the kumbhabhishekam ceremonies, all the statues that are being installed in the shrines are purified and infused with divine energy. Thereafter, the statue is considered a *murti*, an image that has been made worthy of worship and in which the Deity is present. In other words, the great inner-world being uses the image as a temporary physical body through which He/She blesses the devotees present. Thus we can see that Hindus are not worshipping the

icon itself. They are worshipping the holy Deity within it. Though many regard the image simply as a symbol for God, the most devout and mystical regard it as God Himself or Herself.

The priestly rituals are based squarely on the principle of invocation: beseeching conscious, intelligent, compassionate higher powers in the inner worlds. Hinduism recognizes multiple planes of existence, unseen worlds filled with souls of all stages of evolution. We experience these subtle, nonphysical dimensions of being in our thoughts and emotions all the time. During sleep, we leave the physical world and become fully active in unseen realms. At death we shed our physical body and reside in the inner planes until we are again born in a physical body.

Saivism as well, though by different names and personalities. This is the subtle explanation behind the Supreme Being in the Enfield Temple being worshiped in the personage of Nagapooshani Ambaal (Shakti), surrounded by various forms of Siva, including Nataraja and Sivalingam. Despite the separate shrines, Shakti/Siva are philosophically understood as one and inseparable.

The Consecration Rites

Our second topic is the nature of the ceremony that is performed to give life and spiritual power to a temple. In Sanskrit it is called kumbhabhishekam, a term sometime preceded by *maha*, meaning "great." *Kumbhabhishekam* is the combination of the two words

LETTERS

It Is Sanatana Dharma

The SBNR article by Lauren Valentino (July/August/September, 2017) is well written, with supporting surveys. Religion is usually part of a society and its culture, which young minds imbibe as they grow up. It is less likely to have much impact on minds growing up in a multicultural environment. Having good understanding of physical science while holding a poor understanding the inner science of religion only adds to the distance between people and their religious culture.

At a superficial level, religion appears divisive. But spirituality unites, and this appeals to growing minds. They seem to understand the basic oneness of humans, and this is a good sign.

Hinduism, better called Sanatana Dharma, was not founded by a particular human but is qualities of human nature, i.e., yearning to see everyone as equal, doing good, righteousness, seeking right knowledge, etc. Hence, Sanatana Dharma is a way of life, the dharmic way of life that appeals to unadulterated minds.

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Thanks for the Wide Range

I enjoyed the article, "What's Happening to Religion?" It exemplified myself. I find the magazine interesting because it covers a wide range of subjects.

BARBARA BACHMANN
SACRAMENTO, CA, USA

Don't Use Language as a Chain

Animals and even plant species communicate with each other. However, human language is unique in being a symbolic communication system that is learned instead of being biologically inherited. We also use it to express inner thoughts and emotions. It is a medium through which we represent the culture and historical background of our community.

However, a language known by one person or group need not necessarily be known by all. Over the years, we in India have made it our "pride" rather than our "medium," and we have started using language to categorize and chain people to other linguistic minority communities of our regions. This is happening in West Bengal, where Bengali language is being made compulsory, irrespective of the opinions of the hill people. This is a crime on moral grounds. In an independent country like India, an individual should be free to learn and communicate

in the language of his or her choice. No one has the right to force their mother tongue on others, as they also have their own vernacular languages to choose from, Nepali being one of them. It also has a negative impact on the majority language. For instance, the great free-minded Bengali language, instead of being respected and loved, becomes an object of hatred and indifference when forced on the young minds of non-Bengali-speaking students.

I believe all languages are beautiful and deserve respect. But learning them should be the free choice of any student or member of any state. No citizen of this country should be chained to any language. This is my humble suggestion as a concerned citizen of this great "multi-linguistic" country, India.

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Provide Chairs for Elders

Malaysia is fast becoming an aging society, with more people living past 80 years. Not all senior citizens are fit or in good state of health. Some have impaired mobility and have difficulty standing up to pray, as well as sitting on the floor.

A few temples in Malaysia have thoughtfully provided a few benches or kept a stack of plastic chairs at the far end of the temple hall facing the *mulastanam* for the benefit of disabled devotees. But most Malaysian temples don't provide this facility. I hope all Hindu temples in Malaysia and in other countries within the Hindu diaspora will provide seating arrangements for disabled devotees so that they are comfortable while praying and receiving darshan of the temple Deity.

M.GANESHADEVA
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

We Need All Three Dimensions

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Lauren Valentino's article, "I'm Spiritual, But Not Religious." I have come across several incidents where people conflate spirituality, philosophy and religion. To me, it's a relatively simple concept. Most people would agree that human personality has three dimensions, namely, spiritual, mental and physical, corresponding to spirit (soul), mind and body, respectively. Hinduism teaches that mind is a manifestation of soul, and body is a manifestation of mind. We are not, as some believe, physical bodies having mental and spiritual experiences. We are spiritual people having mental and physical experiences.

Spirituality is a spiritual process,

philosophy is a mental process, and religion is a physical process. Thus, philosophy is spirituality concretized as a thought process and religion is philosophy in action. The three disciplines supplement, rather than supplant each other and are as interconnected as are spirit (soul), mind and body.

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SBNRs Headed for Hinduism

The rapid increase of the SBNRs (those who identify themselves as Spiritual But Not Religious) is easy to understand. Young people familiar only with the Western religions are in large part frustrated by the emphasis on dogma and the corresponding rejection of spirituality, mysticism and personal experience of the Divine. In short, the SBNRs, by and large, equate religion with dogma—and with a worldview that looks down upon other religions, to the point of proselytization and sometimes downright intolerance. Given that concept of religion, it is no wonder that it is being rejected by so many souls being reborn during this transition to the next Sat Yuga.

I am convinced that once these old souls become familiar with the Sanatana Dharma—its inclusiveness, respect for all, reverence for the Earth and all its beings, and above all its emphasis on spirituality, mysticism and personal experience of God—most will realize that one or another of the great paths within Hinduism is the religion of their soul, and they will arrange to formally enter the religion through the *namakarana samskara*, joining the worldwide congregation of others whose worldview matches their own—just as I did in 1984, after 17 years of study and practice.

CHAMUNDI SABANATHAN
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Epic Stories Are not Fantasy

I am an ardent fan of your magazine and feel very grateful for the wonderful service to our eternal dharma. But sometimes I find words like *mythology* in your content. A friend here in Bangalore, Vaidyanathan, calls this the language of terrorism. Our *Puranas* and *Ithihasas* are not fantasy. Please do insist this with the contributors. This is my earnest request.

PADMINI RAVICHANDRAN
BENGALURU, INDIA

One God: Energizer and Energy

Many non-Hindus, especially from Western religions, are confused by the Hindu

concept of God. They view Hindus as having many Gods and cannot understand why. This is because they are not exposed to the concept of manifestation of one to many and many to one. Science tells us that everything emanated from the same source (big bang) and will eventually merge back into one tiny dot (big crunch) and repeat this process. This concept of manifestation is emphasized in Hinduism. One can hence reconcile this manifestation concept with science, as rationalized below.

In Hinduism, God is the supreme super-conscious soul entity which fills out the Universe. God is therefore only one. The Universe is only one. Theoretical physics also asserts that the universe is only one by means of the Unified Field Theory as postulated by Einstein, among others.

The Hindu concept of God goes on to explain that within this one supreme soul entity there is an energizer (Shiva) as well as energy (Shakti), all within one. The energizer is portrayed as male and called by many

names, viz., Shiva or Brahman or Vishnu, etc. This energizer is actually the intellect behind the supreme soul. The energy aspect is however portrayed as female and is also called by many names, viz., Shakti, Durga or Amman, etc. There are, in fact, many different manifestations of this energizer as well as many different manifestations of this energy in the universe, and these are personified and symbolized, by the ancients, as different Deities in Hinduism. Science can explain or measure the different energies only, viz., as atomic energy, electromagnetic energy, gravitational force, solar energy, light energy, sound energy, visible forces, etc. Science, however, cannot explain or measure the energizer aspect, as this must be realized to be known.

All Deities are therefore portrayals or aspects of the manifestation of the same one entity. To put it simply, the energizer is within the energy and the energy is within the energizer, and both are one.

However, the true God or true facet of God

which all souls will eventually seek to merge with, is, in fact, the energizer. The manifestation of this energizer is also seen in our own intellect, or can be "seen" as mental energy, and also includes gradual revelations of human knowledge over time. The energizer aspect, in Hinduism, is hence personified or symbolized as different Deities. The scriptures tell us how to conduct invocation of this energizer everywhere around us and within us and show us the path to Him.

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

Two Lifetimes of Sadhana and Service to Sanatana Dharma

How Hindu teachings give meaning to life and make the heart grow generous

IN 1967—FIFTY YEARS AGO—TWO YOUNG ladies independently, separately and quite by chance, met Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who would later found HINDUISM TODAY magazine. Both affirm that their meeting answered their questions, revealed the marvels of Hinduism and transformed their lives forever.

Brahmacharini Chamundi Sabanathan and Mrs. Gayatri Rajan had each grown up immersed in Western culture, but were not satisfied with it. From childhood, they yearned for something that would give meaning to life.

"Since I was six," confides Brahmacharini, "I searched everywhere—relatives, friends, local religions, eventually books. Nothing quite worked or made sense to me—not until Hinduism came into my life on that extraordinary day."

"Hinduism is magical," raves Gayatri, who became a brahmacharini for fifteen years. Later, she married Deva Rajan who shares a similar story and the same passion for Hinduism. They live in a redwood forest in Canyon, California, where they raised two children and have faithfully practiced sadhana together the whole while.

Brahmacharini lives near Kauai's Hindu Monastery, home of HINDUISM TODAY, where she volunteers her many skills.



Brahmacharini Chamundi and Gayatri Rajan: a combined 100 years of accumulated merit. "Through thick and thin, Hinduism has always come through brilliantly for us."



Today, after a half-century of sadhana, meditation, devotion and service, the two remain as enthusiastic as ever. Their work and desire is to help bring Hinduism forward that others may be uplifted as they have been. To that end, they support HINDUISM TODAY through its Production Fund.

"It is one of the most important and fulfilling things I do," says Brahmacharini. "The magazine allows everyone to understand—people everywhere from all walks of life, all backgrounds—and gives the sense we truly are one family." Gayatri echoes, "Nothing is more vital than giving these teachings

to a confused and suffering world. They are mankind's greatest treasure. Dharma demands that we give back. And, doing that, nothing is more fulfilling. I hope many will join us, make HINDUISM TODAY strong and enjoy the beautiful state of *purnama*. Don't wait fifty years!"

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Try an issue or two of our Production Fund newsletter at www.gurudeva.org/email-news

QUOTES & QUIPS

This world is God fulfilled in outwardness

Sri Aurobindo

A spiritual person is one who looks into the realities of life and seeks to know "Who am I?" **Swami Pratyabodhananda**, disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati

If you can just appreciate each thing, one by one, then you will have pure gratitude. Even though you observe just one flower, that one flower includes everything. **Shunryu Suzuki-roshi** (1905–1971), Japanese Soto Zen master

I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food, and from much food of any kind. **Henry David Thoreau** (1817–1862), American author, poet and philosopher

The ignorance of the mind and the senses and the apparent futilities of

human life are the material for the self-expression of that being, for its unfolding. **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** (1888–1975), first Vice President of India

Gratitude is the sweetest thing in a seeker's life—in all human life. If there is gratitude in your heart, then there will be tremendous sweetness in your eyes. **Sri Chinmoy** (1931–2007), renowned spiritual leader and author

Humans live on one-quarter of what they eat; on the other three-quarters lives their doctor. *Inscription in a Egyptian pyramid from around 3800 bce*

The saint helped the scorpion over and over again and the scorpion each time returned a sting. Some said, "Do you not know it is the nature of the scorpion to sting?" And the saint replied, "It is my nature to save."

Saint Kabir (1440–1518), Indian saint

Realize that your world is only a reflection of yourself, and stop finding fault with the reflection. Attend to yourself; set yourself right, mentally and emotionally. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), Hindu sage

Let yourself become that space that welcomes any experience without judgment. **Tsoknyi Rinpoche**, Nepalese Tibetan Buddhist monk

It is not in the outer world that you will find peace. Dig deep into yourself and you will find the priceless pearl. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), Bengali God-intoxicated mystic

Destroy wrong desires now; otherwise they will remain with you after the astral body has been separated from its

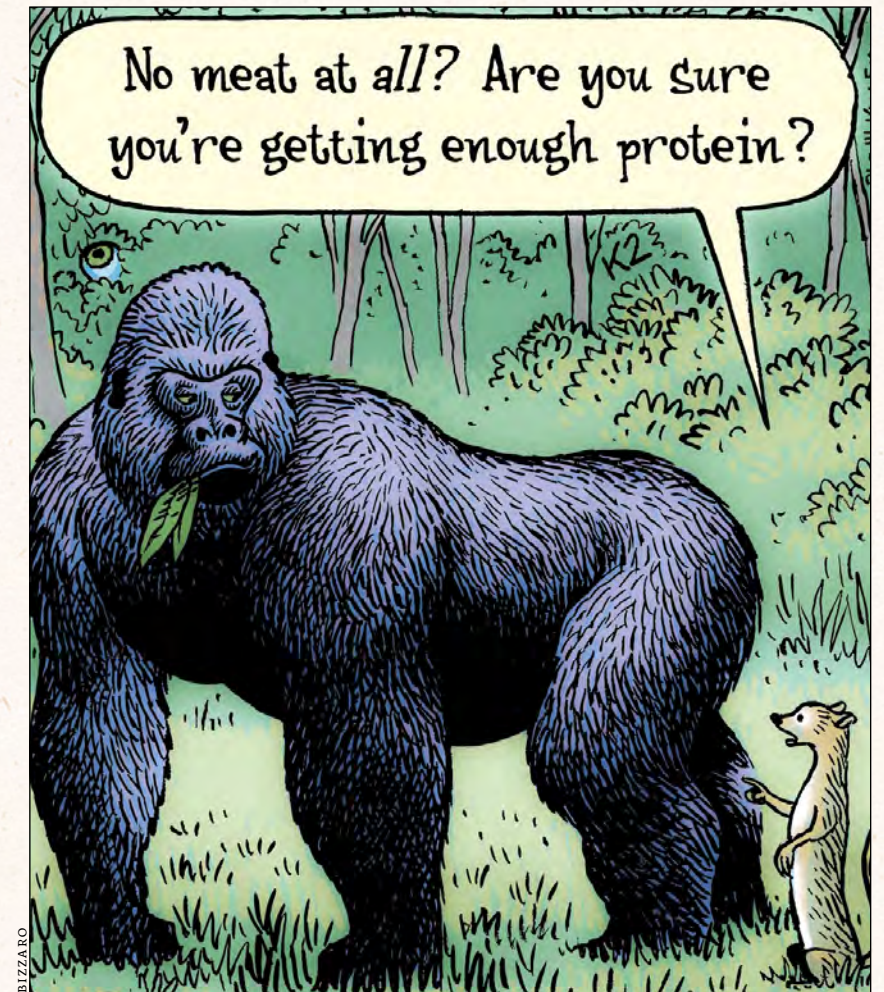
physical casing. Every natural passion can be mastered. **Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri** (1855–1936), guru of Satyananda Giri and Paramahansa Yogananda

Down the millennia of its existence, Hinduism has made a priceless contribution to the collective religious life of mankind through the remarkable findings of her many brilliant mystics and philosophers, as set forth in a voluminous literature. Perhaps, however, her most significant contribution is the persistent, unshakable belief that union with the Divine is attainable while one is still on Earth. **Nancy Wilson Ross** (1901–1986), American novelist

To see form and hear sound but not be clouded by them is liberation. **Bodhidharma**

Every moment of your waking life is a chance to make spiritual progress. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *Hinduism Today*

Never allow yourself to be complacent in your spiritual attainments. Always continue to strive. Even rishis, swamis and yogis who have totally realized Parasiva continue to work on themselves from within themselves. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *Hinduism Today*



DID YOU KNOW?

Harappa's Complex System of Weights

FOUR MILLENNIA AGO, THE CITIES OF the Indus-Sarasvati civilization shared a precise system of weights for trade and taxation. More than five hundred of the highly standardized weights have been discovered, in big towns and small villages alike. Most are made from chert, a fine-grained sedimentary rock. The weights were used on terra-cotta balance scales.

Famed archeologist Jonathan Mark Kenoyer states in his book *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*: "The cubical stone weights are based on a complex system of measurements that is calculated by both binary and decimal increments. The first seven Indus weights double in size from 1:2:4:8:16:32:64 [photo right], and the most common weight is the 16th ratio, which is approximately 13.7 grams [about half an ounce]. At this point, the weight increments change to a decimal system where the next largest weights have a ratio of 160, 200, 320

and 640. The next jump goes to 1,600, 3,200, 6,400, 8,000 and 12,800. The largest unit found at the site of Mohenjo-Daro weighs 10.865 kilos (approximately 25 pounds). Every excavated site of the Indus Valley has turned up such cubical chert weights, and all of the weights conform to the standard system established by the Indus rulers."

Kenoyer adds, "The standardized Indus

weights are unique in the ancient world and do not correspond to any of the numerous varieties of weights used in Mesopotamia or Egypt. However, the Indus weight system is identical to that used by the first kingdoms of the Gangetic plain about 300 bce and is still in use today in traditional markets throughout Pakistan and India."

This weight system and the Indus decimal system of measurement appear to be early examples of the decimal system of counting in use today, one of India's important contributions to the world.



BASICS

What Is the View of Monistic Theism?

From Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Dancing with Siva*

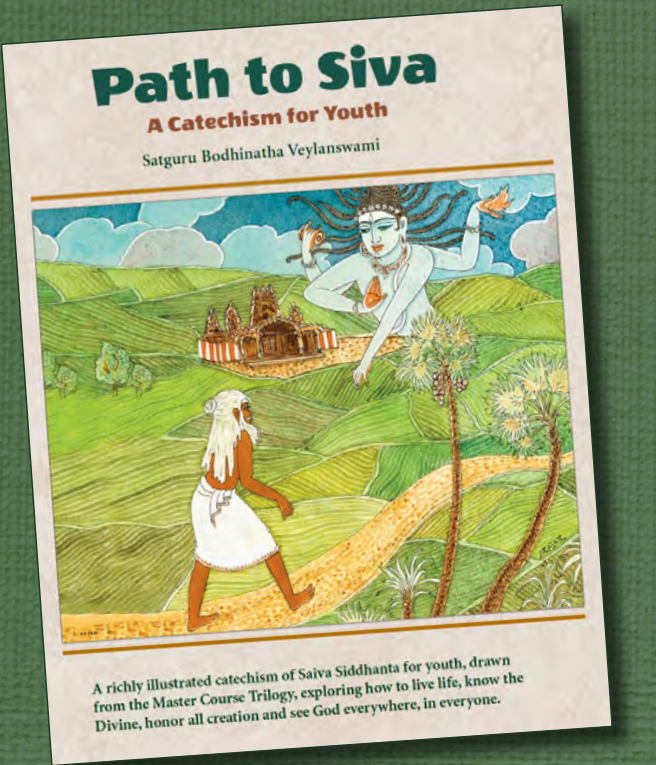
MONISTIC THEISM IS THE SYNTHESIS of monism and dualism. It says God is transcendent and immanent, eternal and temporal, Being and becoming, Creator and created, Absolute and relative, efficient and material cause.

Both strict monism and dualism are fatally flawed, for neither alone encompasses the whole of truth. In other words, it is not a choice between the God-is-man-and-world view of pantheistic monism and the God-is-separate-from-man-and-world view of theistic dualism. It is both. *Panentheism*, which describes "all in God, and God in all," and *monistic theism* are Western terms for Advaita Ishvaravada. It is the view that embraces

the oneness of God and soul, monism, and the reality of the Personal God, theism. As pantheists, we believe in an eternal oneness of God and man at the level of Satchidananda and Parasiva. But a difference is acknowledged during the evolution of the soul body. Ultimately, even this difference merges in identity. Thus, there is perfectly beginningless oneness and a temporary difference which resolves itself in perfect identity. In the acceptance of this identity, monistic theists differ from most *viśiṣṭādvaitins*.

The Vedas declare, "He moves and He moves not; He is far, yet is near. He is within all that is, yet is also outside. The man who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings is free from all fear."





Path to Siva

A CATECHISM FOR YOUTH

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

Path to siva presents all of the important teachings of the Saivite religion. It is written with youth in mind, but is also ideal for anyone wanting a condensed version of Gurudeva's 3,000-page Master Course. Each illustrated lesson is short—just one or two pages—but packed with information. Here our youth can find answers to questions about God, Lord Ganesha, Lord Murugan and the devas—how they can help us in our lives and how to contact them through temple worship and home puja. You will find clear explanations of karma, dharma and reincarnation, and how to use japa, meditation and affirmations to make your life better. You will learn the best ways to live in order to achieve your most important goals. The lessons include insights on home life, getting along with others, religious tolerance, vegetarianism and caring for the environment. They cover challenging philosophical areas, like death and dying, sin and evil. These short essays will provide a clear understanding of Hindu practices, beliefs and philosophy and give you a deep comprehension of life that few people have. The book was designed as a tool for teachers and for parents with youth, a focus text for exploring Hinduism together. Discussing one lesson a week can keep the family conversation going for more than a year.

Path to Siva

A Catechism for Youth

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



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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.

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 unthinkable 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.

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.

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

The Beginning and the End of All Beingness

The mantra Aum stands for the manifest cosmos & the unmanifest Absolute



Everything and nothing: The mantra is not only all of creation, but it also contains within it the unmanifested as well. Therefore, Aum is the manifest and unmanifest at the same time.

The following is a translation of the Mandukya Upanishad from The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan. The introduction reads: "This Upanishad belongs to the Atharva Veda and contains twelve verses. It is an exposition of the principle of Aum as consisting of three elements, a, u, m, which refer to the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep. The Supreme Self is manifested in the universe in its gross, subtle and causal aspects. Answering to the four states of consciousness—wakefulness, dream, dreamless sleep, transcendental consciousness—are aspects of the Godhead, the last alone being, all-inclusive and ultimately real. The Absolute of mystic consciousness is the reality of the God of religion. This Upanishad by itself, it is said, is enough to lead one to liberation."

- 1 Aum, this syllable is all this. An explanation of that (is the following). All that is the past, the present and the future, all this is only the syllable Aum. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the syllable Aum.
- 2 All this is, verily, Brahman. This self is Brahman. This same self has four quarters.
- 3 The first quarter is Vaishvanara, whose sphere (of activity) is the waking state, who cognizes external objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and who experiences gross (material) objects.
- 4 The second quarter is tajasa, whose sphere (of activity) is the dream state, who cognizes internal objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who experiences the subtle objects.
- 5 Where one, being fast asleep, does not desire any desire whatsoever and does not see any dream whatsoever, that is deep sleep. The third quarter is prajna, whose sphere is the state of deep sleep, who has become one, who is verily a mass of cognition, who is full of bliss and who experiences bliss, whose face is thought.
- 6 This is the lord of all, this is the knower of all, this is the inner controller, this is the source of all, this

is the beginning and the end of beings.

- 7 (Turiya is) not that which cognizes the internal (objects), not that which cognizes the external (objects), not what cognizes both of them, not a mass of cognition, not cognitive, not non-cognitive. (It is) unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnameable, the essence of the knowledge of the one Self that into which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual, such, they think, is the fourth quarter. He is the Self; He is to be known.
- 8 This is the Self, which is of the nature of the syllable Aum in regard to its elements. The quarters are the elements, the elements are the quarters, namely the letter a, the letter u and the letter m.
- 9 Vaishvanara, whose sphere is the waking state, is the letter a, the first element, either from the root ap, to obtain, or from being the first. He who knows this obtains, verily, all desires; also, he becomes first.
- 10 Tajasa, whose sphere is the dream state, is the letter u, the second element, from exaltation or intermediateness. He who knows this exalts, verily, the continuity of knowledge, and he becomes equal; in his family is born no one who does not know Brahman.
- 11 Prajna, whose sphere is the state of deep sleep, is the letter m, the third element, either from the root mi, to measure, or because of merging. He who knows this measures (knows) all this and merges also (all this in himself).
- 12 The fourth is that which has no elements, which cannot be spoken of, into which the world is resolved, benign, non-dual. Thus the syllable Aum is the very Self. He who knows it thus enters the Self with his self.

SARVAPELLI RADHAKRISHNAN was an Indian philosopher, author and statesman. He was India's first Vice President (1952–1962) and second President (1962–1967).



THOMAS L KELLY

Hanumantappa is one of several soldiers who serve as priests and caretakers of the Hanuman Tok Temple in Gangtok

SPECIAL FEATURE

Sikkim: Harmonious Himalayan Highland

India's smallest and northernmost state of Sikkim is known for its Hindu, Buddhist and indigenous traditions, high mountains, serene environment, organic-only farming policy and, lately, for its strategic geography at India's border with China and Bhutan. Join us as we explore Sikkim's religions and cultures.

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

NESTLED IN THE LAP OF NATURE IN THE Himalayan northeast of India sharing borders with Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal, Sikkim is known the world over for its breathtaking scenic beauty, clean environment, magnificent Mt. Kanchenjunga and, most recently, being India's first all-organic state. With 607,688 people as of 2011, it is India's least populated state and one of the least dense, with just 86 people per square kilometer—by comparison, Singapore is 7988. Sikkim appears in the Hindu epics as Indrakil, the "Garden of Lord Indra," but little is said about it. The Old Silk Route, a branch of the Silk Road which has existed since at least the first century bce, ran from Lhasa in Tibet to Bengal via the Nathu La Pass on what is now the border of Sikkim and China.

Nathu La Pass, the fastest land route for pilgrims from India to reach Mount Kailash in Tibet, lies just 37 miles from Sikkim's capital, Gangtok. Opened only recently to pilgrims, the pass was closed again as tensions flared with China over a border dispute with neighboring Bhutan, an Indian protectorate. Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan sit just north of the Siliguri Corridor, a thin stretch of land called the "Chicken's Neck"—less than 17 miles wide at one point—which connects the main part of India with its northeastern states. Chinese troops stationed in Tibet's

.....

Old Silk Route: (below left) One of the last pilgrim groups to Mount Kailash allowed through the Nathu La Pass before it was closed on June 27, 2017; (right) shoppers on Mahatma Gandhi Road

Chumbi Valley, between Sikkim and Bhutan, are a strategic threat, one readily felt here. The Indian army is much in evidence, and the movement of foreign nationals is restricted.

Photographer Thomas Kelly and I spent a week exploring Sikkim aided by a local guide, Manorath Dahal. With the blessings of Swami Tejomayanada, we were also assisted by Brahmachari Smaran Chaitanya and other devotees of the local Chinmaya Mission.

This very hilly state has neither airport nor train service. One flies into Bagdogra in West Bengal, then drives about 78 miles north to Sikkim's capital, Gangtok, on the picturesque National Highway 10. Heavily trafficked in normal times, the highway is sometimes blocked by landslides or shut down by a *bandh* (strike) called as part of periodic protests in north Bengal. At a cost of US\$44 million, Pakyong airport is now under construction 20 miles south of Gangtok. Carved into a steep hillside, it uses innovative soil packing technology to create retaining walls over 200 feet high on the down-slope side of the 4,700-foot runway. That alt that altitude, it will be one of the five highest in India.

Historical Background

In order to understand Sikkim's complex religious landscape, some historical background is necessary. Among others,



Rudra Prasad Podiyal

Rudra Prasad Podiyal, former principal director of the government's education department and a specialist in Nepali literature, helped us understand the origin of the state's various communities.

Sikkim's earliest inhabitants were the Lepchas, presently 15 percent of the population, about 60,000 people. They originally followed the Mun religion—called "animist" by anthropologists, but sounding like a variation on Hindu tradition, with its beliefs in the chief Goddess Nozyongnyu, various other

Divinities, rites of passage, festivals and ritualistic worship. Since at least the 8th century this area has received Buddhist migrants from Tibet, known as Bhutias. Today they number about 70,000. Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, is believed to have visited here in the 7th century. With this strong Tibetan influence, the Lepchas mostly converted to Buddhism, but still retain many Mun beliefs and practices. The state has a number of architecturally marvelous monasteries and is a popular pilgrimage destination for Buddhists worldwide.

Sikkim emerges in modern historical records in 1642 with the establishment of

a Tibetan Buddhist monarchy or Chogyal. Over the following centuries, the area saw invasions and retreats from Nepal and Bhutan. The British took a strong interest in the region in the early 19th century, as Sikkim provided a trade route to Tibet. When the entire state eventually came under British rule, many Nepalese were brought here to develop agriculture and mining.

When India gained independence in 1947, Sikkim chose not to join India, instead retaining the Chogyal monarchy. It was granted protectorate status, with India controlling its external defense. The 1962 border war between India and China involved skirmishes at Nathu La Pass, which was then shut down for decades. Anti-monarch sentiment rose in the state and, with increasing security concerns, the Sikkimese voted overwhelmingly in 1975 to abolish the Chogyal and become India's 22nd state.

Nepalis have continued to migrate to Sikkim, today constituting 63% of the population. The original Lepchas are 65% and the Tibetan-origin Bhutias 76%. Other ethnic groups here include Limbus, Sherpas, Tamangs and migrants from elsewhere in India. Religious affiliation falls generally along these ethnic lines, with the 58% Hindus

.....

Land of Sikkim: (clockwise from right) map of Sikkim, India's least populous and second-smallest state; strategically located, it is bordered on the west by Nepal, the north by China and the east by Bhutan; Kangchenjunga as viewed from Darjeeling—at 28,169 feet, it is the world's third highest mountain



Nathula Pass Near Gangtok



Kangchenjunga Mountain





being mostly Nepalese and the 27% Buddhists being Bhutias and Lepchas. Christians, mostly from the Lepcha community, comprise 10% of the population, a consequence of 19th-century missionary efforts. Inter-marriage between communities is increasingly common.

Sikkim is home to ancient Hindu and Buddhist sacred places. The Kirateshwar Mahadev Temple, for instance, is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. Of the 75 existing Buddhist monasteries, the earliest was built in the 1700s. Many Hindu temples were built in the late 20th century; a few of these are run by the Indian army. We were told Sikkim has about 200 priests employed in temples and 500 working independently.

The Sikkim government has been building new temples in order to project the state as a religious tourism destination, taking advantage of its pleasant climate, spectacular scenery and absence of significant communal strife. The government's amply-funded Ecclesiastical Affairs Department finances and promotes temple-building projects and improvements to Buddhist monasteries. It also oversees the general external affairs of all the state's religious institutions. Its next big project is a complex based on the events of the *Ramayana*.

Kangchenjunga

At 28,169 feet, Kangchenjunga is the third highest mountain in the world. The name

means "Five Treasures of the Great Snow," a reference to its five peaks. Local people of all communities, especially the Buddhists, hold the mountain in reverence as the abode of their guardian Deity, Dzo-nga, whose benign watchfulness and protection has long ensured peace and prosperity for the people of the land. In fact, Mount Kangchenjunga is considered so sacred that the early mountaineering expeditions to it went only up to a few metres below the peak, leaving the summit untouched so as to not violate its sanctity.

The American author Mark Twain wrote about the mountain when he visited Darjeeling, a hundred miles south of Gangtok, in 1896. In *Following the Equator*, he humorously recollected, "I was told by a resident that the summit of Kinchinjunga is often hidden in the clouds, and that sometimes a tourist has waited twenty-two days and then been obliged to go away without a sight of it. And yet went not disappointed; for when he got his hotel bill he recognized that he was now seeing the highest thing in the Himalayas."

Gangtok and Environs

Gangtok, Sikkim's capital, is a beautiful city with many views of Kangchenjunga. During our visit, the peak was frequently visible, especially on our way up to **Hanuman Tok** (tok means "temple"), which sits grandly at an elevation of 7,200 feet and is approached by walking up a few hundred stairs. Local

accounts say that when Lord Hanuman was flying with a life-saving herb, sanjeevani, to Sri Lanka to restore the life of the mortally wounded Lakshman, the younger brother of Lord Rama, He rested for some time at the spot where the temple now exists.

A red stone marking the spot was worshiped by the local people for centuries. In the 1950s, a government officer named Apaji Pant had a dream instructing him to see that a temple was built here for Hanuman. At some point, the red stone was sent to Jaipur to be carved into a murti of Hanuman, the one now worshiped in the temple. In 1968, the entire area—just 50 miles from the Chinese border—was handed over to the Indian army, including the temple.

The temple is staffed by Indian army personnel along with a priest on the army payroll. At the time of our visit, the hired priest was on leave, and the aptly named Hanumanthappa, a friendly young soldier in uniform, was performing the temple duties. He and four other soldiers of Army Company 362 manage the day-to-day affairs of the tok and perform the daily pujas. They were

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Soldier saint: (below, left to right) Temple to soldier Harbhajan Singh near the India-China border; Sikkim Sangeetalya, a classical music and dance school; Shekhar Nath Upadhyaya Niraula, chief priest of Shri Siddheshwar Shiv Mandir, Gangtok



Meet the Pranami Sect

Mohan Priyacharya is the local leader of the Pranami Sampradaya, one of the larger and more influential Hindu organizations in Sikkim with many temples and chapters in the state.

WE ARE KNOWN AS KRISHNA PRANAMIS AND ARE believers of Lord Krishna. We have a group of swamis and two to three dozen *pracharaks*, or preachers, here in Sikkim who do *katha* of *Bhagvat Purana* and *Bhagavat Gita*. They educate people about Hinduism and work to ensure that Hindus remain Hindus and are not converted to other religions. We preach that first we are Hindus and then Saivites or Vaishnavites or Pranamis. We propagate Hinduism and, side-by-side, we talk about our Pranami Sampradaya and its teachings. Only when Hinduism is preserved will the various sects and our sampradaya remain in existence. We organize Janmashtami and other major Hindu festivals in a grand manner to inspire people to be connected to their own culture and keep practicing their own religion in a proper manner. We have eight temples in Sikkim, with the newest in Namphing. We train priests to perform all major samskaras, rites of passage, for our devotees. Certain elaborate rituals have been refined by us and are now performed in a shorter time. For example, our marriage ceremony can be done in one hour. We also believe the expenses of marriages should be much less.

My guru, Mangaldas ji, came to Kalimpong [now in West Bengal] in the 1940s. He traveled on foot until 1985 through Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam, Maniur and Nepal propagating Hinduism,

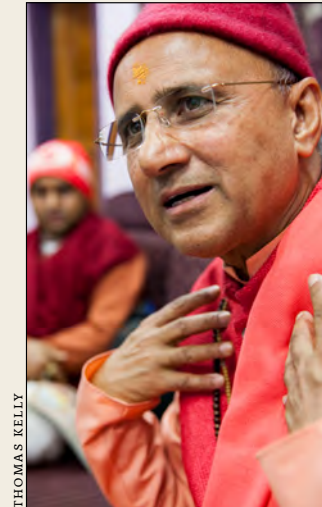
the worship of Lord Krishna and vegetarianism. He built the Mangaldham Temple in Kalimpong, one of some 600 Pranami temples in India. We also have 150 temples in Nepal. I became his disciple in my childhood, and for the past 31 years have been engaged in the propagation of Hinduism and the Pranami Sampradaya. I have trained many brahmacharis and priests. I personally covered all four districts of Sikkim, traveling on foot to many remote places which are inaccessible by motorable roads.

Recently the chief minister of Sikkim visited the Kalimpong Temple and was so impressed he built a similar one in Sikkim to promote religious tourism. The Char Dham project, the Siddhivinayak Temple and the Sai temple were also built for that purpose.

Our founder, Dev Chandra Ji Maharaj (1581–1655), was born in Sindh. His successor, Mahamati Pran Nath (1618–1694), from Jamnagar in Gujarat, is better known today, as he wrote the 18,000-verse *Kuljam Swaroop Vani*. In those days of the Mughal Empire and the Muslim conversion efforts, his emphasis was on unity of religions. He talked about the whole of humanity having one God and one religion and that the message of all religions was the same. He said we should know our own self and be a good human being in this world. We emphasize meditation and teach that through meditation one will experience peace. Our message for the world is: attain spiritual knowledge, strive for devotion to Lord Krishna and perform service

for your fellow human beings.

The mother of Mahatma Gandhi, Putli Bai, belonged to a Pranami family. She and the young Gandhi used to go to a Pranami Mandir in Porbandar. He mentions in his diary that during childhood he was given Pranami sanskars, and due to that influence he was inspired to work on the concept of unity of all the religions.



THOMAS KELLY

The Army's Guardian Spirit



WIKIMEDIA/INDRAJIT DAS



THOMAS KELLY



RAJIV MALIK



selected for these duties based on their personal devotion to God, knowledge of puja and singing abilities.

Hanumanthappa related a story well known to the Indian soldiers stationed along the border: "Besides this Hanuman temple here, the army in Sikkim maintains two temples at Nathu La dedicated to Baba Harbhajan Singh, a Sikh soldier who died in this area during the 1965 Sino-Indian conflict. Both are quite famous, and the main temple of the two is much larger than this Hanuman temple. Harbhajan Singh lost his life in a snowstorm while carrying supplies to a remote outpost. His body could not be located until he appeared in a dream to a friend and disclosed where his body and rifle could be found. After this, something strange and miraculous started happening at that area on the border. If a soldier was not performing his duty properly, an invisible hand would come and slap him. Soon it was realized that this invisible hand was that of the martyred soldier Baba Singh—still on duty, working for the safety of India. This has been going on now for 45 years. The army treats him as someone still on active duty, pays his salary to his family and even sets aside a vacant chair for him at meetings. Every soldier who

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Sanskrit College: Teachers and students pose for our cameraman at the government school

is posted on this border first visits Baba's temple and prays to him. There are many beliefs and legends among the local people about the miraculous powers of Baba Singh."

From the smaller but more popular **Ganesh Tok**, one can see not only Mount Kanchenjunga but also Gangtok, Darjeeling, Nathu La Pass and Kalimpong town. The same government officer, Appaji Pant, whose dream resulted in Hanuman Tok, also had a dream about this temple. In both places, small existing shrines were enlarged. Over time people felt the Deities had become quite powerful, as their prayers were being answered. With government support, the Ganesh temple was enlarged and a bigger Deity installed in 2007. The temple now receives 100,000 devotees a year. Nepalese, Lepchase, Bhutias and Tibetan Buddhists alike visit and pray here, and there are Buddhists on the temple management committee. The chief priest, Bhawani Prasad Neupane, told us the temple's biggest festival is Ganesha Chaturthi, though they do not do immersion of small Ganesha statues as is done elsewhere in India. Weddings are performed here in the Nepalese style, and in fact one was going on during our visit.

Gangtok, the Capital

Through the heart of Gangtok city runs the Mahatma Gandhi Road (**MG Road**). A huge statue of the Mahatma greets one at the road's entrance. Another monument

overlooking the area is the Statue of Unity, comprising figures of Bhutia and Lepcha leaders. MG Road is Gangtok's main shopping area, home to several banks and popular restaurants as well as shops selling all kinds of goods, including Sikkim's famous tea. Closed to vehicular traffic, the road has benches on the sides where people sit to relax or use the free wifi provided by the government. It is like a perpetual mela or fair, but spotlessly clean and smoke free. Brightly lit after nightfall, the area attracts large crowds of locals and tourists. One also encounters Buddhist monks and an occasional Hindu sadhu.

We visited several temples in the area around MG Road. The **Shri Siddheshwar Shiv Mandir** is located in an area known as Pani House. A natural stone Sivalingam here has been worshiped from ancient times. Murtis of Kali, Lakshmi and Saraswati were installed in 2002. The chief priest, Shekhar Natha Upadhyaya Niraula, age 50, said 25 to 100 devotees come daily, while thousands come for major festivals such as Mahasivaratri. His family hails from Nepal, and most of this temple's devotees are Nepalese, though Buddhists also worship here. As with other temples, this mandir is being renovated with help from the government.

Gangtok's **Durga Mandir**, Pandit Tara Prasad Sharma tells us, was established in 1986. He laments that while the temple is busy on festival days, on a day-to-day basis



Hindus here do not set aside much time for religious activities. His attempts to set up regular *Gita* classes have been unsuccessful, in part because travel in this hilly area is difficult even for short distances, plus people don't like to go out when the weather is cold or the sun has set early. He encourages devotees to visit places such as Vrindavan, Haridwar and Varanasi, where they can see how people spend time in devotion to God. Pandit Sharma said it is difficult to encourage people to be vegetarians and not get addicted to tobacco and liquor. He is regularly asked if it is possible to waive their 13-day restriction against meat and liquor after a death in the family. The weather here poses another problem—how can he perform puja in the required veshti, a single cloth, when it is freezing cold? "The climate here is not just affecting the lifestyles of the people but their religious life and practices as well."

Saraswati Dolma, founded in 1985, is one of Gangtok's more unusual temples. Housing both the Hindu Goddess Saraswati and the Buddhist Deity Jetsun Dolma, or Tara, it is popular with Hindus and Buddhists. Students especially flock here to worship Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, before

exams.

It was unfortunate to see that the **Thakurbari Temple**, dedicated to Lord Rama, Lakshman and Sita, has fallen on difficult times. It was established in 1935 by the then king of Sikkim, but recently a major renovation project stalled and the worship is being done in a makeshift shrine.

The well-equipped buildings of the **Sikkim Government Sanskrit College** sit impressively on a large plot of land in Samdong, about 19 miles west of Gangtok. Students and faculty wear Western-style dress; I was told that wearing typical Indian dress would be taken as a sign of backwardness by the locals, and is off-putting to potential students. The college enrolls all castes, offering nearly free education. Past graduates have included many girls, though currently no girls are enrolled. In fact, we soon learned that enrollment is so low that this prestigious institution is on the brink of closure. Though the college has facilities for 350 to 400 students, only a tenth that many are enrolled. Due to the uncertain career opportunities for Sanskrit scholars, parents in Sikkim do not want to send their children here.

Dr. Yugal Prasad Nepali, head of the college, has surveyed a dozen smaller Sanskrit *pathshalas* or schools in Sikkim and found the situation similar at each: a lack of interest in Sanskrit studies. While the government continues to support the college, there is

obvious concern that they could one day face closure.

Dr. Nepali hopes our coverage in HINDUISM TODAY will help the institute survive, both by encouraging parents to send their children here and by pressing the central and local governments to fund more jobs in the field of Sanskrit. Everyone here loves the Sanskrit language and the Indian cultural heritage, and they are working together to make the school a success.

We met with C.P. Dhakal, president of the local branch of the **Chinmaya Mission**, at his home in Gangtok. He is the government's special secretary in the tourism and civil aviation department. Dhakal is locally famous for helping Sikkim win an award presented by Prime Minister Modi in 2015 for Gangtok as the Cleanest Hill Station and Sikkim itself as India's Cleanest State. He said the award came after a sustained campaign by students, police, business people and the general population. "Due to this award," he said, "we received worldwide exposure and the tourist flow to Sikkim improved substantially." Dhakal is also responsible for the

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Spice: (below left to right) Cardamon, the world's third most expensive spice and one of Sikkim's most important crops, growing at the Indian Cardamom Institute in Tadong; Sunita Bhujel, 27, a weaver at the Handloom and Handicraft exhibition in Gangtok

Sanskrit College Faces Low Enrollment



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY





Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, organized by the Indian government, which goes through Nathu La Pass. That pilgrimage route is presently closed due to heightened tensions with China.

"We started this local chapter of Chinmaya Mission in 1995," Dhakal explains. "Our brahmachari Smaran Chaitanya and I conduct classes in *Bhagavad Gita*. We have several hundred students, and in this way we propagate Sanatana Dharma. We've been allocated land for a meditation center and hope to build that in time to come."

With regard to the Sanskrit College, he pointed out that this year there has been a five percent decrease in enrollment in all schools in Sikkim, a result of families having fewer children. He noted in passing that if a youth from Sikkim is admitted to a prestigious university in the West, the government will pay for the entire education.

Dhakal expressed concern about the conversion of Hindus to Christianity. He blames this on a failure to properly understand Hinduism. He is not too worried, however: "The British ruled us for 300 years and could not convert all of us. Today there are Hindu temples being built in Britain costing millions of dollars. So it is some sort of cycle which keeps on moving, and our Sanatana Dharma by and large remains unruffled by all this."

Sixteen Pilgrimages at Once

Siddheshvara Dham is the government's flagship religious tourism project. It is popularly known as Char Dham because of its replicas of four of India's most famous temples. Located near Namchi, 50 miles southwest of Gangtok, it is a slow and rough drive over poor roads—and very cold if traveling after dark. Only in its last few miles, from

"The British ruled us for 300 years and could not convert all of us. Today there are Hindu temples being built in Britain."

C.P. DHAKAL

the helipad—where the VIPs arrive in Namchi—to the temple, is the road in good shape.

Approaching Namchi, one first encounters the world's largest statue of Guru Rinpoche—118 feet—completed in 2004. It joined other important Buddhist pilgrimage destinations in the town, such as the Namchi and Ralang monasteries. A little farther on, the seven-acre Char Dham sits atop Solophok hill, overlooked by a 108-foot statue of Lord Siva. It is believed this place was known in ancient times as Indrakil mountain, mentioned in the *Mahabharata* as the place where Arjuna got the blessings of Lord Siva to obtain the divine weapon Pashupatastra, which Arjuna alone could wield and

which was needed for winning the Mahabharata war. Prior to the creation of the present project there was a small Siva temple on the property.

Siddheshvara Dham's 19 temples include replicas of the Char (four) Dham: Badrinath in north India, Jagannath on the east coast, Dwarka on the west and Rameshwaram next to Sri Lanka, along with replicas of the twelve Jyotirlingam temples, which are likewise spread across India. Pilgrimage to all these destinations is thought to help one attain moksha, liberation from rebirth. Whether that's true for these replicas is as yet undetermined. But each was built according to *Vastu Shastra* and consecrated in its own right as a temple, and each of the Char Dham replicas is overseen by priests appropriate to the original temple's tradition. The twelve Jyotirlingam temples are identical from the outside, as it was not feasible to copy the temples themselves, but inside each the Sivalingam shrine is a faithful replica of the original.

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Siddheshvara Dham: (clockwise from right) Towering statue of Lord Siva overlooks the complex of temples; the original Kirateshwar Siva temple located in Legship on the Rangeet River; Jyotir Lingam shrines; Rai family from Darjeeling receiving blessings from Thapa Singh in the Char Dham; Kirateshwar Siva temple; newlyweds seek blessings at the Omkareshwar Jyotirlingam temple with its faithful replica of the original altar



Pilgrimage Across India in a Single Day





The Siddheshvara Dham project was conceived by Sikkim's chief minister, Pawan Chamling (whose home town is Namchi) as part of the larger program to promote religious tourism in the state. On its completion in 2011, the project won an award from the Centre's Ministry of Tourism for Most Innovative/Unique Tourism Project. It has proven quite popular; during the tourist season it attracts up to 2,000 visitors a day.

Overview of the Complex

We were fortunate during our visit to be spotted by the elegantly dressed Pandit Mohan Timsina, coordinator and priest of the Siddheshvara Dham project, who proceeded to give us a grand tour. He took us first to the Kirateshwar Temple replica, which is independent of the Char Dham and Lingam temples. It enshrines an imposing 18-foot statue of Lord Kirateshwar, a popular local Deity regarded as an incarnation of Lord Siva. Thapa Singh, 65, of the Nepalese Rai community is the priest here. Very popular with devotees, he exudes a distinct divinity and conducts the pujas according to his traditions of Kirat worship.

The four largest temples reasonably match the originals in design, though of course on a much smaller scale. Rameshwaram alone, for example, is a huge temple enclosing 15 acres, twice the size of this entire Char Dham complex. The interior shrines do faithfully follow those of the original temples, and the priests conduct puja in the same manner. Twenty-five priests serve here, all employed by the government of Sikkim. They begin their day with a group meditation together, something we had not heard of at other temples in India.

The complex, designed to be wheelchair accessible, includes a vegetarian restaurant, guest house and huge parking area. There is also a covered yagna shala for fire worship, where a marriage was taking place during our visit. In addition to marriages, the temple trust organizes sacred thread ceremonies, preaching of the *Bhagavat Purana* and community feedings. All major Hindu festivals are celebrated here. Maha Sivaratri, the most popular, is attended by thousands of people from all the local communities.

The pilgrims we spoke with were deeply affected by the temple complex and its stunning setting. They all spoke of how peaceful and calming it was for them. Thomas and I were impressed and left this place with a sense of immense gratitude and satisfaction.

Kirateshwar Temple

From Char Dham we took the rough two-hour drive to the last major temple we would visit: the original Kirateshwar temple located alongside the Rangit river 25 miles northeast of Namchi. This temple, one of Sikkim's most ancient, exemplifies the communal harmony reigning here: the grounds include a small Buddhist temple that attracts a large number of local Buddhists. As with nearly every temple we encountered in Sikkim, the scenic beauty of the surroundings is breathtaking.

The main object of worship here is an unusual Sivalingam located in a cave area of the temple, with a kind of water spout with which one can pour water over it. The Lingam is believed to have been placed here before the time of the *Mahabharata*. The temple's young priest, Nandu Sharma, 28,

of the Kashyap brahmin lineage, relates the story that at one point Buddhists wanted to possess the powers of this Sivalingam and took it far away to a Buddhist monastery. Miraculously, the Sivalingam returned on its own to this temple. It was taken a few more times and mysteriously returned again each time until the Buddhists gave up. Unlike the priest of Char Dham's Kirateshwar Temple, Sharma is not of the local Kirat community.

On normal days, this temple does not receive many visitors. But at festivals, not only Hindus but Buddhists too—understandably appreciative of the Sivalingam's power—come in large numbers. This is known as a wish-fulfilling temple. Sharma tells us it is popular with young lovers who want to marry against their parent's wishes.

Conclusion

Hinduism and Buddhism here in Sikkim co-exist harmoniously, with devotees enthusiastically visiting the holy places and celebrating the festivals of both religions. I was struck by the happy, smiling faces and open-heartedness of Sikkim's people. Almost everyone I met gave the impression of being in a state of meditation or just coming out of one. There is something in the Himalayan air of this erstwhile kingdom that infuses a kind of contentment and blissfulness. Perhaps the reverence for Lord Siva and the Buddha have deeply influenced not only the flora and fauna but all human beings who reside here. The state government is on the right track to promote Sikkim as a land of religious pilgrimage, for all who visit here can take back home with them an experience of true communal harmony—Sikkim's premier export. 

Yungdrung Kundrakling Bon Monastery

ACCORDING TO ITS FOLLOWERS, THE BON religion existed before Buddha's time. But because it shares many characteristics with Buddhism, others claim it is a later offshoot. Communities are found in Tibet, India and elsewhere. According to Yeshe Gyatso, 32, head of the Yungdrung Kundrakling Bon Monastery in Bakkim, there are about 1,000 followers in Sikkim. Gyatso is a Lepcha, originally from Tibet, who converted from Buddhism to Bon. He explained, "Our speciality in Bon is an emphasis on emptiness and meditation. We believe in nirvana, or liberation, as well as rebirth according to one's karma." His monastery houses valuable Bon scriptures and has 25 students receiving both religious and secular education. He observed, "Buddhists and Hindus live amicably here. The problem is Christians with their interest in conversion and refusal to allow their devotees to pray at any Hindu or Buddhist place of worship."



Lama Yeshe Gyatso: The monastery's head teacher discusses a Bon holy book



The Lepcha Priesthood

Naphey Lepcha, 70, is a leader of the Lepcha community and a traditional priest, or Bongthing. While today the Lepchas are Buddhists, they continue to observe Lepcha religious traditions. Naphey lives with his wife and four children in Kambal Basti, Samdong area, outside of Gangtok in the vicinity of the Sanskrit College. His home shrine includes pictures of Ganesha and the Dalai Lama. This interview was conducted in Nepali.

THE MAIN JOB OF A BONGTHING IS TO PERFORM PUJA FOR PEOPLE of the community. My father was also a priest, but the urge to become a Bongthing must come from within oneself. There are 20 to 30 Bongthings in Sikkim. I learned many things from my father, but there is no scripture or book we use for prayers. My name, *Naphey*, means someone who is recognized and considered important. It was given to me at birth. My wife's name is Dokhet, which is the name of a Goddess. We had a love marriage around 30 years ago and I am very happy with her.

Many Lepchas became Buddhists under the rule of the Buddhist kings. I treat the Dalai Lama as our guru and believe in Lord Siva as the Creator. We believe Guru Rinpoche is a form of Siva. I know Ganesha is very generous and grants the wishes of those who pray to Him. Some of the Lepchas are Christians, and that is of their own free will. But it is unclear to me why Lepchas would convert to Christianity. Hinduism has a caste system, and therefore Lepchas cannot become Hindus. However, I have many Hindu friends.

When I work as a healer, I follow the Lepcha traditions and the way of worship known as Mun. We do not perform animal sacrifice, we light a lamp and use only flowers and fruits as offerings when we perform the puja. We first pray to nature, including the mountains, sun, moon and earth, to grant us the power to heal. If anyone is suffering, it is our duty to serve and cure that person and ensure that he is peaceful. When we are healing a sick person, no one, including the family members, is allowed to touch that person. It is through my forefathers that I have learned some mantras for healing the sick.

Besides healing, I also perform puja for the peace and well-being of the ancestors.

We do not have women as Bongthings. My son could become one if he wanted to, but he has chosen to become a Buddhist lama. He was educated up to twelfth standard and had many Buddhist friends. I never wanted to interfere with his life. He is my only son and it is fine with me that he serve the people of this area as a lama. Likewise, I would have allowed him to become a Hindu priest, if he had wanted.

There are around 18 Lepcha families in this village. I conduct marriage as well as funeral rituals in the Lepcha language. We cremate our dead as well as bury them. For most cremations, the lamas do the rituals. We are invited to Hindu social occasions, such as the namakara-samskara, name-giving ceremony. If asked, I will suggest a name for the child based on the time he or she was born. Our community celebrates the festival of Tendong Lho Rumfaat, prayer to Tendong Mountain, in a grand manner. According to legend, the ancestors of the Lepchas went to the top of Tendong Mountain seeking shelter for their lives when it had rained continuously for 40 days and nights, and they were saved by the blessings of the mountain. [Similar stories of a great flood in ancient times are found on every continent]. This festival is in memory of that happening. We also worship Kangchenjunga Mountain.

I normally do not ask for money, but accept whatever is offered to me. If someone willingly offers liquor, that is fine. For my household expenses, I depend on my income from farming. We have been given a home under the chief minister's residence reconstruction scheme. What I get as offerings for my work as a Bongthing is not more than just pocket money.

As a Bongthing, my message is that we should all live in peace and harmony. We must manage our lives within the incomes we generate. Only when people live in peace and within their means do they experience happiness. My message to the youth is that they should fulfill their karma by working hard and trying to practice truth in their lives. If they do these two things, then they will be successful and blessed.

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Community priest: *Bongthing Naphey Lepcha of Kambal Vasti village with his wife, daughter-in-law and grandchildren*



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ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS L. KELLY

Sikkim's Buddhist World

Rumtek Monastery, the most famous of several important Tibetan Buddhist institutions in Sikkim, thrives again, centuries after the religion's arrival here

THE INDIAN STATE OF SIKKIM HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH TIBETAN Buddhism for well over a millennium, and its importance in this religious tradition has increased greatly since the Chinese takeover of Tibet. Sikkim has 60 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries as well as schools and research institutes. Of those in the Gangtok area, Rumtek Monastery is the largest and finest architecturally.

Rumtek is surrounded by lush green countryside, with mountains and a river. To reach the monastery, one takes a footpath for several hundred yards. Posted alongside the path are pointed messages, such as this from the Buddha: "If you can't be positive, then at least be quiet." When we visited, many visitors were being taken around by local guides. We saw many monks, especially the young ones who are brought by their families, some from as far as Thailand, to be educated at the monastery. The young monks seemed to enjoy getting their pictures taken with visitors.

Originally built in the 17th century, Rumtek Monastery had fallen into ruin by the time Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, the 16th Karmapa, fled Tibet in 1959. Sikkim's royal family and the locals helped him rebuild it. Successorship is a matter of heated dispute, and is presently before the Indian courts; the 17th Karmapa, like his predecessors, will

become the owner of the monastery and its valuable contents.

On their way to or from Rumtek, tourists and devotees alike stop at the Dro-dul Chorten Stupa. Accommodating up to 700 monks and encompassing the Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies, this was built in 1945 by Trulshik Rinpoche, head of the Nyingma school of Buddhism. We witnessed a rush of monks and devotees seeking to meet several senior lamas who were visiting.

In Gangtok itself is the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, a museum and research institute established by the Dalai Lama in 1958, which documents the history of Sikkim's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. The director, Tashi Densapa, explained that the institute preserves important scriptures belonging to all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. He and research coordinator Anna Denjongpa emphasized that a harmony exists among the various religious communities in Sikkim, in part because Buddhism is a liberal, all-embracing religion.

(Clockwise from above) Visitors at Rumtek monastery; Buddha Park of Ravangla in southern Sikkim, opened in 2013; Enchey Monastery was established in 1909 with the blessing of Lama Drupthob Karpo; older monk adjusts a new one's robes





The US Medical Profession Discovers Food's Healing Power

A hospital in West Texas is a bellwether for a young movement that teaches many of our deadly diseases can be mitigated, even cured, by a change in diet

Historically, mankind understood that good food means good health. Hippocrates, the Greek father of Western medicine, said "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." Over two millennia ago in the East, Tiruvalluvar wrote, "The pleasures of health abide in the man who eats moderately. The pains of disease dwell with him who eats excessively." Those old wisdoms fell into disuse, and just 30 years ago a US doctor's twelve years of training included a paltry two hours of nutritional science. Food's healing powers were forgotten in the medical community. Then along came the evangelists Dean Ornish, Dr. John McDougall and T. Colin Campbell to talk about plants versus meats in our diet. Suddenly, doctors are entering the conversation. The story of this cultural and scientific shift is told below by two physicians and a health expert.

BY DR. SCOTT STOLL, PENNSYLVANIA

NEARLY 15 YEARS AGO I STARTED TO share with my family, friends, colleagues and patients that a diet consisting of whole plant-based foods can prevent, suspend and even reverse the majority of the diseases impacting the world. My message was met with skepticism: "Food is just food, it can't be that important or influential;" cynicism: "You are nice, Dr. Stoll, but this is a little out there for a doctor;" and occasionally outright hostility: "Don't talk to me about food, I need medical care!"

But a few people acted on the recommendation, and I watched as their lives were transformed: symptoms resolved, biomarkers normalized, medications discontinued, and life returned to their lives.

Few healthcare practitioners at that time shared a similar passion, philosophy and practice style. There were no food-as-medicine conferences, very few books or scientific articles about vegan or plant-based food, and

non-existent support in the medical or academic arena. In the early days of Google, only a handful of results would return to a search for "whole food plant based."

Two years ago, however, I experienced the early tremors of a cultural shift. During the annual dinner cruise that we host for our health immersions, a steward who served on the boat mentioned to me that he was reading about a whole-food, plant-based diet and had decided to make a change. I was stunned. To me this demonstrated a new level of cultural penetration.

So, what is a whole food plant based diet? It is a dietary lifestyle that maximizes the intake to whole plant foods and eliminates intake of processed and animal-derived foods. Consumption of meat, including chicken and fish, dairy products and eggs, as well as highly refined foods, like bleached flour, refined sugar and oil, are all eliminated or minimized.

Today a Google search for "whole food plant based" returns over 9.2 million results. New books are published monthly. Comparing 2016 to 2000, we see a tenfold annual increase in new peer-reviewed scientific ar-

ticles. Nearly four years back I co-founded the International Plant Based Nutrition Healthcare Conference, with the goal and vision of educating, inspiring, equipping, and empowering healthcare practitioners to utilize whole, plant-based food as a cornerstone in their medical practices.

In 2016, more than 800 enthusiastic healthcare professionals from 20 countries attended the conference, including 20 from Japan. Each attendee returned home as a knowledgeable and powerful advocate for positive change.

For example, Dr. Staton Awtrey, a cardiothoracic surgeon at Midland Health, his wife Blythe Awtrey and Marcy Madrid, VP of planning and marketing, have inspired their hospital to transform healthcare delivery for their community. In just the last two years they have helped to:

1. Add plant-based meals to the hospital menu;
2. Provide healthy plant-based options in the cafeteria;
3. Remove all fryers from the kitchen;



4. Start a monthly food-as-medicine journal club;
5. Create a dynamic community garden project;
6. Cultivate a monthly community plant-based meal gathering;
7. Start a lifestyle medicine clinic at the hospital;
8. Produce quality research studies on plant-based medical interventions;
9. Replace unhealthy snack options at the cafeteria checkout with healthy whole plant foods: good-bye candy bars, hello bananas;
10. Develop the annual Food as Medicine conference, expected to attract more than 1,000 people this year.

Midland Health has become a model for implementing a new paradigm of health care by providing the best true "health care" and disease prevention for their community.

Recent evidence suggests that the cultural mindset and belief systems around food are

also changing. A Nielsen survey found that nearly 75% of consumers believe they can control their health through nutrition and 32% believe food can replace medicine. Sales of the super food kale rose annually at a 56.6% rate from 2009 to 2013, with more than a doubling of the number of farms producing kale. While not all things organic are healthy, the sale of organic food has nearly tripled in the last 10 years and continues to show positive annual growth. And shoppers have changed the way they buy food, with a significant trend toward minimally processed, locally grown foods with short, recognizable ingredient lists.

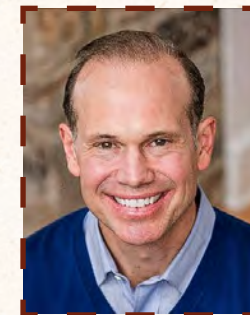
At the end of a busy day or on the weekend, when people eat away from home, 37% of US restaurant patrons in 2016 chose vegetarian or vegan options when dining out. In the last three years

Better choices: Midland Memorial Hospital removed unhealthy snacks for staff and patients and now provides a wide selection of items low in fat, sugar and salt

vegetarian menus have increased by 66%.

Our culture is only beginning to stir from its long, self-induced food coma. Like any young movement, it must overcome many challenges to create real, enduring change. But if we only look at the biggest challenges, we will miss the solutions that are in our own hands.

Every day we influence the culture around us with our choices: how we spend our money, how we use our words, how we help our neighbor, how we allocate our time, and how we invest our relational equity. Your choices, used wisely, will change your life, and your example will ignite change and inspire others. Eventually we will reach a tipping point when millions of people use their power of choice to positively impact their personal sphere of influence. And when those individual spheres finally coalesce, we will have transformed the culture.



.....
Dr. Stoll, an Olympian, is co-founder of the Plantrician Project and the International Plant Based Nutrition Healthcare Conference. He served as a member of the Whole Foods scientific and medical advisory board. Author of the best-selling book The Change Cookbook, he resides with his wife and six children in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
www.PlantricianProject.org



"Can we eat to starve cancer? Yes, we can. What we eat three times a day is our chemotherapy."

.... William Li, M.D.



.....
Change is in the air: (right) Midland Memorial Hospital is a pioneer in the study and application of nutritional sciences. (inset) A quote from Dr. William W. Li, founder of the Angiogenesis Foundation

One Doctor's Experience

Less cancer, less heart disease, less diabetes

BY DR. STATON AWTRY, TEXAS

MIDLAND IS AN OIL TOWN OF ALMOST 130,000 people located in the Permian Basin of West Texas. Until about two years ago the health care community here was as conservative as rural Texas politics. That all began to change in 2015, when Dr. Scott Stoll traveled here to share his nontraditional perspective on health and wellness with physicians at Midland Memorial Hospital and with the general public at our local First Baptist Church.

Dr. Stoll is cofounder of the Plantrician Project and a prominent international leader in the grassroots movement to acknowledge and leverage the central importance of nutrition in wellness and in treatment of disease. Coronary artery disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cancers of the breast, colon and prostate, and many autoimmune diseases are linked to an unhealthy dietary lifestyle, and Dr. Stoll specifically endorses a whole-foods, plant-based (WFPB) diet based upon the body of peer-reviewed research which documents not only its efficacy in preventing these common diseases, but also the unique ability of a WFPB diet to in many cases arrest or reverse disease.

The response to his message was remarkable. It initiated a conversation in the hospital that led to the creation of a committee and subsequent major changes. Our inpatient menu now includes a WFPB option, our cafeteria offers healthy options and has eliminated the patently unhealthy ones, our director of food services and dietitians have embraced the concept of food as medicine and promote it, as have physicians, nurses, the administrative team and the hospital Board of Directors. Many of our employees are personally regaining health through participation in our hospital-based Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP). A Lifestyle Medicine Clinic will be opening in a few months, and evidence-based nutritional education will be its cornerstone.

While medical schools in the United States have historically marginalized the significance of diet, the local medical community is beginning to

understand that a whole-foods, plant-based diet leads to less cancer, less heart disease, less diabetes, fewer strokes, less osteoporosis, less Alzheimer's disease, less obesity and less infirmity. It does, in fact, lead to health and vitality. This knowledge is changing the way many of us practice medicine and is bringing well-founded hope to our patients. Rather than merely mitigating and managing disease, we are experiencing the joy of helping others actually achieve health.

Recognizing that radically changing one's diet can be challenging, we created a Monthly Community Meal Event to support and shepherd those seeking to transition to a healthy diet. For more than two years now, my wife sends out invitations and assigns recipes to those planning to attend. We then meet in a host's home and share delicious, healthy food, have a short educational presentation, share testimonials, and generally walk this journey to health together. It has been, I believe, the key to our success. There are now more than 300 people on the invitation list, and each month we have from 40 to 80 participating.

A few days ago we held our May event. A local physician who recently joined our group shared his story. In spite of appearing healthy, he was dealing with recently diagnosed diabetes (type II). His fasting blood glucose was 394mg/dl, his Hgb A1c was 11, and his serum triglyceride level was 400. Eight weeks ago he committed to a WFPB diet to prevent the otherwise inevitable cascade of events he had seen play out in other family members: renal failure, blindness, amputations, heart attacks, and early death. His results are amazing, but more significantly, they are predictable. He lost 30 pounds he



.....
Dr. Awtry is a cardi thoracic surgeon and third-generation physician. Watching 'Forks Over Knives' with his wife Blythe, he learned that a whole-food, plant-based diet prevents, arrests and can even reverse coronary artery disease.

didn't need, his fasting glucose plummeted to 86mg/dl, his Hgb A1c normalized to 5.4, and his triglycerides fell to 152 (upper limit of normal). He and his wife have changed the culture of food in their home. His entire family will benefit in the coming years and possibly for generations to come as a direct result. This is orders of magnitude more efficacious and fun than simply writing a prescription for metformin.

Enthusiastic community members have joined physicians and MMH administrators to create Healthy City, a nonprofit whose mission is to provide ongoing evidence-based nutrition education and support to the public and to increase local resources for those



Change is possible:
Following a heart attack and pneumonia, Terry Dummer changed his diet, lost 96 pounds and averted heart surgery.

.....
pursuing a healthy lifestyle. Healthy City will also produce the yearly Food is Medicine seminar for the general public. This event brings in internationally recognized experts to educate the people of West Texas. The first iteration last year was a resounding success, and we are actively preparing for this year's event on August 12th.

One participant at last year's event was a 32-year-old man with debilitating multiple sclerosis. He was an invalid and needed a walker to ambulate. He was becoming progressively weaker as his disease advanced. He couldn't tolerate more aggressive medical intervention, and worst of all, he had bowel incontinence for six years. He had seen multiple specialists, but no one could help with this. Based upon what he learned at the Food is Medicine event, he changed his diet. Within days his incontinence resolved.

Within weeks his strength returned and he no longer required any assistance to walk. He also lost weight. After being an invalid for years, he began looking for a job.

Helping people achieve and maintain health is the right way to practice medicine, and we are seeing our efforts bear fruit. The last three patients coming to my office to discuss heart surgery, for example, were already aware of the WFPB movement in our community and wanted to know more. I even have cardiologists referring patients to me for counseling.

Mr. Terry Dummer was admitted to MMH almost two years ago with a heart attack. I was asked to evaluate him for coronary artery bypass, but Mr. Dummer developed respiratory failure as a result of aspiration pneumonia, and he was not a candidate for surgery. When he improved and no longer required life support, he decided to change his diet while his lungs recovered further. He adopted Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn's dietary recommendations for preventing and reversing coronary artery disease (CAD), and he has done beautifully without surgery. His last nuclear medicine stress test was normal, which is impressive given the severe blockages present in all three major coronary arteries.

I'm confident Mr. Dummer would have done well with surgery; most people do. But if he had opted for surgery instead of lifestyle change, he would still be morbidly obese. Instead, he has lost 96 pounds. He would still be an invalid in a wheelchair. Instead, he walks with a cane. He would still be



We all make choices: *More and more we are aware that our lifestyle impacts health and the quality of life. Dr. Awtry is inspired when patients begin to wean away from a sedentary, junk food way of living and embrace fresh foods and exercise.*

.....
on at least 15 medications. Instead, he is only on three. He would still be sick—but instead, he has become healthy.

In medical school I was taught that coronary artery disease is incurable and relentlessly progressive. But as Dr. Esselstyn explains, it is actually "a toothless paper tiger that need never ever to exist, and if it does exist it need never ever progress."

My goal as a physician and Healthy City board member is to educate people in our

community to understand that more money, more doctors, more drugs, stents, and high-tech interventions cannot undo the damage of an unhealthy diet. My recommendation is to skip the unnecessary drugs and procedures, keep your money, eat a delicious whole-foods, plant-based diet, avoid or reverse your diabetes and hypertension, lose weight, feel better, and reduce your risk for prostate, colon and breast cancers—in short, actually become healthy.

HOSPITAL STAFF

The Healing Power of Food

One health professional's personal journey

BY MARCY MADRID

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED IN OUR health system over the past several years is that people don't just come to us physically sick and broken; they are coming to us with all sorts of emotional, social, mental and spiritual illnesses that have festered for years and finally manifested into a physical sickness or disease.

We know from research that stress, unforgiveness and constant worrying can cause the physical breakdown of our bodies. According to an article published by the Mayo Clinic, the long-term activation of the stress-response system and the subsequent overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones can disrupt almost all your body's



processes. This puts you at increased risk of numerous health problems including anxiety, depression, digestive problems, heart disease, weight gain, memory and concentration im-

pairment, and immune system deficiencies such as MS.

This means when you talk about truly healing the whole person, you have to look beyond just what's going on physically. As healthcare providers, it's more important than ever that we look at what's happening beneath the surface, emotionally and socially. This is the essence of holistic health, and it's the only way we can bring comprehensive health improvement to our patients.

The importance of food in all of this is that food can be a gateway drug or the key to our health.

Many people are oblivious to the fact that certain foods have really become a legal version of a drug in people's lives. Research shows us that sugar is more addictive than cocaine, and fatty and salty foods set off the same sensory receptors in our brain as do alcohol and drugs. People are no longer just eating to satisfy a hunger or to sustain their life; they are eating to medicate themselves, and not in a good way. Think about the reasons that you eat and how often you're eating just because you truly are hungry. Now think

about how many times you eat when you're stressed, when you're excited and want to celebrate, when you're depressed or sad. I would venture to say that most of us eat for these non-hunger related reasons almost as much as we eat for reasons of true, physical sustinment.

Within the Midland Health system in Midland, Texas, we started the conversation about the science behind food and the health of our bodies, but it has now grown into a much deeper discussion about the health of our souls. And that has created the most profound impact.

In 2014, we began an initiative called the culture of ownership, sparked by some great insight and wisdom from culture guru Joe Tye. We'd been struggling to improve our failing patient satisfaction scores, and realized we could not expect to solve the problem by offering another "program of the month" telling people to be nice to each other. Joe had revealed to us that our behaviors are driven by personal accountability, ownership and ultimately our own personal values, not by some top-down mandate to be kind.

We started emphasizing values. We sent all our employees to a peer-instructed course helping them identify the values they may intrinsically hold but don't often recognize. That's when something amazing happened: People cried. Lots. The classes had to be stocked full of tissues. We found our people were not being ugly and hateful and careless because they woke up wanting to make everyone's life miserable; they were fighting back their own personal enemies every day, and it was hard enough to just put a smile on and plow through their task lists.

No wonder they were struggling with being kind and caring to others. Those feelings

were buried beneath years of unresolved conflicts, un-forgiveness and personal grief. Knowing the impact of constant stress on our physical bodies and the resulting reliance on food as a feel-better drug, it's no wonder hospital employees and clinicians are among the unhealthiest people in our nation.

After sharing their struggles and dreams with their peers in these classes, our employees realized they weren't living the values they claimed to hold, because they didn't stop long enough to think about those values. When they did, something broke in them and they finally felt a release, allowing them to take ownership of their lives and improve their health along the way.

In 2015 a group of local physicians introduced several of our administrators, including myself, to a new understanding of the role of nutrition in our healthcare plans and goals. We began realizing the impact of food on our health and its relation to the diseases we fight every day in our patients. It was as if someone suddenly turned the light on in our hospital for the first time, and all these areas that were dirty, cluttered and hindering the healing process were suddenly revealed.

So began the cleanup efforts. We cleaned up our inpatient meals, offering plant-based options to patients in our care. We cleaned up the cafeteria, offering plant-based, vegan and vegetarian options, and eliminating blatantly unhealthy items like candy bars, corn dogs and milk shakes. We switched out all our deep grease fryers for air fryers and cut back all our 2-3 serving containers of sodas and desserts to only one serving size.

We began changing the way we educated the public on nutrition, becoming much more clear on what exactly a healthy diet looks like and why it's not a protein shake, a



Eating as sport: Contestants chow down at the 2016 Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest at Coney Island, New York. Overeating places harmful burdens on all systems and organs of the body. Amazingly, every pound of additional weight a person gains requires 3,000 miles of blood capillaries, which add to the heart's workload.

low-carb meal or a diet pill. We held public events and health conferences, and initiated a community garden project where locals can rent a plot for \$15 a season and learn how to grow their own food alongside local experts and master gardeners.

Finally, and probably most importantly, we began seriously looking at our sickest employees and offering them something more meaningful to impact their health than another step program or calorie-counting diet plan.

We incorporated CHIP (Complete Health Improvement Program) and Nelson Campbell's Plant Pure Nation products into a more holistic wellness program that focused much more on lifestyle medicine.

We are now actively planning the opening of a lifestyle medicine clinic on one of our campuses to begin offering a full-scale and holistic wellness program. After taking dozens of our sick employees through this program, we have seen them not only lower and eliminate medications, but also drop significant weight—both the physical kind and the emotional kind. Dr. Scott Stoll recently visited a class potluck for our program participants and asked them to name the most meaningful takeaway for them in the CHIP program. One lady raised her hand and said forgiveness. She had learned to forgive herself and others who hurt her in the past and now realizes she can move on. Isn't that remarkable? A discussion around healthy food choices and the control and addictive power

food can have over our lives has led our employees to uncover deeper and more prevalent health issues going on beneath the surface. This is true healthcare—healing the body, mind and soul to bring real and permanent health to those we were called to care for.

My own story is similar. I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in October, 2015, the same month I was invited to participate on a committee to start planning for the lifestyle medicine clinic. You can call it a coincidence, but I call it divine intervention. Presented with a debilitating and depressing diagnosis and a prescription pad full of names I couldn't pronounce, I was faced with a decision to go along with the cultural norm and my physician's advice or try this new thing they called "food as medicine." It wasn't new at all; just to us.

Thankfully, I have a strong and supportive husband who stood with me in prayer through the days and weeks following that diagnosis. Through our faith, we found the strength and answers we so desperately needed. After a month of crippling side effects and extreme hair loss, I stopped the meds and went fully plant based. Six months later, my disease was stabilized and even regressing as

a lesion on my brain began to shrink.

Food was definitely and obviously the key, but it was just that, a key that opened a door to a much bigger issue of true health. After facing food-related social struggles, rejection, judgment and my own personal battles with food addiction,

I realized this healing God was bringing me was going much deeper than what I put on my fork every day. I had to come to terms with the constant stress I put myself under, stress which caused cravings I was now more aware of. I had to deal with unresolved conflicts and un-forgiveness in my past and present that I was holding on to and pushing down, which resulted in food-related responses like binge eating and unnecessary snacking.

Most of all, I recognized the complexity of these bodies we inhabit and how delicate the balance can be between health and sickness if we are not constantly aware of who we are and what's most im-

portant to us in each moment of every day. I'm not yet completely healed of my MS, but through the gradual healing taking place in my physical body, there is a much more profound and meaningful healing taking place in my mind, my heart and my soul. And that kind of healing transcends the impact of physical health and wellness, incredibly.

This experience has given me a fresh perspective on my profession, a new understanding of health and disease. Our problems may look like obesity, diabetes and heart disease, but the real issues lie beneath the surface, in our hearts and souls. It's just being manifested though food addictions and easy access to our country's legal drugs of choice—sugar, fat and salt.

If our health system—or any other—is to succeed in improving health, not just sustaining life, we have to go beyond just treating the disease and begin to effectively treat the person—body, mind and spirit.



..... Marcy Madrid is the VP of Planning and Marketing at Midland Memorial Hospital. She also oversees community health outreach, employee engagement and patient experience.



Brain health: Marcy's two brain scans, six months apart, show extensive abnormal white matter disease (center of pink ellipse, left). This large frontal lesion became smaller and was nonenhancing in six months (right). No new lesions were seen on a follow up scan.

Mirabai's Soulful Love of God



The Life and Legacy of a Poet-Saint

BY LAKSHMI CHANDRASHEKAR SUBRAMANIAN & MARIELLEN WARD

"It is extremely difficult to find a parallel to this wonderful personality, Mira, a saint, a philosopher, a poet and a sage. She was a versatile genius and a magnanimous soul. Her life has a singular charm, with extraordinary beauty and marvel." Swami Sivananda



Love: Artist S. Rajam's 1967 depiction of Mirabai singing to her beloved Lord Krishna on a veranda in Rajasthan. On the back of his canvas, the artist wrote that this image promises the "possibility of merging with God through heartfelt singing of devotional songs."

The most popular songs of Mirabai speak of her unflinching love for Lord Krishna, attempts to poison her, the miraculous escape and her blissful merging with God. Mirabai (c.1498–c.1557) was a remarkable Hindu devotional poet-saint in 16th-century India. She was a princess born in the town of Merta and married to a king in the Mewar region, both in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan. Twentieth-century Indian cinema has portrayed this in several accounts. Mirabai, also known simply as Mira, is a favorite among Hindu poet-saints, particularly in the North Indian bhakti tradition, and thousands of poems have been attributed to her. Saint Nabhadass of the early 17th century praised her in his hagiography, "Renouncing respect in society and all family ties, Mira worshiped Lord Krishna in the form of the divine mountain-lifter Giridhari." Entitled *Shribhaktamal* ("garland of devotees"), Nabhadass' anthology, comprising descriptions of numerous *bhaktas* and one of the oldest Indian vernacular hagiographies, contains six meaningful lines about Mirabai. The central message is that of her fearless devotion to Giridhari in the face of familial and societal obstacles. This early mention of Mira, in addition to her large poetic corpus, carves a well-defined place for the saint in the "bhakti movement," a spiritual revolution in India lasting several centuries during which there was a fervent attempt to make religion accessible to all, irrespective of language, gender or caste. A Google search fetches numerous popular Mirabai songs translated into English by Hindu organizations, secular poetry websites and academic scholars. The Western interest in Mirabai started with British colonialists in the early 19th century; and since then there have been several translations of her songs. Immigrant communities as well as academicians carried the baton forward. Today Mira's songs are found everywhere, from well-attended Mirabai Festivals to informal music sessions at yoga studios. In the 21st century, Mira has surpassed her standing as a pan-Indian devotee to become a global poet-saint revered by an international audience. In the pages to follow, her dramatic life story is unraveled and the path she took in life is documented, along with temples and museums that honor her life. Her linguistic genius and depictions of her life in film and the digital world are also explored.

S. RAJAM

Mira's Bhakti Poems

By Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IS NOT ISOLATED LITERATURE; IT IS CONNECTED to systems of spiritual practice, or sadhana, such as singing, chanting, prayer—undertaken individually or as a community. These practices evoke devotion in the heart of a spiritual aspirant. The uniqueness of Mira's poems is that they have traveled throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond, not as texts but as songs traveling on the tongues of people performing various types of personal sadhana. Mira sang:

I have obtained the precious wealth that is the Lord!

This invaluable treasure is from my true guru.
Out of compassion, he has given this to me.

I have obtained the asset of many lifetimes
and lost everything of this world.

Doesn't reduce with spending, that which no thief can steal.
It increases day by day (by a quarter).

On the boat of truth, with my true guru as the boatman,
I have crossed the ocean of endless births and deaths.



HAREKRNA DE

Mira's Lord, the clever mountain-lifter
With much happiness I sing his glories.

Mirabai composed *sagun* poetry, songs about a personal God with particular attributes and personality traits (*sagun*: *sa* "with," *guna* "attributes"). In her case, divinity is embodied in Giridhari, the heroic form of Krishna as mountain-lifter. Based on signature line (*chhaap*) and the oral tradition that this song has passed through over the centuries, we can be confident that Mirabai composed this poem. Sentence structure is confusing. The base lyrics, *paayoji maine*, is the starting point, which gets transformed into a musical piece with context-specific elements such as melody, tempo, orchestration and performance setting. The underlying emotion (*bhava*) in this poem is ecstatic devotion and contentment; Mira joyfully sings about having obtained the greatest wealth, which is the Lord. Over time, countless musicians have performed this poem—at temples, concert halls and home altars. More recently, it has been featured in a Bollywood film. "The base lyrics, *paayoji maine*, is the starting point, which gets transformed into

My Mirabai Expedition

By Mariellen Ward

ON OCTOBER OF 2014, I UNDERTOOK THE MIRABAI EXPEDITION, A cultural journey in the footsteps of Mirabai, a 16th-century poet and Krishna devotee, traveling to all of the primary sites in India associated with her amazing life. It was made possible by an Explorer's Grant from Kensington Tours, as part of the Explorers-in-Residence program. Mirabai's life has relevance today because her story parallels the struggle many women have attempting to live a fulfilled, creative life while society pressures them to settle down, marry and devote themselves to domestic obligations and duties.

My First Stop: The Mirabai Temple in Vrindavan

It is the first day of my journey and I'm a 54-year-old feeling very vulnerable. India can cut you open. The early morning taxi to Nizamuddin train station, leaving behind friends, leaving behind Delhi and festival time, leaving behind Ajay. Last night we walked in the park at dusk with the sounds of Ravanna burning, and bursting fireworks all around us. Trees filled with unseen birds making a roof of noise. Sikh taxi driver in a black van with yellow stripes, the kind of Delhi taxi I know so well. Then the first early morning India train in a long time. Very skinny people on the side of the road, wrapped in fabric, noisy chai stalls, shantis, broken pavement, a stream of litter, everything tinged in red sandstone and pink sunrise.

Arriving at the station, I'm greeted by a porter who demands way too much money, and I don't have very much fight in me. He seems nicer than most, less hard, so I capitulate at an exorbitant Rs 150, two or three times what I should be paying. But he is going to wait with me for the train, find my car, my seat and put my bags on the rack. It's convenient and frankly worth the money. The train arrives on time and I find my seat beside a large and assertive couple. I sense they would like to spread out and take all three seats and feel I have to fight for my space,

as first her elbow, and then his (after they change seats) appears in front of my face.

I try to read my book about Mirabai but it's hard to concentrate on the flowery language, full of descriptions about her devotional fervor. I don't feel this kind of spiritual intensity, so it's hard to imagine or grasp. Is belief an act of faith? Is it a feeling, like falling in love?

As I set out to trace her route, her journeys and try to get a sense of her life, I wonder how similar we are, and how different. I was born into a kind of freedom she could never have imagined as a woman in traditional India. But I cannot imagine her religious ardor, and her courage in striking out on her own to travel the dusty roads of this ancient land.

The train ride from Delhi to Mathura Junction is just two hours, and it arrives pretty much on time. I'm hungry, as I have only munched on some fruit, an Indian milk drink and some railway chai—which comes in a small cup with milk, sugar and tea bag for seven rupees. I forgot to pack my thermos.

The Taj Express stops in Mathura only for three minutes, and a large group has piled up their suitcases in the door. They



MIRABAI MUSEUM
MERTA CITY

Vibrant today: (above left) Krishna (Giridhari) lifts Mount Govardhan to protect His gopis from Indra's wrath; (right) devotees undertaking the spiritual walk (*parikrama*) around holy Vrindavan town; (lower left) at the Mirabai Museum in Merta City, Rajasthan, Mariellen and new friends pose in front of a statue of the illustrious saint

notice my concern and make way for me to move to the next door. After I get down, I notice someone has been calling me on the phone, and before I can answer, a smiling young man says my name—actually a word that sounds enough like Mariellen for me to know it's Pupendra, the person I am supposed to meet. He takes my bags and we walk a long distance down the train platform to the car park, where masses of green-and-yellow autorickshaws are waiting.

Pupendra tells me Vrindavan is "a special place, best place in India, most sacred city." Then he hands me over to his friend, whose name sounds like Sagar, and whose auto is somewhat less smart than the others. Sagar is going to take me to Gopinath Bhavan in Vrindavan, where I'm staying.

It's a long, hot, dusty, bumpy ride—first out of Mathura and then through a stretch of countryside and into Vrindavan, which does seem a bit different than your typical Indian town. We drive down narrow cobbled streets, and everything is dry and dusty and a kind of pale ochre color that reminds me of Italian Renaissance paintings.

Finally, the river Yamuna appears on our left and we drive along a narrow road with a line of intricately carved temples and ashrams on the right, facing the water. Some of the buildings are quite lovely, with cupolas and spires and carved facades. We stop at one of the loveliest, a large three-story building made of deep rose sandstone and carved in traditional haveli style. This is Gopinath Bhavan, a ladies ashram in Vrindavan that looks old but is actually quite new. Out front, cows are gathering to drink. I see monkeys above in the single tree, and a group of devotees walking barefoot.

Inside, the courtyard is cooler and rosy-hued. I am met by Tun-gavidya Dasi, whom I know only from Facebook, and she signs me in



Vrindavan



In Mira's footsteps: a map of the author's travels to the cities most central in Mira's life. 1. The Mirabai Temple in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh; 2. Merta City, Rajasthan, Mirabai's birthplace (Mirabai Temple & Museum); 3. The Chittorgarh Fort with its Mirabai Palace and nearby Mirabai Temple; 4. Dwarka, Gujarat, the Dwarkadesh Krishna Temple in which Mira merged with Krishna.

a musical piece with context-specific elements, including melody, tempo, orchestration and performance setting.”

Bhakti, or devotion, comes in many flavors and causes a devotee to completely forget herself. According to some Hindu schools of thought, five kinds of emotions oocan arise in bhakti: *shanta*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya* and *madhurya*. These bhavas arise in one’s heart subconsciously, and one should go towards whatever resonates with his or her temperament. Mirabai’s poetry falls under madhurya bhava, as she thought of the Lord as her beloved. In Swami Sivana-nda’s words, “The lover and the beloved become one. The devotee and God feel one with each other and still maintain a separateness in order to enjoy the bliss of the play of love between them. This is oneness in separation and separation in oneness. Lord Gauranga, Jay-adeva, Mira and Andal had this bhava.”

With *madhurya bhava* comes *viraha vedana*, the agony of separation from the beloved. A recent PhD dissertation by Holly Hill-gardner compares the expressions of viraha in the poetry of Mirabai and Hadewijch, a 13th-century Christian mystic: “Each woman’s respective longing for the divine not only takes her on an inward journey but also opens her up into an entangling involvement in the beauty and sufferings of the world.” Viraha bhakti transcends the poet’s internal sphere of consciousness and connects them to the external world. In this poem, Mira shares this feeling with a bird:

Hey, love bird, crying cuckoo,
Don’t make your crying coos,
For I who am crying, cut off from my love,
Will cut off your crying beak
And twist off your flying wings
And pour black salt in the wounds.

Hey, I am my love’s and my love’s mine.
How dare you cry love?
But if my love were restored today,

and shows me my room. I’m happy to meet her in person; she is a warm and sweet-faced Dutch woman in a pale sari with white hair. I’m on the top floor with a view of the river and Parikrama Road—the road the devotees walk along as they do their circle of the town.

After failing to buy an umbrella and finding only empty ATMs, I go back to the ashram with almonds, water and Limca. Happy to see my room cleaned, I promptly fall sound asleep, which seems like the sensible thing to do between 2 and 4 pm, when the sun is baking hot.

At 5 pm, the scene outside my window seems milder, the long slanting rays adding a picturesque quality to the Indian version of Canterbury Tales. It’s time for me to find the Mirabai Temple, so I grab my camera bag, make sure I am monkey proof and head out into the mele.

After walking for about 15 minutes and asking many people, I find myself in a narrow, ancient street. A sewage drain runs down the side of the cobbled lane, brick shows through the crumbling ochre-tinged plaster, scalloped door frames surround heavy, wood doors, and again I am reminded of medieval Europe—except with monkeys and

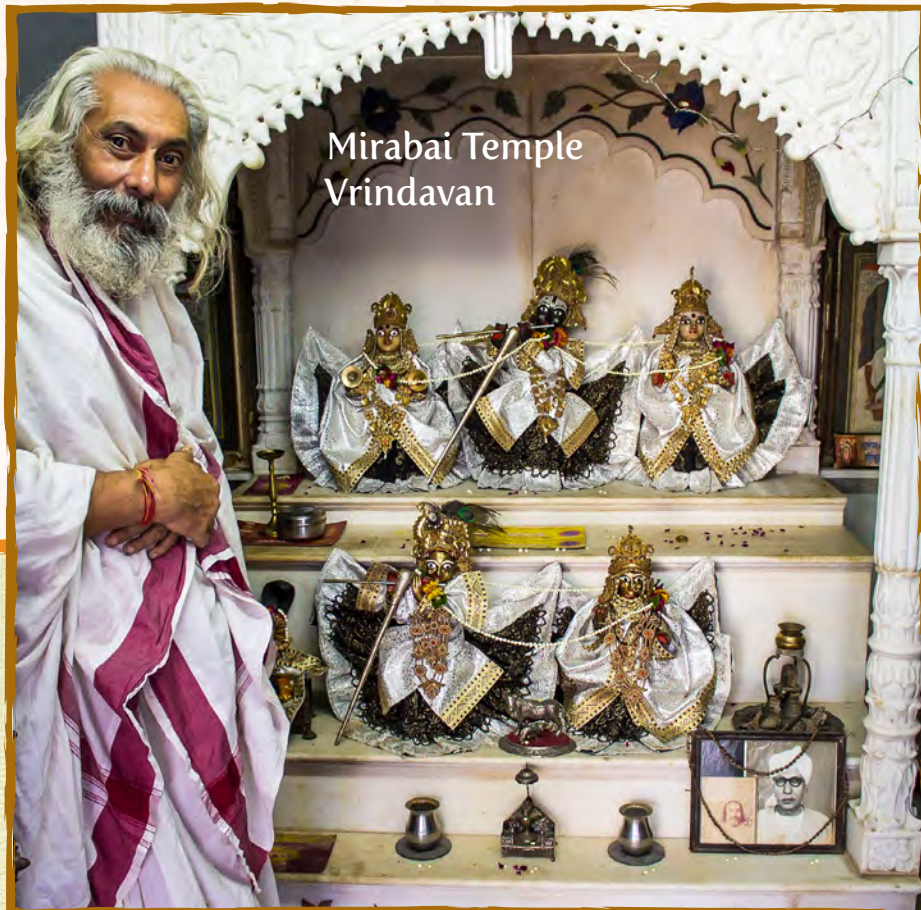
your love call would be a joy.
I would gild your crying beak with gold
and you would be my crown.

Hey, I’ll write my love a note,
crying crow, now take it away
and tell him that his separated love
can’t eat a single grain.
His servant Mira’s mind’s in a mess.
She wastes her time crying coos.

Come quick, my Lord,
the one who sees inside;
without you nothing remains.

Hawley and Juergensmeyer 2004

In her poem, Mira addresses not just any bird, but a cuckoo, a love bird. Like Mira who is cut off from her Krishna, the bird is a legendary symbol of anguish, said to be crying due to love’s separation. In



MARIELLEN WARD

Eastern architecture. Finally, a small sign, and a door to an even narrower lane. Another false start, another tribe of menacing monkeys, and I find it. Through a rusty gate and I’m in a small, cool, serene, blue-and-white courtyard. Charming, fresh and modest, the Mirabai Temple is more like a home. A small group of Indian pilgrims sit in front of a grate where a white-bearded man is talking to them. They are all very engaged. Unfortunately, it’s Hindi and I understand only a fraction. However, the man also speaks English and agrees to repeat what he’s said.

He explains that his ancestor built this home for Mirabai five centuries ago, and she lived here in this spot for 15 years, before going to

this instance, viraha gives the lover agency. Mira threatens the bird that if it continues to cry, she would cut off its crying beak, twist off its flying wings and pour black salt in the wounds. These threats challenge the gentle demeanor that traditionally surrounds the figure of Mirabai, a royal princess, wife and devotee. If we transpose the image of the rebellious Mira who broke all family ties onto this poem, it starts making more sense. My translation of a line from Nabhadass’s *Bhaktamal* is as follows: “Unrestrained, totally fearless, she enjoyed singing the fame of her lord.” This unstrained image of Mirabai resonates with the harshness of the first stanza.

The second stanza begins with strong possessiveness, a quality often found in the lovelorn gopika. “How dare you cry love?” she challenges. In the next line, her stance softens and she promises to reward the bird and cherish its love call if her own love is restored. The sudden change in temperament reveals the unstable mind of a virahini, unrestrained in love. Mira then asks the crow a favor: to deliver a note to her Lord. Crows are traditionally known to deliver messages. Mira urges the bird to tell her beloved that because of his distance she can’t eat a single grain. This speaks to the urgency of Mirabai’s love; she cannot stay apart forever and may starve to death. The bird serves as a lady friend (sakhi), confidant and messenger, which reflects Mira’s entanglement with nature. The body-mind connection is apparent: Mira “can’t eat a single grain,” as her “mind’s in a mess.” She then decides that all this cooing is a waste of time as her beloved makes her long in separation. The phrase “the one who sees inside” refers to the Hindi word *antaryami*, connoting that Krishna knows of Mira’s suffering, and places the onus on him to respond to her urgent coo. Mira finally pleads with her Beloved, “without you nothing remains.” Here is my translation of a Mira bha-jan that I often sing.

Manmohan Kanha Vinati

Mind-captivating Kanha, I make just one request:
All day and night
My eyes are constantly watching the path.
Give me your darshan right now,
O Kunjbihari,

Dwarka. I am absolutely delighted to find such a charming spot and such an articulate, open and fascinating man. I can’t believe that I have been so lucky on the very first day of my pilgrimage expedition.

I take photos and a short video and realize I have not brought a notebook. I tell the man I will be back tomorrow to interview him and I leave at sunset. As I walk back along the busy road, I take a detour along the riverbank, avoiding the monkeys but putting myself in the way of the river boat touts. It’s worth it to take some stunning photos of the huge orange ball of the sun sinking into the river, and the colorful small boats gliding along the surface. A boy rides a huge black water buffalo across the river and as I take a video they suddenly emerge right in my path and I run.

Everywhere, there are animals and people in this dry landscape. A manic, naked holy man suddenly appears and runs down to the boats. He is wearing only a Brahmin’s thread. He doesn’t surprise me at all.

I pick my way carefully back to the ashram and dive into the quiet and safety of my room—which luckily, and surprisingly, has an A/C unit—to think about my day. I realize that I desperately need a sanctuary to be in India. I can only expose myself to the heat and the crowds and the challenges and the noise for so long. It’s hard on my nerves, and it’s emotionally draining.

During lunch at Govinda’s, I listened with bemusement to the Russian woman’s talk about Vrindavan, and the mythical lore of this

My mind is restless and impatient!

The thread of love binds us together.

This bond cannot be broken.

Hey, flute-bearer Krishna Murari,

I don’t have any peace.

My eyes are constantly watching the path.

Give me your darshan right now,

O Kunjbihari,

My mind is restless and impatient!

This song can be considered on multiple levels: lover to beloved, devotee (bhakta) to God (Bhagavan), and individual consciousness



ARTIST: INDRA SHARMA

Precious legacy: (left) Praduman Pratapsingh, priest of the Mirabai Temple in Vrindaban. Enshrined here holding two cymbals, Mira has been elevated to equal status with Radha. (above) Artist Indra Sharma’s depiction of the saintly poet singing to Krishna, with the town of Vrindavan in the background.

place—where Krishna and his gopis cavorted on the river bank. The classical image of pastoral, lush and harmonious Vrindavan is so far removed from the dirty, polluted, over-crowded, dry, monkey-menaced, scorched-earth reality of today that it’s shocking.

I read that Mirabai was also shocked when she arrived in Vrindavan in the mid 16th century, because she didn’t expect any buildings. She, too, was expecting a pastoral paradise. Is this what faith is all about? That we hold up an ideal to hang onto in the face of the disappointments of reality?

Anyway, I’m here, and I’m lonely, and I don’t love Vrindavan, I don’t feel I have found a sanctuary, and I’m not sure what I’m doing here, except dedicating myself to the discipline of the pilgrimage, to stick with it and go through whatever ups-and-downs, emotional roller



(soul; jivatma) to supreme consciousness (Paramatma). The poem would interest a person whether they are inclined towards the path of devotion (bhakti marga) or the path of knowledge (jnana marga). One who enjoys devotional literature reflects on their personal relationship with Lord Krishna, while someone who enjoys philosophy gets intellectually inspired by the jivatma-Paramatma dynamic.

Mira's poetry also satiates the spiritual seeker who may not be of Indian origin or identify with Hinduism. Nancy Martin, scholar of devotional Hinduism and gender, describes in a 2010 article how Mirabai comes to the US: "Americans begin looking for figures for inspiration and canonization within an emerging non-institutionalized global spirituality and women around the world mine the past to find their spiritual foremothers." Universalized metaphors of love and longing, union and separation, allow the poems to transcend time and space. Not only can the metaphors in Mirabai's poetry be universalized, but her turbulent life story also carries the universal message of hope, courage and triumph in the face of adversity. This makes the historical Mira a powerful female character that serves as an inspiration for novelists, filmmakers, philosophers, social activists and feminists, says Martin. Thus, diverse people around the globe find cultural and spiritual relevance in Mira's 500-year-old poems.

Four of Mira's Songs

THE FOLLOWING ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS COMPRISE COMMONLY sung Mira bhajans as well as texts of her poetry. The first three songs were translated by Nancy Martin in 2007. The fourth is Lakshmi's work.

Mhārā re giridhar gopāl

Mine is the mountain-lifting Gopal, there is no other. There is no other, O *Sadhus*, though I have searched the three worlds. *Mine is the mountain-bearing Gopal, there is no other.*

Brother, friend, relative, kin—all I left behind. Sitting in the company of *sadhus*, I abandoned the world's expectations. *Mine is the mountain-bearing Cowherd, there is no other.*

Watching devotees, I was delighted; looking at the world, I wept. The vine of love grew, watered by the river of my tears.

Mine is the mountain-bearing Gopal, there is no other.

Churning the milk, I extracted the ghee and discarded the buttermilk. Drinking the poison the *rana* sent, I attained bliss. *Mine is the mountain-bearing Cowherd, there is no other.*

Mira has bound herself to love; what was to be has come to pass. *Mine is the mountain-bearing*

In the bhakti tradition: (left) The Mirabai Temple in Merta City, Rajasthan; (right) Ravi, a Mira devotee and proprietor of the Roots of Pushkar music store

mixture of hope and trepidation, I haggle for an auto and go straight to the ATM. The sound of the money dispensing is more delightful to me than all the temple bells in this moment. Even in a holy city like Vrindavan, money is necessary.

From there I go directly to Govinda's Restaurant at the ISKCON Temple for breakfast. As it is an "ekadasi day" (a day without grains), I have a strange breakfast of fruit, juice, a mango lassi and kind of potato dosa. Then I have their thick herbal tea and a coconut laddu. With money in my wallet and food in my tummy, I feel so much better about life and about the day. I hail a bicycle rickshaw outside ISKCON and fall into the usual negotiations over the price. They say 100 rupees, which is two or three times the price that Indians pay. A young woman joins in and bargains

one driver down to 50 rupees to take me to the Mirabai temple.

We ride through a long, narrow market area. It's fascinating to see the stores, the old buildings, some carved, and the crazy traffic jams. Bullock carts, a camel cart, every type of vehicle, all vying for space in a narrow street. We pass tiny children playing and open-air barbers and groups of devotees walking *parikrama* in their bare feet. Finally we get there. Because of the distance and the heat, and the man's advancing age, I decide to give him 100 rupees after all. He isn't sure

Gopal, there is no other.

Make me your servant, dear Mountain Bearer

Your servant, I'll plant a garden. Arising each day, I'll come before you. In the groves and lanes of Vrindavan, I'll sing of your love play, Govind. *Let me serve you, dear Mountain Bearer.*

In serving you, our eyes will meet. Remembrance will be my wages. The land-grant of loving devotion my payment—Desire of birth after birth. *Make me your servant, dear Mountain Bearer.*

Peacock-feather crown, yellow silk at your waist, jeweled garland adorning your chest. Enchanting flute player, Vrindavan's grazer of cows, *Let me serve you, dear Mountain Bearer.*

O Lord, I'll plant new groves with fragrant gardens beneath them.

Dressed in a red sari, I'll come to meet my Dark Love. *Make me your servant, dear Mountain Bearer.*

At midnight, Lord, reveal yourself, on Yamuna's shore! Mira's Lord is the gallant Mountain Bearer—A terrible restlessness fills her heart. *Let me serve you, dear Mountain Bearer.*

Come, Lord Kanha. I have enchanted the Renouncer!

Come, friends, come and see Lord Kanha. I have enchanted the Renouncer! In a brand new pot, I've churned curds; Come as a milk-seller to taste them.

In the green garden, I've gathered beautiful flowers; Come as a gardener's wife to enjoy them. I've made a spinning wheel of sandalwood; Come as a carpenter's wife to admire it.

A needle of gold and silk thread I have; Come as a tailor's wife and take them.

Popular Mira Bhajans

Kenu Sang Khelu Holi by Lata Mangeshkar

Mharo Pranam by Kishori Amonkar

Aisi Lagi Lagan by Anup Jalota

Mat Ja Jogi by Anuradha Paudwal

whether I mean for him to keep it. I feel his sweetness and humility in my heart; I feel humbled.

Immediately on stepping through the old rusty gate and entering the small residential temple, I feel cooler and calmer. I love the feeling in this shady, airy house, full of light and greenery, painted pale blue and white. The bearded man appears, this time in a more priestly garb, a white robe trimmed in red, and we sit down to talk. He gives me a piece of paper with information about Mirabai, tells me it's at least 45 years old, and that I should have it translated and copied. On it he has carefully printed his name and address: Praduman Pratapsingh, Mirabai Temple, Govind Bagh, Vrindaban. Praduman tells me, in simple English, what's written on the paper, which is in Hindi. He goes through the main details of Mirabai's life, and how she was rejected by her husband's family because of her devotion to Krishna, her dancing and singing. This is why she came to Vrindavan—to find peace and devote her life to Krishna.

Praduman's ancestor built this temple for her to live in, and she lived here for about 15 years. Apparently she wrote many poems here. He continues to tell me her life story. Mirabai went from Vrindavan to Dwarka. While she was living in Dwarka, when she was about my age (around 50), there was a drought in Rajasthan. Some of her family members traveled to Dwarka to entreat her to return, but she refused. That night, according to Praduman, she dissolved in Lord Krishna—and the drought ended.

Mira says, I sing of the Mountain Bearer; Come and meet my guru Ravidas.

Pyāre darshan dijo āye

Come my beloved, allow me to see you. Without you, I cannot exist. Lotus without water; night sky without moon is the state of a lover without seeing you. Restlessly I roam day and night, separation eating my heart out.

No hunger in the day, no sleep at night, Tongue-tied with grief, no words. What shall I say? I am unable to speak. Now come, extinguish my pain.

Why make me thirst for you, knower of my inner self? Come meet me by way of compassion, O Lord

Mira, servant-devotee of many lifetimes, forever remains at your feet.



coasters and life lessons are in store for me. Perhaps this is my first glimpse into what it may have been like for Mirabai to leave the comfort and safety of home to follow her heart and the call of her soul.

Finding My Way in Vrindavan

I awake in Vrindavan with two problems on my mind: money and food. I slept without dinner, and no breakfast is available; and the day before, I tried two ATMs and both were out of money. So, with a



Praduman talks about Mirabai with conviction and enthusiasm, and though he must do this several times every day, he seems passionate. He has an open face, large eyes, and is very expressive. He shows me around the temple, poses for me and even opens the altar grate so I can photograph the statues. He tells me he is the ninth generation of his family to be born here, and to maintain the temple. He has a son and daughter—they are the 10th generation (but his son is an artist and animator in Mumbai).

"People come here for peace, love and spiritual strength," Praduman

Mira's Music & Spirit Live On

MUSIC IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF UNDERSTANDING A POET-saint's message, because it physicalizes his or her emotions in a tangible, "heard" way. Singing makes the emotions in Mira's poems more accessible and immortalizes her poetry in the Indian devotional space.

Mira bhajans are popular in many Indian music genres, including classical, folk and devotional. Certain famous vocalists are known for their beautiful, heartfelt renderings of Mira bhajans, including Bharat Ratna recipients Lata Mangeshkar and M.S. Subbulakshmi. In North Indian (Hindustani) classical programs, singers often complete their concert with semi-classical devotional music. This usually consists of poetry by Mira, Kabir and other popular poet-saints. Folk artists who sing Mira bhajans include the Manganiyar and Langa communities, who are hereditary Muslim musicians in the desert regions of Rajasthan bordering Pakistan. They sing a rich repertoire of Hindu and Sufi spiritual music which includes Mirabai's poetry. These highly skilled artists, who usually have Muslim or Hindu patrons, play traditional instruments that are specific to those communities. Musicians specializing in sacred music, either professionally or as a hobby, typically include Mira bhajans in their repertoire as well. Along with Kabir, Tulsidas and Surdas, Mirabai is among the most loved of the Hindi poet-saints, and, being the only woman in this pantheon, is one that



says. "This is the real place of Mirabai. She lives in this temple. People who come here can feel Mirabai and Gopal (Krishna) in their hearts." Though I am not a Krishna devotee, I do feel a light, happy atmosphere in this temple.

Onward to Rajasthan

I wake up on the third day feeling satisfied. Meeting Praduman and basking in the delightful energy of the Mirabai Temple is such a great start. Vrindavan in myth and legend is a fecund place of peace and harmony, a kind of Garden of Eden where Krishna and his

female vocalists often choose to sing about.

Mirabai's legacy continues not only through music, but also through historical temples. The Mirabai temple in Vrindavan, constructed by the minister of Bikaner state in the mid-nineteenth century, revolves around the story of Mira drinking and remaining unaffected by the cup of poison sent by her in-laws. Legend has it that they sent not only a cup of poison, but also a live snake that transformed into a black shaligram stone, a symbol of God universally worshiped by Vaishnava devotees. Hence the temple is popularly known as the Shaligram Temple. The arrangement of Deities at the temple corresponds to Nabhadass' conception of Mira as a "latter-day gopi." Krishna is in the center, with Radha on His left and Mira on His right. The symmetry suggests that Mira's status is elevated to that of Krishna's most beloved gopi, Radha. This temple is not only known for its historical significance as the temple Mira visited, but is an abode for current-day Mirabais.

In her article "Mirabai: Inscribed in Text, Embodied in Life," Dr. Martin describes two modern-day women who identify with Mira. The first, a young woman living at the Shaligram Temple, regards herself as a Mirabai, devoting her life to Krishna. With a well-respected public persona, she sometimes dresses in sparkling golden clothes as Krishna, and other times in the saffron of a renunciate. Another, older, woman, called Lakshmi Bai but commonly known as Mira Mataji, also lives a life of service and devotion to Krishna in Vrindavan. Despite being a householder earlier in life, she lives today as a saint with a following of devotees, whom she treats as equals. She, too, is a composer, and her hymnal of three hundred and five compositions, called Sri Radha Krishna Bhajanavali, is used at daily satsangs.

Otherworldly: (left) Mirabai dances and plays music with Krishna in a Rajasthani-style painting; (right) the amazing Chittorgarh Fort, stronghold of the proud Rajput rulers, whose exploits are the stuff of legend

gopis (milk maids) cavorted in innocence, bathed in love. Vrindavan in reality cannot be further from this image. It must take enormous faith for the many devotees who flock here to feel the spiritual energy of this place. I feel a bit bad about not feeling Krishna's energy here. But when I was discussing the Mirabai expedition with a woman I met at Gopinath Bhavan, she said it's great that I am giving attention to one of the female players in the Krishna story. So be it. I am happy to move on.

I have to be in Agra to take the train to Rajasthan at 5pm, so I make plans for a taxi to drive me there in the late morning. I consider seeing the Taj Mahal (for the third time), and decide to stop at the ITC Mughal hotel, taking me on an unplanned detour into luxury, and it feels right. Mirabai was a princess who lived in a sumptuous palace before striking out on her own, both to escape the cruelty of her husband's family and to follow the voice of her soul, the call of her devotion to Krishna. There is synchronicity in this visit, too, as the ITC Mughal celebrates the era of Emperor Akbar—who visited Mirabai in disguise and praised her talent and devotion, bestowing upon her a valuable necklace.

So, as Mirabai left her palace home, I have to leave the comfort of the ITC Mughal to brave the chaos of the Agra train station.

A Broken Heart, a Spiritual Journey

The train is late, but eventually it arrives, I find my berth and settle

Mirabai in Modern Media

WE CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THE LIFE AND IMAGE OF Mirabai has been adapted by studying South Asian popular culture. For instance, we can see how Indian cinema has constructed her story at different points in time, with corresponding regional and linguistic sensibilities. The shifts in social circumstances change the methods of transmission and target audiences, and the type of media affects the way certain stories are told. For example, in films and comic books, the visual is highly relevant. While traditional hagiographers didn't need to

ponder how to illustrate Mirabai, directors and authors must. Moreover, let us consider the different audiences that print comics and movies reach. Mira is portrayed as an ideal Hindu wife in the postcolonial illustrated comic series Amar Chitra Katha. The story stresses her dharma, followed by her bhakti. The comics served as "culture-makers" intended for a young Indian audience, while the films portray a strong and graceful Mira that women could relate to. The primary focus of both genres is the story of Mirabai and her bhakti and dharma, rather than her poems. These depictions play with

Chittorgarh Fort, Rajasthan



in for the journey to Ajmer in Rajasthan. I'm in a lower berth in the second-class compartment. Somehow I like taking the train in India. I like the gentle movement and knowing I am going somewhere fascinating—plus I like it better than driving. The roads in India are a chaotic obstacle course and you really do feel you are taking your life in your hands. The movement of the train makes me philosophical. In Pushkar, Avtaar meets me and we walk together through town to meet someone that Anoop, owner of Inn Seventh Heaven, suggests I talk to about Mirabai. So we walk out of the haveli, around the corner and we are in the busy market that wraps around most of the lake. We go straight to meet Ravi, of Roots of Pushkar music store. Luckily he's there and happy to chat.

As a music lover, Ravi knows Mirabai primarily through the songs and bhajans she wrote, or that were written about her. He brings out

three CDs, two beautifully produced (by Roots of Pushkar) with great cover art and booklets, and I buy them all. Then he calls his brother-in-law Milap, in Merta City, and arranges for me to have a tour of the Mirabai temple the next day.

I have come to expect this kind of over-the-top helpfulness in India, but I hope I never take it for granted. India can be challenging and frustrating in so many ways, but the people usually make up for it. I have never met more warm and helpful people anywhere.

Finding Mirabai in Merta City

Avtaar and I meet the next day for our drive to Mirabai's birthplace. I'm really excited to explore the second stop on the Mirabai Expedition, and the unknown journey that awaits. We drive out of Pushkar and past the vast desert-like fields that host the annual Pushkar



the idea of radical bhakti as demonstrated by a female poet whose love of God supercedes the duties she shirks as daughter and wife.

Mira Films

Two popular films are available on YouTube, both portraying Mirabai as the paradigmatic Hindu female saint who maintains her devotion despite life-threatening obstacles, thus raising issues about bhakti, gender and a woman's traditional dharma. The first is a 1945 Tamil movie produced in South India, and the second is a 1979 Hindi movie filmed in Mumbai. Both are stories of a devotee's triumph. The latter film can be read as a nationalist discourse depicting a woman's victory over power and patriarchy.

"Meera," the Tamil language film directed by American filmmaker Ellis R. Dungan, features the renowned Carnatic vocalist M. S. Subbulakshmi. The decision to have an American director on a project that carried religious and cultural ideas is surprising. Dungan had moved

to India only in 1935 and knew little Tamil. But his innovative videography and the prominence he gave to female characters in his previous work may have influenced this decision. The film was unique in that it starred a professional musician rather than an actress, and M.S. Subbulakshmi chose Mira's role precisely because it carried a universal message of devotion. Her husband Sadasivam, seeking to advance his wife's career, produced the film, replete with songs in Tamil rendered by M.S. Subbulakshmi. A few semi-classical songs in Sanskrit find a place in the film. Amazingly, none of the songs featured in the Tamil film are taken from the collection of Hindi poems popularly attributed to Mirabai; instead, they were specifically composed for the film by Tamil lyricists Papanasam Sivan and Kalki. Many of the compositions contain the word *giridhari* or the phrase *mira prabhu giridhara gopala*.

In terms of narrative, the film begins with a happy-go-lucky Mira who sings and dances with her friends. Mira is the granddaughter of Dudha Rao, a Rajasthani ruler. One day a swami (whom we later learn is poet-saint Rupa Goswami, a follower of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) visits and brings with him a murti of Lord Krishna in the form of Giridhari. Little Mira is enraptured and imagines herself to be Radha. The film presents a scene with the young Mira as Radha dancing with Krishna in Vrindavan. Mira's mother encourages her divine love, and the goswami, moved by Mira's devotion, leaves his Giridhari murti with her. By age ten, Mira has lost both parents. Just a few years later, around 1516, at the insistence of her grandfather, she marries Kumbhaji Rana, the king of Mewar, despite her belief that she was already married to Giridhari. King Rana is portrayed as a devoted husband, encouraging Mira in her devotion to Krishna, building a temple at her behest, but ultimately regretting having allowed

In Rajasthan: (left to right) The Mirabai Krishna Temple in Chittorgarh, built for Mira by her father-in-law, who was initially pleased with her devotion; women gather to sing Mira songs inside the Mirabai Temple in Merta City

light because of the green plastic roof. A serene statue of Mirabai faces across a checkered tile courtyard towards the inner sanctum, the Krishna Temple. She is frozen in an adoring gaze of love and devotion.

A group of women sit in the courtyard playing music and singing Mirabai songs. After darshan in the Krishna Temple, I join them on the floor to experience the camaraderie of women and the music of Mirabai. It's a wonderful and exhilarating experience. I feel warmly welcomed by them. One woman hands me a pair of cymbals

while others move aside to make room for me. The woman leading the singing catches my eye and signals for me to join in.

I am beginning to get an idea of Mirabai—the joy and love she engendered, and the femininity of her creativity and devotion. And I am delighted to see that she is still honored today in her birthplace, in a very real and kinesthetic sense.

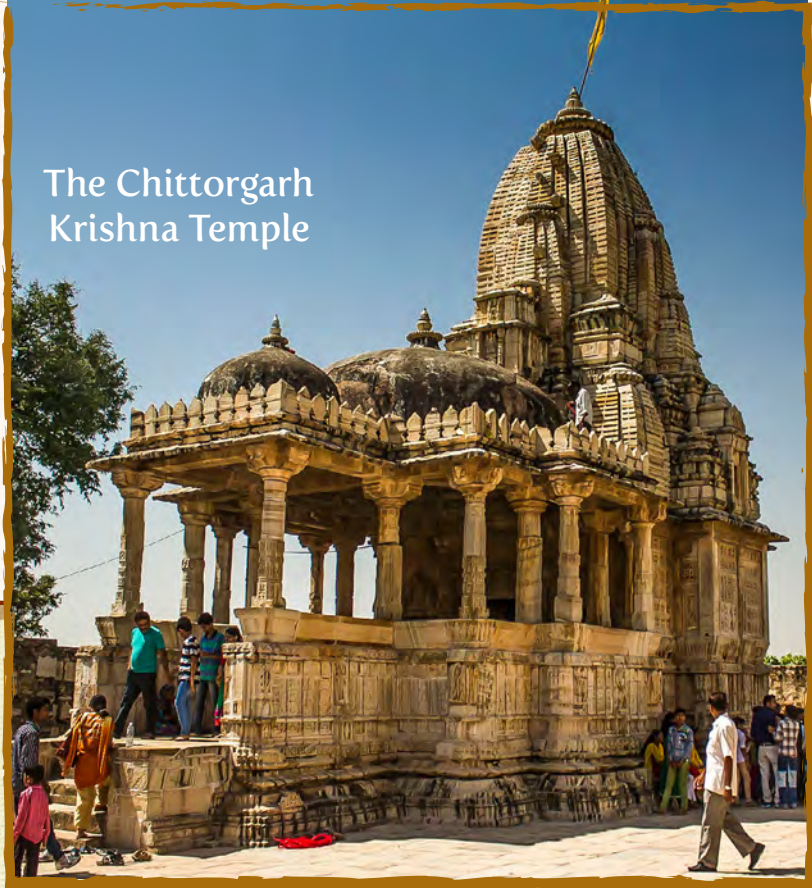
Leaving the temple, I feel full, satisfied with my Mirabai experience. But much to my surprise, Milap tells me we are going to the Mirabai Museum next door. This is news to me. I had no idea. The Mirabai Museum never came up in my research.

Striking Gold at the Mirabai Museum

I discover it's a fairly new museum in a very old building, housed in

Mira to leave his kingdom. This is similar to Priyadas' portrayal of Mira's husband in his early 18th-century text *Bhaktirasabodhini*. In Gulzar's 1979 Meerabai film, too, Bhoj Raj Singh is a devoted husband, exemplifying bhakti in the form of unconditional love for his wife. Mira's devotedness, on the other hand, is focused entirely on

Giridhari. Despite her best intentions, Mira is emotionally unable to live as queen and wife to Rana. In the Tamil film, Mira's brother-in-law Vikraman tries to poison her via Rana's sister Udha, but Mira is unaffected by the drink, a miracle that inspires Udha to become a devotee of the Lord. This is a famous story found in many Mira



The Chittorgarh Krishna Temple

MARIELLEN WARD

Camel Fair. Within an hour we are in Merta City and look to meet our guide.

We park in a narrow lane beside a temple and find Milap and his young son waiting for us. They escort us upstairs to their home, a spotlessly clean, light-filled, spacious flat over an electronics store. We meet his wife and daughter, too, and enjoy chai together.

Milap, his son and his daughter accompany Avtaar and me to the Mirabai Temple. I started as one, and now I am part of a five-person entourage. After walking for about 10 minutes along a narrow road through a busy market in the hot sun, suddenly, in the midst of all the bustle, we are at the Mirabai Temple.

I am immediately impressed with the place—by the size, the design, the beauty of the temple. The atmosphere inside is tinged with green



Mirabai Temple, Merta City, Rajasthan

MARIELLEN WARD

the former palace that was her home. I am dumbstruck, because I thought her house was in ruins. It turns out the house she was born in is in ruins, but the red sandstone building I am entering is where she grew up.

We enter through a thick, medieval-looking gate into a sizable courtyard. At the back of the courtyard is the palace. It is not big, but it is impressive enough. Most impressive is the care and thought that went into preserving the name of Mirabai here. Her life is plotted with signboards, portraits and paintings throughout the lofty rooms. In the main room (perhaps the throne room?), there is a beautiful gold-colored life-size statue of Mirabai behind a railing in front of a portrait of Krishna.

I am really impressed with this display; it evokes the quality of devotion and reverence that Mirabai represents. As I'm standing at the barrier, paying homage to Mirabai and also trying to imagine her actually living within these rooms, I am introduced to two local journalists. It seems like a coincidence they are at the museum at the same time as me.

I continue to walk slowly, enjoying the spacious rooms, naturally

cool even in the heat of the day, and filled with delightful images of feminine beauty and heartfelt devotion. My entourage continues to grow as I walk, with the journalists and several young local people joining us.

As I walk out through the massive, medieval museum gate into the glare of the noonday sun, I remember the story about how Mirabai stood in this same spot with her mother and watched a passing marriage procession. "Where is my groom? Whom will I marry?" she innocently asked her mother, who pointed to an image of Krishna and said, "Krishna is your groom." This idea stuck with Mirabai for the rest of her life. Milap's 10-year-old daughter and I take pictures of each other posing as "strong women," with our hands on our hips, and I hope she takes the attitude with her for the rest of her life.

Chittorgarh Fort: in the Footsteps of Royalty

Rajasthan is literally "the land of kings," a desert state with a rich history of chivalrous rulers, silk-road trade routes and romantic tales. Fantastical palaces and sand-castle forts, loping camels and screeching peacocks, women in neon-bright saris and men in bulbous

poems and legends.

Another prominent incident in the Tamil film is that Mira starts living in the temple that Rana built for Lord Krishna, singing with people of all castes including peasants and laborers, which the king disapproves of. This is also mentioned in Priyadas' *Bhaktirasabodhini*. Rana's frustration increases when he learns of a necklace that the Mughal emperor Akbar sends for Mira out of respect for her devotion and singing. A turning point in the film is when Mira leaves the palace, informing her husband that she doesn't belong in



FROM THE 1979 HINDI FILM MEERA

turbans. Rajasthan is all your fantasies of India writ large, and the setting for many of India's epic stories, including the improbable tale of Mirabai.

Mirabai was born a Rajput princess in Rajasthan around 1500. Her father, Ratan Singh, was the second son of Rao Duda ji, a descendent of Rao Jodha ji Rathor, the founder of Jodhpur. She was a renowned beauty known for her sweet voice and devotional nature, and was sought in marriage by a powerful Rajput family. She married Bhojraj, the son of Rana Sangram Singh of the Sisodia Dynasty, the powerful King of Mewar and ruler of the Chittorgarh kingdom.

Mirabai's Royal Connections

I read that after marrying Prince Bhojraj, Mirabai moved to Chittorgarh to live with her husband's family, as all Indian brides did, and most still do. But now I'm in Chittorgarh Fort, near Udaipur, and seeing the remains of the fort, the crumbling palaces and well-maintained temples, her story is becoming real. It's becoming real because I am walking where she walked and prayed; it's becoming real because I can see for myself the prestige and power of her husband's family.

As Avtaar and I drive into a Chittorgarh on this hot, sunny day, I'm struck by the vast size of the fort, which covers the mountain plateau, and how it towers over the modern town below. We head straight for the Castle Bijaipur hotel, about 25 kilometres outside of town, by far the top hotel in the vicinity; and it's well worth the drive.

Partially still occupied by the royal family, Castle Bijaipur is the most evocative heritage hotel I've ever stayed in. They managed to

the kingdom but in Vrindavan and Dwarka, where Lord Krishna lives. We see the transformation of Mira's physical appearance when she leaves the kingdom, from a queen in royal finery to a devotee in a simple sari, no jewelry and with a vina in hand. She wanders on foot and finally reaches Rupa Goswami's ashram in Vrindavan. Then they travel to Dwarka together, where she merges with Giridhari. In the film we see Mirabai's physical body fall, but her soul is shown leaving her body and entering the murti of Giridhari. Rana arrives in Dwarka at the same time that this happens, and he too becomes a devotee of Krishna.

Gulzar's *Meera* is different from Dungan's. Most notably, there is an interpretation of Indian history running throughout the movie. Gulzar's Krishna is the heroic Krishna from the Mahabharata, while in the Tamil version, M.S. Subbulakshmi is soaked in devotional love for the youthful, intimate Krishna called Giridhari. Gulzar's social and political agenda may be deliberate. As scholar Heidi Pauwels states in her

Remembering Krishna's devotee:

(left) a scene from the 1979 film, *Meera*; (right) the sacred town of Dwarka, on the embankment of the Gomati River, with white flag atop the Dwarkadesh Temple

modernize the rooms without losing the original character, and wisely left the patina of age. I feel like a princess in my large room with private balcony overlooking the town below, with its warren of medieval streets.

Arabian Nights' Castle in Rajasthan

At dusk I walk the grounds of the hotel, going up onto the roof to take photos from among the turrets. I sit on a cushioned window seat overlooking the inner courtyard, and also try out a swing seat. Before sunrise I walk through the quiet empty grounds to the massive gate to await my friend Ajay, who's arriving by train from Delhi. I feel lost in time, as if I've stepped into the pages of the *Arabian Nights*. In the morning I'm awakened by devotional music coming from a nearby Hindu temple, and the call to prayer from an equally nearby mosque.

Castle Bijaipur has put me into exactly the right frame of mind to spend the day in Chittorgarh Fort. It's a hot day, but we set out early and drive directly to the fort, engaging a guide at the entrance who travels with us. Far too big to walk—the circumference of the walls is 16 kilometres—we drive from place to place. Our first stop is the 15th-century Kumbha Palace, a vast site of crumbling walls and clambering monkeys. While the guide wants to give us every word of his memorized spiel, I entreat him to just show me the Mirabai Palace. To my surprise he takes me directly there, to a small building in the corner, with a sweeping vista. Though it is in ruins, the effect is still very much as if we're in a palace in the clouds. I'm absolutely charmed.



Dwarka Town

MARIELLEN WARD

Mirabai Escapes Three Attempts on Her Life

Our next stop is the Mirabai Temple, built for her by her father-in-law, the King of Mewar, who was initially pleased with her religious devotion. It is, of course, a Krishna temple, a small, intricately carved building on the grounds of a much larger Vishnu Temple. The temple is a well-maintained, sacred pilgrimage destination. A woman sits in the entrance singing Mirabai songs, and inside I see a beautiful white statue of Mirabai in front of the Krishna murti.

It's a delightful temple and I'm thrilled to be here; however, I am very surprised to see a stall set up inside selling books and souvenirs. A signboard inside reads: "Meera Temple. This is the temple where Mira worshiped Lord Girdhar Gopal—chanted hymns and danced. Here is the place where poison was turned to nectar."

Mirabai's in-laws did not accept her ecstatic devotion, feeling that her behavior was not seemly for a Rajput princess. After her husband died, and word got out that Muslim Emperor Akbar—the sworn enemy of the proud and independent Hindu Rajputs of Chittorgarh—had visited her in disguise, they attempted to kill her. Three times they tried, and three times she was miraculously saved.

The first time, she was given a basket of flowers with a poisonous snake hidden inside. The second time, she was given a cup of poison to drink. The third time, she was asked to drown herself. Lord Krishna was credited with the divine interventions that saved her, by turning the snake to a stone, the poison to nectar, and by lifting her out of the water. According to the sign, the third attempt on her life

happened at this temple. It was after these incidents that Mirabai left her royal home forever, to wander as a sadhvi in North India.

Dwarka: Releasing the Bonds of Love

Crossing the desert, we reach the remote seaside town of Dwarka. This is where Mirabai's story ends, where she mysteriously disappeared in front of crowds of people while singing in the temple to her beloved Krishna, when she was about my age. And this is where I wonder how my own story will end.

Dwarka is a flat place, barren, washed by sun and sea. But the light here has a crystal clarity, and the colors are few: beige sand, blue sky, silver sea. I feel calm here, and obviously Indians do, too, because the frenetic pace of most Indian towns is almost non-existent here.

Though a small town, Dwarka is awash in temples, new and old, grand and modest. The 5,000-year-old Dwarkadesh Temple in the center of town towers over all of them. Everything revolves around this temple, which emanates an ancient feeling and evokes deep reverence. Otherwise, Dwarka is a modest place of narrow, winding, colorless streets and the usual conglomeration of shops, stalls, cows, sadhus, beggars, cyclists, two-wheelers, autorickshaws and the like. But the pace is slower and the sea air gives it a special quality.

Miracles Begin to Happen

I like Dwarka instantly, though it is far from beautiful. My hotel faces the sea; otherwise it has nothing special to recommend it; a

Dwarkadesh Krishna Temple, Dwarka, Rajasthan

The Dwarkadesh Temple, where Mirabai disappeared, merging with her beloved Lord Krishna



characterless box with awkward young men working behind the desk and in the restaurant. The sea front here is lined with concrete, dotted with temples and smattered by cow dung. It is not what a Westerner would call picturesque. It was just down this coast, in Porbandar, about 43 miles away, that Mahatma Gandhi was born.

After checking in, the first thing I do is ask one of the young men behind the counter if there is a local guide who can help me learn about the temple. He says there is one priest who speaks English and he will call him. I go back to my room with my expectations in check. After five minutes, I get a call from the front desk. The priest has arrived. The first miracle.

To say I am surprised to find a handsome, charismatic young man in a crisp, clean silk dhoti, who speaks almost perfect English, waiting for me is a gross understatement. If I had planned ahead, I would never have met a better guide than Hardik Dwarka. Not only does he speak English, he has a sophisticated understanding of the world and he is from the Googly Brahmin caste that has served the Dwarkadesh Temple for hundreds of years. I immediately sense that Hardik is a special person, and my short association with him proves this to be true. Hardik and I arrange to meet at 5pm, when the temple reopens, and he is right on time. The second miracle.

Meeting Mirabai at the End of Her Story

My driver, Gopa, drives Hardik and me first to the Mirabai Temple in the center of Dwarka. It is a modest temple in the market area, and you would never find it without a guide. Hardik tells me it is quite new, and built by Sadhri Devi and her followers from Nagor, Rajasthan. While I am pleased to find the Mirabai Temple, I don't get any particular feeling from being there. Mostly, I am pleased to see women celebrated—Sadhri Devi also seems to be a musician.

From there we drive through the dusty streets to Dwarkadesh

Temple, as Hardik explains that Krishna lived for 100 years in Dwarka. He came here for the quiet, and there is still a sense of quietness about this sacred town. Krishna built Dwarkadesh Temple 5,000 years ago. *Dwar* means "gate or entrance," and *ka* indicates "moksha."

Gopal drops us outside the temple compound where people are gathering. Beggars line the outside wall, flower and tulsi sellers walk around with garlands, hawking their wares, and large groups of pilgrims arrive with anxious excitement. We walk slowly through the crowd, and as Hardik speaks, I become aware only of his presence and his words. He completely holds my attention, even in the maddening crowd.

"Krishna is awareness," Hardik says, "He teaches us that the past and future is not real. Only now is real." For the first time, I feel like I have found a way to understand Krishna. Maybe someone said this to me before, but at the Dwarkadesh Temple, I finally heard. All the many years I studied and practiced Gestalt and then yoga, I was also trying to understand this teaching. Hardik makes Krishna accessible and real to me. I ask him about Mirabai. "Mirabai shows us a different way to love. In her love for Krishna, she didn't want anything. In reality, lovers are always givers and takers. Mirabai's love for Krishna was amazing. There were no boundaries; she forgot herself. The saints told her that her love was very powerful." Krishna is awareness and Mirabai is love.

We drop our shoes and my camera at a counter and enter the temple. I immediately feel I am surrounded by ancient, sacred energy and know this is a special place. The spire of the temple towers above us, covered in ornate carvings, topped by a bright silk flag fluttering in the sea breeze. Hardik takes me directly to the heart of the temple, the inner sanctum, to see the black figure of Krishna, bedecked in colorful garments, deeply set in a recess and surrounded by several frames of gold and silver. Two queues of anxious people, male and

article "Who Is Afraid of Mirabai? Gulzar's Antidote for Mira's Poison," "He [Gulzar] is aware that his interpretation is not "the truth" but a creative adaptation of the story as passed on to him" in order to make the film look real as well as adhere to Bollywood standards. The film begins with a conversation between Mira's father and brother about the current political landscape. This sets the tone for the rest of the film, which heavily relies on the relationships between the various rulers. Mira's character is introduced a few minutes into the film, where she is shown singing the popular Mira bhajan "Mere to Giridhar Gopal". Her devotion to Krishna is apparent, though not the focus of the film yet. Mira has a cousin sister named Krishna in the movie, a character that we do not come across in historical or bhakti sources. As for Mira's brother Jaimal, however, he is mentioned in hagiographies and political documents as Mira's cousin brother. However, while in the movie he demonstrates enmity towards the Sisodiyas (Mira's in-laws), Heidi Pauwels points out in her work that there is historical evidence to suggest that Jaimal "found a protector in the Sisodiya Rana Udai Singh of Mewar."

female, corralled by metal gates, are pressing against the barrier for darshan, to see the figure of Krishna.

I find the darshan a bit overwhelming and am happy to move out of the main temple and walk around the compound. As we talk about Krishna, Mirabai, Hinduism, spirituality, religion and our own lives, we make our way around the temple and to the back of the darshan lineup. On a raised marble platform in front of the temple dedicated to Krishna's mother, I can see above the pilgrim's heads into the inner sanctum. I am completely surrounded by the womb of the temple and stand happily, imbibing a feeling of calm, and imagining Mirabai singing her love for Lord Krishna on this very spot. Here was the place she disappeared.

I ask Hardik about the disappearance, and he says that only a small square of her sari was left and that it was placed on the Krishna statue. In my research, I learned she was drawn to Dwarka by the extreme sanctity of the Krishna Temple, and she was perhaps running a soup kitchen for the poor at the time of her disappearance. The spiritual tradition is that she dissolved into love for Krishna. But others, less mystically inclined, say she fled from her fame. Apparently, a delegation was sent to Dwarka to persuade Mirabai to return to Chittorgarh because of either a political situation or drought. By this time, she was about 50 and famed for her ardent devotion and beautiful poems and songs. She may not have wanted to return to Chittorgarh, for obvious reasons—her in-laws had tried to kill her. Perhaps she decided to leave her identity behind and run away. Or perhaps she did undergo a spiritual miracle.

The Key to the Mirabai Story

It's my second morning in Dwarka. I meet Hardik again, at 6:30am, and we go back to the temple. We go into the temple compound where I join the queue for darshan. A woman in a mauve sari pushes me several times, though I motion for her to stay calm, to wait her turn. She pushes again and I say in English, knowing she will not understand, "Where do you think God is? You think God is only up there?" She ignores me, but the woman behind her understands, and makes room for me. So I let the pushy woman go ahead, and then enjoy the space created by the understanding woman, recognizing that I am experiencing the flow of consciousness.

Afterwards, I go back to the spot at the back of the queue, on the raised dais, and stand again feeling the subtle energy. I feel a kind of buoyant joy undulating through me, from where my bare feet touch the smooth, cool marble floor all the way up through my body to the

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top of my head. It is a pleasant feeling, like bobbing on a summer lake.

Walking to where Gopal is waiting by the car, an old, bent woman in colorless rags holds out a cup towards me, begging for money. This happens all the time in India, and I have learned to harden myself against it. But this time, my heart is open and I want to give her something. I have no money with me, but Hardik gives me a small bill and I hand it to her. Our eyes meet and hers are filled with love.

I am stopped in my tracks. I feel overcome with emotion, and start to cry. Hardik asks me if I am okay. "I saw my mother's eyes in hers," I blurt out.

I can barely move. Waves of love, longing and grief wash over me. I lost my mother 16 years ago, and all the pain, and all the love, come rushing back. I have to stop and lean against a wall, letting the masses of cows and pilgrims pass in a blur. An eternity of time opens up. I am in distant Dwarka and I am at home in Canada. I am here and now and with my mother in the distant past.

And then, all of a sudden, I have the key to the Mirabai story, and the mystery of what happened to her doesn't matter to me anymore.

I know what Mirabai's essence was, what the key to her story is, and what I am meant to learn from this expedition. And I can say it in one word. Love. Love is all that matters. Krishna is awareness and Mirabai is love, and together they merged. This is our higher self. This is the story of Mirabai.

ABOUT MARIELLEN WARD



Mariellen Ward is an award-winning professional travel writer based in Toronto and Delhi. Inspired by her extensive adventures in India, she launched a travel service, Breathe-dreamgo, in August, 2009. Her passion, exploring India, is the theme underlying all of her "meaningful adventure travel" writing. Canadian by birth, she considers India to be her muse and her "soul culture."

Enjoy Mariellen's blog at breathedreamgo.com



ARCHITECTURE

India's Astonishing Great Wall

The untold history of Kumbhalgarh, Rajasthan's most famous fort, surrounded by a massive 23-mile-long rampart that is second only to China's Great Wall

BY ANNESHA SENGUPTA, NEW YORK CITY

SIXTY-FOUR KILOMETERS FROM THE city of Udaipur, formerly the capital of the Mewar Kingdom, sits the elaborate Kumbhalgarh Fort. At first glance, it appears like a mirage—the harsh yet beautifully constructed buildings create a somber silhouette atop the Aravalli mountains. The fort, perched 3,600 feet above sea level, is one of the loftiest jewels in Rajasthan. Taking nearly a century to complete, it was begun under the supervision of master architect Mandan on the side of an even more ancient castle built by Samprati, a Jain prince of the second century bce.

Perhaps even more astonishing than the fort is the surrounding wall and parapets. At almost 23 miles long, it's the second longest wall in the world, second only to China's Great Wall. At most sections it is 15 feet wide, but broader stretches reach 49 feet. Legend

claims eight horsemen could ride side by side at the top. At each of its seven gates is a formidable rampart with circular bastions for archers and other fighters. The ramparts were often folded within each other in places where the wall was crenelated. But unlike the Great Wall, Kumbhalgarh Fort contains a powerful religious influence, with large and ornate temples. Today, Kumbhalgarh Fort is one of Rajasthan's best kept secrets, with much of the rich folklore and history known only by local historians and academics. The historical king Rana Kumbha (1433–1468), constructed it in the 15th century, completing the main section after 15 years. When finished, it proved to be one of the most impenetrable fortresses known to man. Strategically situated on steep, high ground, the fort contained all the supplies necessary to withstand long, tedious sieges. Water was always in full supply from the nearby Banas

River, and the heavily fortified battlements could withstand heavy bombardment. In all its 500 years as a stronghold of the Mewar Kingdom, it was only captured once. That happened in when the Mughal army took advantage of a drought (some claim they poisoned the water supply), but the Rajasthanis recaptured it just days later. "If you wish to enter [the fort]," wrote scholar Onkar Rathor, "you have to become a mosquito."

The fort's creation is shrouded in mythology. It is said that when Rana Kumbha first started construction, whatever his workers built each day would crumble to ruins by sunset. A priest informed the monarch that the fort could not be built until someone voluntarily gave their life as a spiritual sacrifice. For months, no one could be found, until one pilgrim (who in some versions is a soldier from Rana's troops) volunteered and was ritually dispatched. From that moment on, the



World heritage: (facing page): (From above, a drone captures a rare image of the grandeur of the Rajasthani fortress amid arid mountains; (right, clockwise from top): a Jain temple inside the wall; typical embattlement detail; one of the seven entry gates; sign leading to the king's birthplace; the wall from above; the Golera group of shrines; towers of a Hindu temple; the wall's wide walkways.

fort blossomed on the mountainside. From this origin story stems the history of the fort as a place of war and religion, bloodshed and peace.

While Rana Kumbha was a real, historical figure, the stalwart leader of the Mewar kingdom, he has picked up mythological characteristics throughout the years. Formidable on the battlefield, famous for capturing the city of Nagaur, he commissioned over 31 other Rajasthani fortresses, and also oversaw the construction of the 121-foot-tall Vijay Stambha, the Victory Tower of Vishnu. He was an accomplished wrestler, artist and poet, the author of 13,000 couplets. It is said he was eight feet tall, one reason that many of the temple Sivalingams are enormous, as they were designed, per tradition, to equate with the king's stature. During his reign, the fort was not overcome once.

Unfortunately, Rana Kumbha's glorious life came to an inglorious end when, at age 35, he was murdered by his own son, Udai Singh I, in 1468. At that point Kumbhalgarh temporarily lost its glory. The patricidal son did not live long after the murder. He was struck by lightning in Delhi while traveling to offer his daughter's hand in marriage to the Delhi Sultan. This is seen by many as divine justice for his gestures toward the enemy. Kumbhalgarh then lay nearly forgotten for over seventy years.

This changed in 1540 with the birth of Rana Pratap, one of the most respected warriors of Indian history. Rana Pratap, born within the confines of the fort, rejuvenated interest in the area as a place of history, politics and war. His archenemy was Akbar, more popularly known as Akbar I or Akbar the Great. Rana Pratap spent his entire life fighting the Mughal Empire at a time when resistance to the foreign invaders' larger armies seemed futile. The Mughals breached the fort only once, but it was taken back by Rana Pratap within a matter of days. He would go on to spend most of his life in Kumbhalgarh, dying of hunting injuries at the age of 56.

A quick glance at the structure of the fort's interior reveals the priorities of its creators. The residential structures are sparse and utilitarian, almost entirely devoid of ornamentation. These are flat-roofed structures made of rubble stone or broken scrap stone with little

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RAJASTHAN FREE STOCK PHOTOS

Defensive bastions: (above) a few of the massive round bastions with parapets above to give soldiers protected spaces; (next page) inside the fort's courtyard.

ornamental beauty, while the great wall was made of large premium stone blocks from the surrounding mountains. The multitudinous temples that dot the fort and wall are stunningly elaborate, full of intricate work carved by thousands of artisans, who often utilized rare and stunning black stone, showing the culture's reverence for these religious edifices. There are over 360 temples within the wall's confines, mostly Jain, while many of the largest are Hindu. While Rana Kumbha built the fort for defensive purposes, he was clearly just as interested in providing his citizens with places of worship.

The largest, a Siva temple, has over 52 canopies, an expansive courtyard and a pillared corridor. The ceilings, rounded and beautiful, stand above statues of several Deity murtis, including Siva and Hanuman, that reach from the floor to the top of the roof. This creates the illusion that the Gods themselves are holding the temple aloft and betrays the fundamental wartime purpose of the fort. Hinduism is no minor adornment here. Rather, it is the very cornerstone of the citadel—the artistic and military power of its success. Rana

Kumbha regarded all his endeavors as holy, a perspective that his successor, Rana Pratap,

would also come to hold. No part of the fort—its defense, its picturesque surroundings, its harbouring of Jain merchants—could exist without the Gods.

The Siva temple was built in the middle of the 15th century, shortly after the main structures went up. It is a stupendous feat of architecture—a wide, round dome with a heavy and intricately designed roof held aloft by 24 massive pillars. Nandi the bull, the mount of Lord Siva and protector of His ancestral home, Mount Kailash, stands statuesque at the temple's entrance. The Sivalingam is five feet high and made of black stone.

Some distance from that citadel sits a Jain temple to Ganesha with an intricately decorated roof that appears like a dome when viewed from afar. Nearby are statues of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. This is part of a complex of nine coexisting Hindu and Jain shrines. Many of the tenants of Kumbhalgarh Fort were wealthy Jain merchants who had allied themselves with Rana Kumbha and lived here in religious and diplomatic harmony. One of the most famous of the Jain temples stands on a platform rising above the flat ground and is devoid of any idol. The layout is simple, but the stones adorning the gate are elaborately carved with scenes from the *Mahabharata* and delicate figures

of temple dancers.

The Vedi Temple, three stories tall, is a sacrificial shrine located near the famous Hanuman Gate. It was built by Rana Kumbha and later renovated by Maharana Fateh Singh. It is the final remnant of India's ancient sacrificial temples.

While Kumbhalgarh is a popular tourist destination for those living nearby in Rajasthan, it has not achieved nearly as much popularity as its closest counterpart, the Great Wall of China. This is curious, because although the Kumbhalgarh Wall is vastly shorter than the Great Wall, there are many features in Kumbhalgarh that are worthy of fame. The Great Wall, for example, was purely military in purpose, and does not give space for temples and monuments. The Great Wall was not connected by a single fort that also functioned as a ruler's court—it worked as a border, not as a center. Remarkably, Kumbhalgarh manages to do both. Tourists and locals who visit Kumbhalgarh describe being overwhelmed by its grandiosity, its cultural complexity and the breath-taking surrounding landscape.

Baudhayan Lahiri, an IT professional who is also an avid traveller, photographer and videographer, describes his experience: "After entering the fort, we first had a lunch break and then commenced our journey upwards. While quite a steep climb, we still enjoyed as the weather was pleasant and the views became more and more amazing. After a climb of almost 15 hours, we finally reached the top which was extremely windy and

Fort Factoids

RAJASTHAN IS HOME TO SOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST FORTS. AMONG THEM KUMBHALGARH stands apart, not because the fortress itself is especially magnificent (which it is), but because of the great wall that surrounds and protects it.

The fort which the wall surrounds is built high on a steep hillside and dominates the landscape, being more than 1,000 meters above sea level. The kings of those days hoped that the protection of the wall would avoid violence simply because any advancing enemy could not penetrate it. The wall was constructed half a millennium ago (work began in 1443, about the time the printing press was invented), in tandem with Kumbhalgarh Fort itself, the second most significant citadel after Chittorgarh in the Mewar region. It is one of 32 forts built by the Rajput rulers of the Mewar kingdom. The virtually unassailable fort boasts seven gigantic gateways, called *pols*, and seven ramparts strengthened by rounded bastions and massive watchtowers.

Tourists find it pleasant to have this extensive, well-preserved but not not well-trafficked site to themselves, a feature of the many miles they had to travel through the desert to reach it. Though clever traps and defensive mechanisms along the wall and within the fort have been deactivated, visitors are still warned to be careful, especially when approaching badly deteriorating areas. Guest quarters and restaurants have been opened inside the fort itself, making for an immersive experience.

Within the walls stand more than 360 Jain and Hindu temples. A delightful palace, aptly named Badal Mahal or the Cloud Palace, sits at the summit. From the palace roof, one can see several kilometers into the Aravalli Range and the sand dunes of the popular Thar Desert. According to local folklore, Maharana Kumbha used to burn huge lamps that consumed 50 kilograms of ghee and 100 kilograms of cotton each night to provide light for the farmers who worked the fields during the nights in the valley.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has successfully protected the site, which includes five other majestic forts: Chittorgarh; Sawai Madhopur; Jhalawar; Jaipur and Jaisalmer. The eclectic architecture bears testimony to the power of the Rajput princely states that flourished in the region from the 8th to the 18th centuries. Enclosed within defensive walls are major urban centers,



palaces, trading facilities, living quarters and temples that often predate the fortifications. There is evidence here of a highly developed and elaborate courtly culture that supported learning, music and the arts. The fort uses the natural defenses offered by the landscape: inaccessible hills, deserts, rivers and dense forests. The extensive and highly engineered water harvesting structures are largely still in use today.



DINODIA / DIRK RENCKHOFF

From the Thrilling Travel Blog

BY AMI BHAT

WHenever I research a destination, there are always some places that I earmark as “uncompromisable,” “must visit,” “cannot avoid” kind of destinations. Kumbhalgarh, for me, was this one uncompromisable destination during my trip to Rajasthan.

It is hard to believe that you are in a desert when you pass through these hills, for they are naturally green and the cool breeze that blows along makes you realise what an apt location the Kumbha kings had chosen for their fort. The best part of this fort is that there is no restriction, and you are free to wander away from the main path to explore anything that catches your fancy. I walked along the walls to discover little watch towers, gun and cannon holes.

The walls of the fort are unusual and very scenic. They are brownish with a bit of red color. They reminded me of castles I saw in Europe. With the greenery and the lovely clouds as the backdrop, they are bound to bring out the shutterbug in you.

Unlike the other forts in Rajasthan, Kumbhalgarh Fort is devoid of guides—both real and audio. There are very few sign posts and

the whole fort is kind of DIY. I frankly loved that about the fort for it gave the explorer in me a bit of satisfaction. I felt as if I was living a story. You can even explore the little tunnels near the walls. They must have been made for sentries to walk along in the night.

The entrance to the room Maharana Pratap was born in is through a flight of stairs. The room itself seemed removed from the main palace, possibly used as an infirmary or a room where mid wives were called to help out the queens. When I walked in, I realized that the room was empty and in shambles. It did not seem like a Queen's chamber at all.

The palace is not as huge as I imagined it to be, nor as ostentatious as the Meherangarh Fort of Jodhpur. Simple and charming is how I would describe it.

Built by Rana Fateh Singh, the Badal Mahal clearly has two parts—the male chambers (Mardana Mahal) and the female rooms (Zenana Mahal). You can easily identify these sections from the decor. The Zenana Mahal has a lot of windows that would shield the women from the public eye and yet allow them to see the court proceedings.



Jewel in the desert: *The famed 15th century hilltop fort*

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provided stunning panoramic views of the Aravali mountain range. What amazed me was that other than the main fort boundary there are other walls built across the mountainous range around which demarcated the area of governance and control. The walls extended for miles around, and I had to use my binoculars to see them.”

Kumbhalgarh lies not only at the intersection of government and religion, but religion and aesthetics. Everything about Kumbhalgarh is absolutely beautiful, from its carefully designed interior to the sweeping views outside. The fort intentionally becomes part of the landscape, and both the beauty of the fort and the beauty of its locale serve as a testament to Kumbha's faith in the beauty of all things created by God.

In 2013, Kumbhalgarh Fort, along with five other forts of Rajasthan, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is finally protected by both the government and groups of dedicated scholars and archaeologists. Now that it is no longer private property, Kumbhalgarh is not used as a residence.

Its significant upkeep is overseen by the government of Rajasthan. The fort maintains its cultural importance in the surrounding community. Every year, the Rajasthan Tourism Department organizes a three-day festival in honor of Kumbha and his contribution to the arts. The festival includes a Heritage Fort Walk, turban tying, tug-of-war and mehendi for adults and children. It remains the perfect tourist attraction, reachable by air from Udaipur (85 km away), by train via the Falna railhead (80 km away) and by road via private cars and buses. The recently released book, *Wonderful India, Kumbhalgarh the Majestic*, by Amit Tejwani and photographer Kapil Tejwani, contains the best photos you will see of the site and a wealth of information on the fort's history and architecture.

Kumbhalgarh Fort has the second largest parapet wall in the world and is the second largest fort in Rajasthan. However often the fort is demoted to being second, it refuses to be overshadowed. Within its delicately carved temples and sparse yet majestic rooms is the birthplace of Rana Pratap and the fascinating history his reign inspired. Its architecture tells the story of the warrior

king Kumbha and all those who lived with him, died with him and even fought against him. It is a place of religious harmony, where Jain and Hindu temples coexisted, and where faith was prioritized above war and politics. Kumbhalgarh Fort remains a testament to humanity, courage, the Hindu faith, religious synergy and time itself.

Great videos of the fort can be found here:

youtube.com/watch?v=o5WNV5-luzI
youtube.com/watch?v=_w9BWbhJ4HA
youtube.com/watch?v=dmRr7lWbUcs

Annesha Sengupta studies writing and literature at New York University. Her work appears in Tin House Online and the National Book Foundation's website. She is editor of the Minetta Review, which publishes art, poetry and prose from around the world. She has



a deep interest in Hinduism and other South Asian religions.

WONDERFUL INDIA

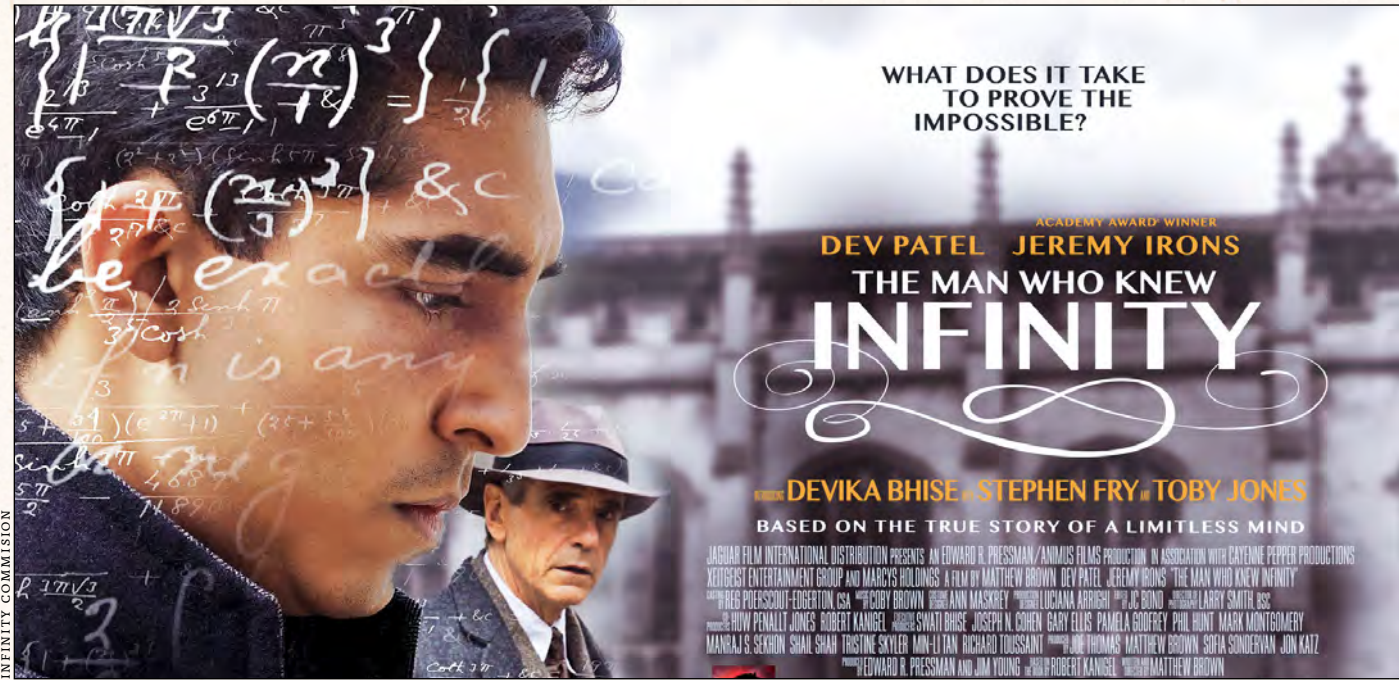
Kumbhalgarh the Majestic

By Amit Tejwani

Photography by Kapil Tejwani



The book to see: Wonderful India, published by NotionPress, is the best source of photography of India's Great Wall. Clockwise from top left: Neelkanth Mahadev Temple (built 1458); brick watch tower; Veda Temple (1457); Ganesha Temple built by Rana Kumbha; inside Badal Mahal, the king's palace; raised temple near the fortress; black Sivalingam in the Neelkanth sanctum.



FILM

The Man Who Knew Infinity

A young woman's review and reflections upon a film that honors a life of genius, and touches on issues confronting Hindus today

BY ANNESHA SENGUPTA, NEW YORK

THE MAN WHO KNEW INFINITY, DIRECTED by Matthew Brown and based on Robert Kanigel's 1991 book of the same name, introduces the life of one of the most influential mathematical figures of all time. The film follows Srinivasa Ramanujan (Dev Patel) from his time as a young mathematical genius in Madras, where he worked as a common accountant, to far-off England, where he worked with (and often baffled) the top mathematicians of Cambridge. The film explores a clash of cultures which remains familiar to Hindus living in the West today, and shows how, throughout his studies and transformations, Ramanujan maintains his cultural heritage and deep Hindu faith, even in the face of racism and xenophobia.

To this day, S. Ramanujan is a legend in mathematical scholarship. He broke new ground in many abstruse fields, including mathematical analysis, number theory, infinite series and continued fractions. While he was criticized during his lifetime for not providing adequate proofs for his theories, almost all of his claims were proven correct posthumously. *The Ramanujan Journal*, established in 1997 and named in his honor, publishes work in all areas of mathematics

influenced by him.

When the as-yet-unknown Ramanujan sent some of his work to professor G.H. Hardy (Jeremy Irons) in Cambridge, Hardy found it so remarkable he first assumed it was a fraud. Finally convinced otherwise, he invited Ramanujan to Trinity College at Cambridge, the setting for most of the film. There Ramanujan faced racism and a lack of understanding about his strong Hindu faith. After much hardship, and a massive campaign by Hardy, he was made the first Indian fellow of Trinity College. But his story is a tragically short one. Soon after becoming a fellow he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, dying at age 32.

The Man Who Knew Infinity traces the arc of this rich yet fleeting life, emphasizing Ramanujan's devotion to his faith and showing how he attributed his work to it, even while it was mocked or disrespected within the halls of the college.

Watching the movie, I felt a deep connection with Dev Patel's masterfully portrayed Ramanujan. I am no mathematical genius—I almost failed calculus—but I responded deeply to the way in which he practiced his faith in an environment where Hinduism was seen as something foreign

and inconsequential.

Ramanujan saw Hinduism as an intrinsic part of all that he loved—mathematics, his family, and the very soil on which he walked. His faith was as important to him as air or water. He was a brahmin and one of the first scenes of the movie shows him praying to Namagiri, his household Goddess. The scene is familiar to those who, like myself, grew up in a Hindu household. As a child, I would never practice piano or Bharatanatyam without my murtis of Saraswati and Nataraja. I would gently lay them on my piano bench while I practiced my scales, and then move them above the fireplace before I was ready to dance. My non-Hindu friends did not understand this. "What do these murtis have to do with art?" They asked me. Some of them listened, as did Hardy, Ramanujan's colleague, but others followed their ignorance to the bitter end. Through it all, I've always found strength in my Gods. Regardless of what others thought, I felt they imbued me with a vision as I began my study of arts.

I was a child, learning scales and the initial steps to my dance. Ramanujan was a mathematical pioneer who lived a century earlier. The Deities to which we connected were different, but both our souls were linked to the

same faith.

Ramanujan's mother (Arundhati Nag) and bride Janaki (Devika Bhise) were spiritual women, respecting many of the brahmin customs. The centerpiece of the home was their altar, and before Janaki's arrival, rice was sprinkled around the house, befitting Hindu tradition. Ramanujan's bosses, on the other hand, found his deep devotion to Namagiri unnecessary, even childish. When his boss learned of his invitation to Cambridge, he urged the young man to accept: "Other people will have a chance to understand you, just not your Namagiri."

The movie shows clearly that in British-ruled India Indian religions and thoughts were considered less legitimate than British and Christian ones. Despite Ramanujan's demonstrably brilliant mathematical mind, he continually faced pressure to travel to England; only this would legitimize his genius. For those like me who find themselves practicing Hinduism in an area of the world that is predominantly Christian, this feeling of being illegitimate, somehow "less" than others, is all too familiar. In the public schools of Christian-dominated countries such as the UK and US, children learn Christian theology, as if Christian beliefs applied to all children. Similarly, holidays are provided for Christmas and Easter, but not for Durga Puja (which was very important in my household) and Diwali. In both UK and US, Christmas is actually a national holiday.

For Ramanujan, food in England was also a great challenge. The film depicts this well. On his first night in the dining hall at Cambridge he is offered potatoes—the only apparently vegetarian item on the menu. He takes a bite, only to learn that they were cooked in lard. He stumbles out, disoriented having realized that this environment will not be friendly towards him.

I experienced similar issues throughout my childhood. Hinduism allows for a variety of consumption practices; some of us avoid beef and pork, some of us forgo meat altogether. Several times I have been offered beef without any thought. My Hindu friends have confided in me that they accidentally ate meat, even beef—their friends gave them vegetables cooked in beef stock, or they weren't told that their burrito contained chicken or beef. The people who gave us these meat products, like the hapless server plopping down lard-cooked potatoes on Ramanujan's plate, were not acting from malice, but from total and profound ignorance. I have seen Ramanujan's

fear and disorientation on my own face and on the faces of those I love.

Ramanujan's very journey to England was marked by strife and controversy. According to a tradition known as *kala pani* (black water) anyone who crossed the ocean would shed their caste. This custom was fading even in Ramanujan's time; but his family was conservative, and his decision to go to England was considered a betrayal.

"I'm finally here and you talk of crossing the sea? It is forbidden for us," pleads Janaki with her husband. But Ramanujan calmly responds that if their neighbors rejected them, they would simply move to a more progressive neighborhood.

This conflict between tradition and globalization continues to dominate the personal and public lives of Hindu communities living in India and abroad. How much are we to cleave to conservative traditions? Is it possi-



Honoring a great mind: (far left) The film's official poster; (above) a scene of Ramanujan and his wife Janaki before his departure to England

ble to maintain our Hindu faith while letting go of certain tenets that we may deem outdated? This is a question I've grappled with and that I continue to grapple with. And it is clearly a question that Ramanujan encountered. One moment in particular stood out to me. When he tells his mother he must move across the ocean, she is praying at the altar. It is an interesting directorial choice; Ramanujan literally pries her away from her religious reverie. Her face is horror-struck when she sees he has cut his hair in the Western style, and she immediately blames the influence of his wife. In the end she, too, turns away from tradition. She allows her son to leave, and later is seen bragging about his publications in a large, appreciative crowd.

But Ramanujan maintained his faith even

in England. The movie shows him waking up each morning and lighting incense, wearing the symbolic tilaka on his forehead. "You have something on your forehead," an ignorant professor remarks. On a small, cold ledge in his sparsely furnished apartment, he lays out his murtis and creates mandalas of sand. Later this small corner becomes the place where he does complicated mathematics.

Throughout the movie, Ramanujan's faith is shown as a source of great strength, an endless well of perseverance that sustains him across oceans and ideologies. Two of the most powerful scenes occur when faith and math are inextricably linked. In one, Hardy, Ramanujan's dear friend and a staunch atheist, asks Ramanujan how his formulas come to him. "Namagiri," he says with profound earnestness, "She puts formulas on my tongue while I sleep. Sometimes while I pray."

Across the ocean, Janaki is still waiting to hear from her husband, unaware that her mother-in-law has been hiding his many letters to her. When she fears he has abandoned her, she runs to the temple and throws herself on the floor. There she finds scores of formulae written in Ramanujan's hand before he left. For Ramanujan, math and God are sides of the same coin.

Ramanujan exemplifies the ways in which Hinduism can connect—and I mean this literally—everything. Even when I am not actively engaging with my faith, even when I am admiring art at a museum, doing my taxes, or having lunch with a friend, the formula of faith is all around me. *The Man Who Knew Infinity* is in many ways an acknowledgment of Hindu connections; Ramanujan's math is connected to his body, which is connected to those he loves on the other side of the ocean.

The movie also shows that the alienation of Hinduism is not necessary: Hardy, a pronounced atheist, respects Ramanujan despite or perhaps because of his faith. The real tragedy is not Ramanujan's death but the lack of acceptance by those who cannot open their minds to the beauty of other faiths.

The real Ramanujan once said, "An equation for me has no meaning unless it expresses the thought of God." *The Man Who Knew Infinity* emphasizes this sentiment throughout.

Ramanujan's body is ultimately defeated by the diseases and unfriendliness of his new climate; but his math, his faith and his spirit remain absolutely eternal, with his divinely inspired work still relevant today.



To My Fellow Hindus of the West

A call to second-generation Indians in the United States and elsewhere to do their part to help sustain our great religion and pass it on to subsequent generations

Dr. Pemmaraju Rao, devout Hindu, world expert in women's health and passionate gardener, wrote the following article just prior to his passing in 2015.

I WAS BORN IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, at a time when there were few Indians in the US. My parents were pioneers, moving here in an era when almost no Indians were here unless for scholarly research, medicine, science and education.

My father, originally a Fulbright Scholar in chemistry—one of only four chosen at that time to come from India—was an adventurous soul. At the time of my parents' arrival in the US, my mother, was still emotionally and mentally preoccupied with her Indian family lineage and all its wit and woes. A state of shock greeted her upon arrival.

Tears come to me as I ponder their heartache as they were about to leave their ancient Motherland of India. They would be leaving the banks of the Eastern Godavari River—a cornucopia for ancient Saivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism, the land of the gurus, sages and Gods—and landing on American soil in San Antonio, Texas, the land of cattle, cowboys, sombreros, critters and jalapenos.

I often imagine what they felt as their plane departed India, and their parents innocently waved goodbye, not knowing if they would see their children again. Somehow my parents were driven by an inner calling to go West, guided by the Divine to become Eastern pioneers in the Western world.

In looking at their lives from their arrival in the 50s to the present day, I am astonished at their courage, as well as the courage of other such Indian Hindu pioneers at the time. They would all plant the seeds of the Sanatana Dharma, which would eventually sprout into mighty trees of experience and understanding for our modern times. After an immense and ancient history, for only fifty years have Indian Hindus migrated westward. I was taught by my parents to never underestimate the power which immigrants can carry to foreign soils through their spiritual power within.

My older sister and I grew up in San Antonio, where there were really no Indian children—though later in childhood a few would arrive. We went to a Jewish kindergarten and then to public school and college before venturing out into our careers. I grew up with partial admiration as well as ridicule. I had to bear the antics of little kids yelling at me, "Holy cow!" and "Oh my Gods!"—instead of "God." On several occasions, food and other trashed items were thrown at me with the words "Here, feed this trash to your starving relatives and family. If everyone is starving, they should eat beef!"

I deeply thank my parents that despite all this misunderstanding, they still managed to create an altar and a small temple as we grew up. They did their best to explain our Hindu tradition to us through ritual as well as in practical day to day application.



Pioneers: The late Dr. Rao with his wife Suvarna Rani on a visit to Kauai Aadheenam in 2007

My first memories of saintly Hindu portraits were those of Sarada Devi and Ramakrishna. My mother was very close to them and would often share stories of their life and teachings. My parents would always be open to discuss each Deity, with their meaning and unique effects on our lives. They taught us that each is a ray of light within ourselves, to be worshiped outside of us to rekindle the inner lights of knowledge and willpower.

While my mother and father were far from perfect, they were able to hold on to their vision of creating a temple in San Antonio and were always able to integrate the social and cultural aspects of India with the religious. In those days they kept in contact with their other

few pioneering friends around the country, and we would drive to their houses out of town for pujas, meetings and other worship services.

Their Indian friends became our role models. This was important to my sister and me, for until we traveled to India years later, we had no relatives at all in our lives to relate to. Remember, in those days there were no cell phones, computers or the internet. Letters would take 21 to 30 days to reach us from India, if they arrived at all, and travel to India was no easy task as it is today. Emergency messages were sent via telegram.

My parents always found books, TV programs and films for us related to India, and signed us up for the Amar Chitra Katha cartoon books. Through these comics I learned a great deal about Hindu lore, legends, myths, facts and everything in between. As a youth I would be taken shopping. In those days, prints of Gods and Goddesses were just coming to certain East-West stores. From such materials along with other murtis and images, I would create my own temples at home with my parent's encouragement and guidance.

My mother and father's longing for a guru would ultimately lead them to Swami Satchidananda of the Integral Yoga Movement and also to Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Kauai Aadheenam and HINDUISM TODAY. At that time they met with Gurudeva at his ashram on Kauai. Gurudeva, in his graciousness, guided them, along with Swami Satchidananda, to ultimately help create the San Antonio Hindu Temple—one of the few temples in the US in those days. My mother created, along with Gurudeva, the first Ardhanareshwara Temple. This had been a childhood dream of hers.

I have been fortunate to have the interest to be involved in many ways with Hinduism and temples in the US; but as an adult and a second-generation Indian Hindu in this country, I've noted time and again that most of the activities of temples and Hindu-related agendas are still largely managed and addressed by first-generation Indians—even after 64 years of migration to the US from the 1950s to the present.

Granted, I have watched many generations grow up in our Hindu



religion, and I know that children, teenagers and college students are actively involved in Hindu matters. However, what still astonishes me is that, despite all the childhood exposure and the resources on Hinduism in this era, we are still lacking in the deeper continuity of help and support needed for the growing number of Hindu temples in the US.

When I go to many temples in the West, I see that most if not all adults are still first generation. It seems that this is the larger trend, even though most Hindu children and teens have had a good deal of exposure growing up. Why, I wonder, are there not as many (if not more) second-, third- and now fourth-generation Hindus participating in their traditions—like in the Jewish faith and other such traditions—especially with the explosive global awareness of Indian pop culture like Bollywood and other social influences?

I know the reasons are myriad and complex, but I cannot help wondering and contemplating these matters. Major questions that arise for me are as follows:

1. Why do we not see the second, third and fourth generations from the continuous stream of first-generation immigrants taking a more active role in funding, supervising, administering and practicing the basic and deeper aspects of Hinduism through actual temples and related manifestations, when many grew up with this knowledge?
 2. Does this trend mean that a continuous wave of immigrants from India will have to lead the Hindu Renaissance around the world into the 21st century and beyond, while the second and subsequent generations fracture into their new culture?
 3. What really is the future of temples and related elements of Hinduism if subsequent generations are not taking an active role?
- Millions, if not billions, of dollars have been raised by first-generation immigrants for such endeavors, and they have devoted a great deal of their lives to painstaking planning, preserving, maintenance and management. After all this, I wonder if second-, third- and fourth-generation Hindus are thinking about these matters and taking them to heart.

One could speculate answers to these questions, but what I think really needs to happen is that these important concerns be addressed by second-generation Indians like me—to inspire awareness which can circulate through our own and subsequent generations. We can do this by looking at how we grew up, what needs to take place, and how we can partner with first-generation Indians to create a supportive infrastructure to support Hinduism on all levels beyond the

Temple leaders: The San Antonio Hindu Temple, founded in part by Dr. Rao and his wife, who served as long-time trustees and advisors

motherland.

We need to create financial foundations and endowments, not just for Indian cultural initiatives but for the Hindu religion—supported by funding from subsequent generations. Judaism and Christianity have done this quite successfully. Such endowments can be used to support education and raise awareness about Hinduism. They can also help to support the colossal undertakings of our aging parents. Many Hindus simply are not aware of what it really takes to sustain temples and related activities, with cost, maintenance, procedure, presentation and sustenance.

As second- and now even third- and fourth-generation adults, we need to refresh and renew our own experience and knowledge of Hinduism. We can do this by taking our own measures, by meeting with gurus, Divine Mothers and others around the world, and by practicing the teachings of our original lineages to learn and relearn what we were taught and not taught growing up. We must fill the gaps in our own understanding that many of us have from growing up in a dual culture, dominated mainly by Western thought. We must also create more networks and forums for the teachings, tenets and practices of Hinduism. We can also look to new technology and social media as powerful methods of communication to truly spread a wide message around the world about the richness of Hinduism.

If we do not begin somewhere, then perhaps in the all-too-near future, temples and all related activities stand the chance of becoming archaic and dilapidated. I feel that the first-generation Hindus abroad cannot do it alone. It is going to take us all to work together. Otherwise, the pioneering efforts of our parents will go from renaissance to ruin and reversal.

We can make a difference if more of us are awakened to the importance of such an undertaking and if we work together for this common cause: to uphold a dharma that is the world's oldest continuous tradition and practice. Are we going to let it die on the vine in the West? It is really up to us and our own inner renaissance of the heart, first and foremost, since our vines are rooted in Western soil. We need to fertilize the heart with knowledge and experience of Hinduism in order to nurture the outer manifestations of this ancient path.

Siva's Kailas of the South

God's blessings flow out to the world during the chariot festival at Chennai's Kapaleeshwarar Temple—the millennia-old southern abode of Lord Siva

By LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, CALIFORNIA

KAPALEESHWARAR TEMPLE, NESTLED in the heart of Mylapore in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, is one of the most popular temples dedicated to Lord Siva. As a little girl growing up in Chennai, I visited the temple for the first time with my grandmother. "Patti (Tamil for grandmother), we are Vaishnavites. Why are we visiting Siva's temple?" I asked. My staunch Vaishnavite grandma then quoted Krishna's words to Arjuna, as well as an old Tamil saying, that Siva and Vishnu, Hari and Haran are different manifestations of one and the same God. Later, as a student in Queen Mary's College and Presidency College, I used to take a bus from T. Nagar to Triplicane. The bus used to stop by the temple tank. The conductor would shout

"Tank, Tank." His words still echo in my ears.

Then I got busy with my studies and moved to the USA for my Ph.D. Decades later, in 2013, I finally returned to Kapaleeshwarar Temple with my husband. But this was not the Chennai where I grew up! Tall apartment complexes everywhere, theaters, hospitals, colleges, schools and shopping malls have transformed the city's landscape beyond recognition. Men and women both work now to meet modern demands; almost everyone is caught up in the hustle and bustle of city life. Movie madness has taken hold of young and old alike. Yet residents of Chennai still find time for visiting Hindu temples and celebrating the festivals in grand style. It was inspiring to see that ancient temples built centuries ago, such as the Kapaleeshwarar Siva Temple

and Adi Kesava Perumal Vishnu Temple, are still very active, standing tall and solid, a testimony to the religious faith deeply rooted in Tamil Nadu. Wanting to know more about Mylapore and Kapaleeshwarar Temple through the ages, we returned in March of 2016 to join devotees for the temple's most important annual festival.

Kapaleeshwarar's Chariot Parade

Kapaleeshwarar Temple attracts Hindu devotees from all over the world. It opens at 5am and holds special pujas throughout the day, closing at 10pm. While every day is festive in Tamil Nadu, some days are more so than others. We joined the throng of devotees here for worship during the grandest festival of all—the ten-day Brahmotsavam (Festival of

Brahma). This festival is also called Panguni Thiruvila, as it is held in the month of Panguni (March–April). It is this temple's annual chariot festival, when the Gods of the temple go out to bless the community and all living beings, commencing with flag hoisting on the first day and concluding on the ninth day with the wedding of Karpagambigai and Eswar,

There are Deity parades on each day; the most important are the Adikaranandi on the third day, the Rishaba Vahanam at midnight of the fifth day, and the seventh-day parade of the main chariot carrying the festival image of the presiding Deity, Siva, in the form of Tripurantaka (with bow) and the Divine Mother by His side. On the eighth day, the Arupathimuvar—63 Nayanmars (devotees who composed *Thevaram*, Tamil Saiva devotional songs) are paraded through the streets.

It is a tradition here to worship Kolavili Amman (Goddess with beautiful eyes) before celebrating any festival. The Kolavili Amman temple was the first temple built in Mylapore, centuries ago when the city was just a village. She is the guardian angel (*gramadevata*, village goddess) or Ellai Amman of the area. *El-lai* means boundary in Tamil. She stands on the outskirts of Mylapore, protecting the town from evils. Priests offer special puja

(worship) to Kolavili Amman and get Her permission and blessings before celebrating festivals at Kapaleeshwarar Temple.

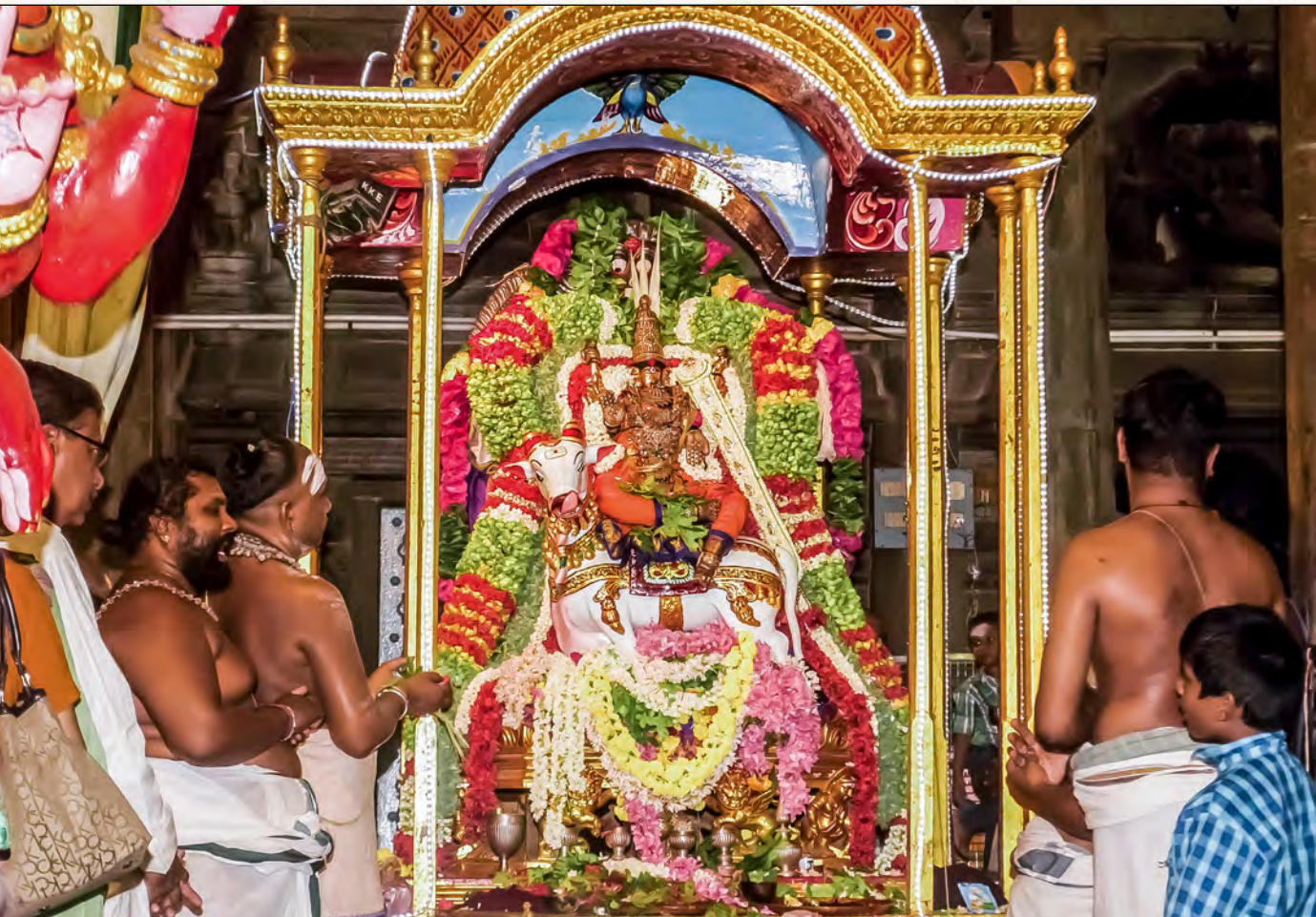
The Brahmotsavam began with Dvajarahnam, the hoisting of the flag. In the center of the outer court of the temple stands a huge metal flagpole (Dvajasthamba), with 33 rings. On this occasion a long rope made of sacred dhara grass is wound round the pillar bearing the flag of Rishaba (Nandi the bull). Nandi is the guardian of Kailas. It is believed that those who witness the flag hoisting will attain moksha, freedom from reincarnation.

After worshipping Kolavili Amman, priests performed Vastu puja and puja to Bhumi (Mother Earth). Dozens of priests chanted sacred mantras, offering special prayers to the utsava murti. Murtis of other Gods were also assembled: Vigneshwarar, Sarasvati, Mahalakshmi, Guardians of the Eight Directions, and the seven Mother Goddesses—Brahmi, Maheshwari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani and Chamundi. After the flag-raising, the priests performed arati (the waving of lamps) to all five parade Deities—Siva, Kapagambal, Vinayaka, Singara Velan, Chandikeshwarar—preparing for the grand procession in the streets, when the Deities of the temple come out to bless everyone, irre-

spective of social or economic status, including anyone who cannot approach the sanctum sanctorum to see the murtis. Dozens of priests chanted sacred mantras as thousands of devotees repeated "Aum Namah Sivaya!," raising a spirit of hope and joy in the whole crowd. Lord Ganesha as Vigna Vinayaka led the street procession, followed by Singara Velan (with his divine consorts Valli and Devayanai), then Siva Kapaleeshwarar with Karpagambal, and finally Chandikeshwarar.

These days after day of parades of gorgeously flower-decorated palanquins with statues of Gods, Goddesses and the Tamil saints build an awesome experience. The seventh day parade of the temple's main chariot was the grandest moment. This huge chariot, thirteen meters tall, is pulled through the streets by the massive gathering of overjoyed devotees holding long, heavy ropes. Everyone's faith is inspired and renewed for another year. To get a feel for the incredible energy of this event, look up "Kapaleeshwarar" on YouTube.

Sacred power: (bottom left) Priests invoking the shakti into the Mother Goddess parade image; (right) The grand procession of chariots in the streets of Chennai.





Auspiciousness of this Day

Panguni Uthiram, the final day of the festival, is a particularly auspicious, observed on the transit of Moon in the star (nakshatra) Uthara-Phalguni (also known as Uthiram) in the Tamil month of Panguni which is the last month of the year on our calendar. On this day the temple celebrates the wedding of Kapaleeshwarar with Karpagambal. Panguni Uthiram is known as the "Full Moon of Divine Marriages" because, according to the Puranic stories, other celestial weddings also take place on this day, including the wedding of Goddess Parvati with Lord Siva, and Lord Muruga with Devasena; and the *Ramayana* says Sita married Rama on this day. It is also believed to be the birthday of Lord Ayyappa. In addition, legend has this as the day on which Goddess Mahalakshmi came to life on Earth from the ocean of milk which was churned by the devas and the demons, on opposite sides; thus Mahalakshmi Jayanti is also celebrated on this day.

This auspicious muhurta (timing) when the full Moon is conjunct with Uttaraphalguni star is considered to be the best day to tackle all kinds of relationship problems and

give an immeasurable boost when you join hands with your better half in life. Worshiping the Divine Couples on this day, drives away sufferings and anxiety in nuptial life. We can connect with their energy to alleviate any relationship troubles.

Traveling to Mylapore

If you cannot come to the Panguni Uthiram festival in March, the other best time to be in Mylapore is December. The weather is pleasant, and you can enjoy the classical music and dance of Tamil Nadu. If you happen to live in tropical countries, Chennai's hot humid summer weather should not be a problem.

Mylapore is 15 miles from the airport in Chennai. It is well connected to all corners of India by road, air and railway. Transportation is easy and cheap. The local language is Tamil; however you can easily feel at home when you speak English or any Indian language. There are many five-star hotels that offer excellent, safe accommodation and healthy delicious traditional South and North Indian food that would delight anyone's palate. (My husband loves the food in Chennai—and it is not easy to please him.) These hotels cater to

Kailas of the South: *Kapaleeshwarar Temple has been a sacred center for over 1,000 years. Here we are (above) in front of the side shrine to Lord Murugan with the main sanctum tower in the background.*

Westerners, too.

A word of caution regarding the street food—be careful if you have a delicate digestive system. Stay away from uncooked food. Always drink boiled water and hot drinks if you travel from the US or Europe.

This Poonya Bhoomi (sacred land) is also a super destination for those who love shopping. Fine jewelry (silver, gold or costume), clothing, handicraft items, statues of Gods and Goddesses, and puja items such as beautiful lamps are easily available at a reasonable price. So you do not have to go to Himalayas to get the blessings of Lord Siva. You can make this pilgrimage to Mylapore in Chennai, where you are not just visiting one of South India's oldest cities, you are coming to the Kailas of the South for a totally new blissful religious experience, to receive the grace and vision of Lord Siva in the Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore.



The Rich Lore of Mylapore

MYLAPORE TOWN IS A SOUTHERN MUNICIPALITY OF THE sprawling metropolis of Chennai. The word *Mylapore* is probably derived from the Tamil phrase *mayil ar-parikum oor* (land of the peacock scream). It is also known as Thirumayilai (Holy Abode of Peacocks). These names are testimony to a time when this area was filled with these marvelous and beautiful birds.

Mylapore has other historical names as well, including Vedapuri, Sukrapuri, Mayilai, Ma Mayilai and Kekhayapuri—each based on an interesting story. According to the story behind the name Vedapuri, the demon Somuka stole the sacred *Vedas* and buried them under the sea so that he alone could learn them. Mahavishnu killed the demon, restored the *Vedas* and took them to the temple. Since the *Vedas* were brought to this place, it is called Vedapuri.

Historical and archaeological records show that Mylapore is an ancient town, with a history of well over 2,000 years. As early as the 2nd century CE, it was a seaport with a flourishing sea trade with the Romans and Greeks. No one knows how long the town existed before then, though the underwater structures off the coast would support speculation that its history goes back many millennia. A well-known saying in Tamil Nadu is *Kailaye Mayilai* and *Mayilaye Kayilai*, expressing the Tamil people's belief that Mayilai (an older name of Mylapore) is the Kailas (the celestial abode of Siva) of South India.

The maritime maps of the ancient Germans and Greeks refer to the town as Maliarpha. In 1523 the Portuguese occupied Mylapore and established the vice-royalty of "São Tomé de Meliapor" or "Saint Thomas of Mylapore." Portuguese rule lasted a little over two centuries. When the East India Company took over, Mylapore became a part of Madras Presidency, remaining so when the British Empire took over the rule. When India became a free country in 1947, Mylapore remained part of Madras State, which later became Tamil Nadu. Now it is one of the elite districts in Chennai.

The Nayanmar saints (Tamil devotees of Siva) as well as devotees of Vishnu have immortalized the Mylapore temples in their hymns. This is where devotees can perform Saptha Sthana Siva worship, i.e. worship of seven manifestations of Siva. Mylapore has 1) Sri Karaneeswarar Temple, (2) Sri Theerthapaleeswarar Temple, (3) Sri Velleeswarar Temple, (4) Sri Virupaksheeswarar Temple, (5) Sri Valeeswarar Temple, (6) Sri Malleeswarar Temple

and (7) Sri Temple, all not far from one another. Devotees believe that Saptha Sthana Siva worship will bring them all the *saubaghyas* (blessings), such as good children, good education, happiness in married life, prosperity, long, healthy life, peace of mind. One's blessings will multiply several fold when one worships Saptha Sthana Siva.

Kapaleeshwarar is a most renowned Siva temple, attracting devotees from all corners of the world. Of the numerous Puranic stories relating to Mylapore, the central one relating to Kapaleeshwarar is the worship of the Sivalingam here by Parvati, who, because of a misdeed, had been trapped in the body of a female peacock. At Kapaleeshwarar, She was finally freed from the curse.

The temple's exact construction date is not known. Probably it was built by the Pallava dynasty in the 7th century CE, a date supported by the hymns composed during this period by Thirug-nanasambandar (6th song in *Pumpavaipathikam*) and Arun-agirinathar (697th song in *Thirumylai Thirupugal*). As mentioned in these hymns, Kapaleeshwarar Temple was originally on the seashore in Mylapore. The Portuguese destroyed that original temple.

The Tuluva dynasty (the Vijayanagar kings) probably built the current temple during the 16th century, using some remains of the old temple. Inscriptions on the stones date the reconstruction back to 12th century. The temple's rajagopuram (main tower), facing east, was built in 1906. Today the Hindu Religious and Endowment Board of the Tamil

Nadu government maintains the temple.

The temple is built in the Dravidian style. Its seven-tiered, 120-foot rajagopuram is adorned with stucco figures. As you enter from the east, you come across Nardhana Vinayakar (Ganesha in dancing pose). In the sanctum sanctorum Kapaleeshwarar is in the form of Lingam (the one worshiped by Parvati as peahen). The Lingam faces the west; this unique feature is believed to be most sacred.

Modern Mylapore is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multiracial, cosmopolitan city, a far cry from the seaside village of 2,000 years ago. Hindus, Christians, Jains, Sikhs and people of all religions and faiths live there. Christian churches, Hindu temples, mosques and gurdwaras, etc., are in close proximity—even next to each other in some places. But the power and darshan of the temples of Mylapore are as strong as ever, a testimony to the enduring strength of Sanatana Dharma through the ages.



Adikaranandi: Lord Siva's mount, Nandi the Bull, in a rare standing form, carries Siva on his right shoulder and Parvati on his left on a giant palanquin for his parade



OPINION

Concerns of American Hindu Youth

A student gives her impressions of the Drishti Conference in Boston

BY SUCHARITA JAYANTI

AS COLLEGE STUDENTS AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS, MANY OF us are in an awkward middle ground. Being over the age of 18, and some of us over 21, we are adults by law. Yet whenever anyone says that word, we still find ourselves looking around, trying to find the “real” adult. We are told frequently by parents, teachers and society that this is our age to find ourselves.

Throughout our 18-plus years, the world has given us glimpses of various paths to traverse, samples of what life has to offer us. Parents, grandparents and relatives have passed on traditions, culture and *samskaras*—all intertwined with their own hopes and dreams for who we will one day be. Teachers have taught us keys to unlocking intellectual secrets, work ethics that will keep us disciplined, and lessons on how to interact with our peers. Gurus have given us practical philosophies to guide us and a sense through which we can view and accept all the changes in the world. Friends have passed on lessons of empathy and care, and, of course, the latest trends. Society being amorphous, has given us an ever-changing, razor-thin line of what it currently considers acceptable behavior, with opinions on everything, including politics, morality, fashion, music and religion.

To find ourselves within all of this is to make choices. We simply cannot be everything that everyone wants us to be, so we must choose what matters to us. One choice we can make is to embrace our Hindu heritage. In this context, the Hindu Students Council (HSC) held a one-day conference, *Drishti*. This Sanskrit word roughly translates as “sight” or “wisdom,” and the conference attempted to help young Hindus identify a vision of what their Hindu identity could be, and how it could weigh into their lives alongside the complex set of expectations placed on them.

The conference started with a meditation and prayer session led by Shri Sanjay Saxena of the All World Gayatri Parivar. He took the time to explain to his young audience the meaning behind everything he was doing. This set the tone for a conference that was quintessentially Hindu, while still being accessible to those less familiar with the traditions. We then transitioned to a student panel with the topic “What is Hinduism?” Each of five panelists from various universities across the United States described what Hinduism meant to him or her. These statements were followed by group discussions of the topic at tables around the room. Like the answers and discussions of thousands of Hindu gurus over the millennia, the table discussions ranged from describing traditions and pujas, to talking about devotion, to focusing on an overarching philosophy of attaining a state of eternal happiness.

Following this was a panel and discussion about cultural appropriation. Ravi Jaishankar, president of HSC and an alumnus of Rutgers University, initiated the panel and explained that cultural appropriation occurs whenever there is an asymmetry of power between different cultures. This allows the dominant culture to exploit its influence in subversive ways, which ensure that the original source of a particular cultural practice is not authentically represented. Arnav Kejriwal, a graduate of Washington University of St. Louis, added, “The dominant culture takes the parts of the practice they find useful and removes those they find unsavory.” In the context of Hindu



Dharma, the panel delved into Hindu practices such as yoga, whose Hindu roots and deeper meditative and metaphysical practices are often shorn away in an industry centered on postures and appearance. Other practices discussed included color runs (Holi-like events), kirtan and Indian devotional dances.

As Hindus growing up in the US, the topic of cultural appropriation is rather confusing. On the one hand, second-generation Indian Hindus are more sensitive than ever to the issue. Having grown up being made to feel like outsiders because of our culture, the sudden acceptance of bits and pieces of it as disjointed fads is strikingly offensive. On the other hand, that same feeling of being outsiders has instilled in many of us a strong desire to fit in; and the acceptance of any part of our culture frequently strikes us as a step in the right direction. Shyam Bhatt, a senior at Stony Brook University and the president of this HSC chapter, noted that it is our duty to inform less knowledgeable people that “this is my tradition and this is how we do it,” but not to impose “this is how you should do it.” Another point brought up was that we ourselves often try to combine our Indian and American identities in ways that can compromise the authenticity of our Hindu traditions.

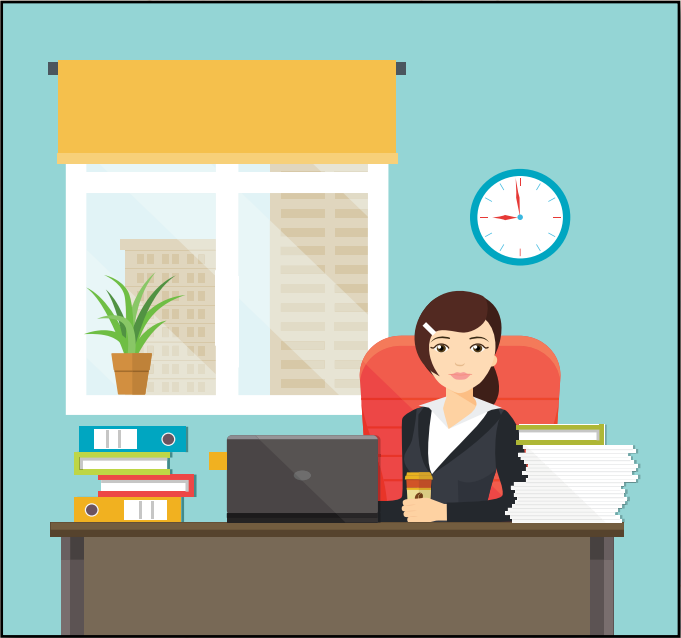
Students at the conference remarked that the panel was particularly helpful in learning how to educate their campuses about cultural appropriation. For me, this conversation became a wonderful backdrop over which to hear our guest speaker, Rajiv Malhotra, talk about the contributions and effects of Hindu Dharma on American society. This talk reminded me of why I am involved in HSC. When we speak about issues of religion and culture, especially in the Hindu context, the focus is often on learning the epics or the philosophy. HSC covers these topics well through online webinars, camps, retreats and on-campus activities. However, as we pass through this crucial phase of becoming adults in a country where Hindu Dharma is a minority tradition, I think it’s equally necessary to discuss why it’s important to learn about our traditions in the first place, keeping Hinduism alive in all its glory. After all, that is what will truly motivate us to engage.

SUCHARITA JAYANTI, 25, is the VP of Education for HSC and graduated from Dartmouth College in 2014. sucharita.jayanti@gmail.com

Hindu Heritage Endowment

Nine Easy Ways to Build a Strong Estate Plan

Taking the time to create an estate plan can help you decide how to distribute the hard-earned resources you have accumulated throughout your lifetime. Follow this framework to build a plan that achieves your personal and charitable goals and recognizes the people and causes you cherish most.



You have worked your whole life to accumulate your assets. While estate planning is often associated with the wealthy, in reality anyone who wants to pass on their assets to their loved ones and favorite charities needs to think about their plan.

1. **Determine which people and charities** should receive your assets and whether the gifts should be made outright or in a trust. Contact us to learn about the variety of ways to include HHE in your estate plan.
2. **Select a trusted family member, friend or responsible party**—such as a bank or trust company—to administer your estate, which includes following the instructions in your will and distributing assets.
3. **Prepare an advanced directive** (also known as a health care power of attorney) to indicate who should make health care decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so. You should also decide if you want a living will, which directs that no extraordinary life-sustaining medical procedures will be used to prolong life when there is no hope of recovery.
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6. **Compile a list of all of your personal data**, including Social Security number, date of birth and digital information, such as online accounts, user names and passwords.
7. **Record the locations** of important documents, such as your vehicle title, marriage certificate, copies of prior years’ tax returns, as well as the name of your accountant and estate planning attorney.
8. **Ensure that your will is available** outside of your safe-deposit box, which in some states can be closed when you die and not immediately accessible.
9. **Consult an estate planning attorney** or tax advisor for assistance as you develop your plan.

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Anonymous	US\$195.74	Yagnesh Patel	299.00	Deochan Sanichar	25.00
Janava Dharmadeva	1,248.00	Richard Henry Pratt	299.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Noel Scott	299.00	Anonymous	63.00
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00	Sai Singh	120.00	Total	2,755.44
Madhu Narayanan	300.00	Sabapathy Siva	299.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund	
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Keith Wallach	54.00	Venkat Raghavan Tirumala	300.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	1.43
Other Donations	30,000.00	Karthikeya Venkatesan	299.00	Roshan Harilela	375.00
Total	32,539.49	Total	11,185.78	Veena Kunniah	1,872.00
				Anonymous	21.57
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund		Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Frank Burkhardt	20.00	Vel Mahalingum	17.30	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Irina Davydova	165.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	85.71	Total	2,606.55
Amey Surendra Gangal	11.00	Anba Dayananden Valayten	3.82	Hindu Education Endowment	
Anonymous	33.00	Total	106.83	Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	100.00
Other Donations	30,000.00	Kadavul Nataraja Ardra		Atul Thakkar	500.00
Total	30,229.00	Abhishekam Endowment		Total	600.00
		Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	9.00	Hindu Press International	
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Gowri Nadason	122.38	Endowment Fund	
Benevity	101.00	Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	Hiranya Gowda	63.00
Jivanta Alagan	251.00	Bala Sivaceyon	10.00	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	
Anil Ananda Badhwar	9.00	Total	234.38	Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	2.86	Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund		Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Anil Kumar	18.00	Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	12.00	Kunjai Thaker	21.00
Ashwini Maureemootoo	11.76	Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Total	1,596.00
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Anonymous	238.76	Gowri Nadason	122.38	Anil Kumar	36.00
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Lavanyadeva Sivananda	64.56	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Vinaya Alahan	33.00
Total	973.56	Anonymous	238.36	Total	102.12
		Other Donations	4,800.00	Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund	
Hinduism Today Lifetime		Total	5,610.04	Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
Subscription Fund		Iyarappan Temple Trust		Srinivas R. Madaboosi	300.00
Anonymous	2.86	Krishanth Rajasooriyar	45.00	Total	333.00
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Krishnamoorthy Arvind	299.00	Total	442.00	Art and Artifacts Fund	
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Mekaladeva Batumallah	39.00	Rajendra Giri	121.00	America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Narendra Bhat	299.00	Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund		Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
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Gunavadee Caremben	8.66	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha		Total	105.00
Somasundaram Caremben	8.66	Temple Endowment		Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Sukanta Caremben	8.66	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	Anonymous	1,177.14
Ashok & Sudha Chandrasekhar	299.00	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	58.00	Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Ankit & Yukti Dhanadia	299.00	Total	133.00	Amey Surendra Gangal	11.00
Prabhat A Diksit	299.00	Hinduism Today Production Fund		Debashis Ghosh	300.00
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Michael Wasylkiw	648.00	Total	173.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples	
Total	4,326.56			(Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
		Himalayan Academy Book		Anonymous	23.64
Udayan Care Endowment Fund		Distribution Fund		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	1.43
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Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00	Rajendra Giri	121.00	Total	422.07
Total	250.00	Anonymous	152.00	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		Total	273.00	Anil Ananda Badhwar	9.00
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Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00	Balasingham	750.00	Bhagirath Gopinath	21.00
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Tiptur Shiva Temple & Youth Hostel Fund		Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	12.00	Hitesvara Saravan	21.00
Kunjai Thaker	12.00	Marion Karimjooy Borhani	100.00	Total	45.00
		Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Digital Dharma Endowment	
Kerala Temple Trust		Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	Anonymous	251.95
Easwaran & Beena Variyam	50.50	Total	2,291.39	Carole Kahn	108.00
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Anonymous	100.00	Murugan Temple of North		Kauai Aadheenam Renovation	
Total	121.00	America Puja Fund		Endowment	
Swami Vipulananta Children's		Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Other Donations	600.00
Home Endowment		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Total Contributions	\$103,289.53
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	1.43	Funds at Market Value, Jun 30, 2017	
Hindu Literature Fund		Hiranya Gowda	99.00	Total Endowment Funds	\$15,200,187.69
Rajendra Giri	121.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	57.14		
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	17.30	Grand Total	\$15,200,187.69
Total	274.00	Total	174.87		
Hinduism Today Complimentary		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment			
Subscription Fund		Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	10.00		
Hiranya Gowda	153.00				
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00				

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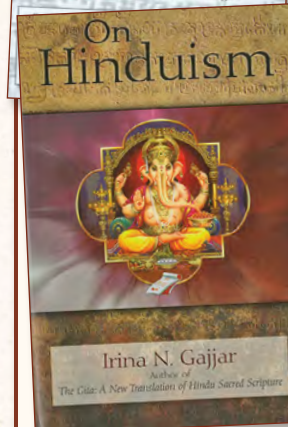
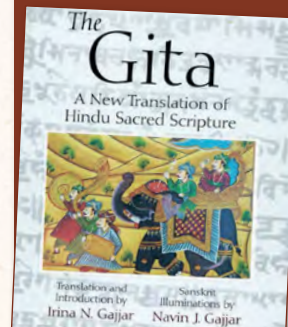
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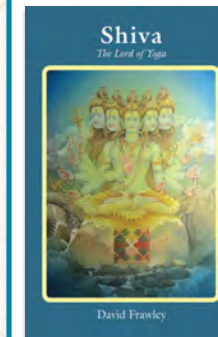
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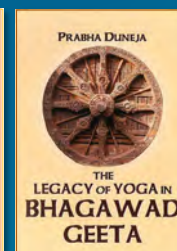
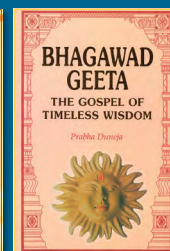
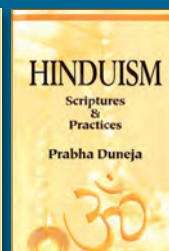
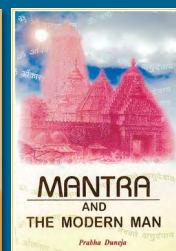
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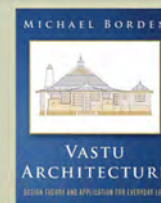
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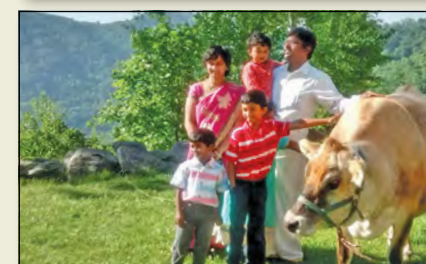
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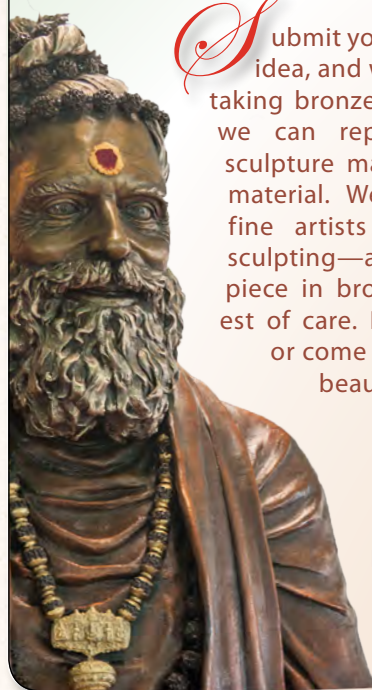
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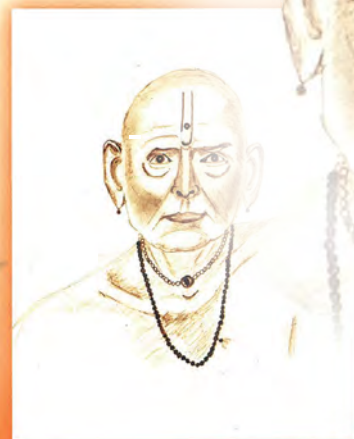
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India's Cutting-Edge Mega Projects

THE EMERGING YOUTUBE CHANNEL [EverythingIndiaPro](#) has posted a video about the amazing infrastructure developments now underway in India. The video focuses on just five of India's many up-and-coming mega projects, several of which are magnitudes beyond anything attempted in India before. In it we learn about the high-speed bullet trains that will connect portions of the country; world-class airports; record-breaking residential skyscrapers; entire futuristic cities and IT hubs for the country.

1. Navi Mumbai International Airport

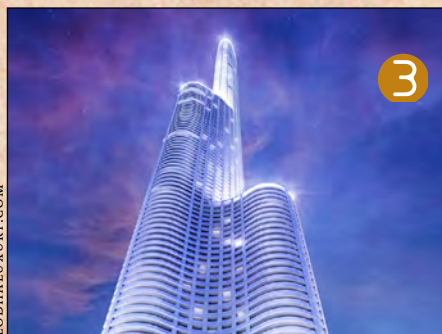
The NMIA was proposed in 1997 and received the government's approval in 2007. In February, 2017, the US\$2.5 billion project moved a step closer to reality with contractors acquiring the bid to build and operate the facility. According to the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra,



tra, the first phase of the airport will be able to handle 10 million passengers annually. By 2030 it is expected reach full capacity of 60 million passengers a year.

2. Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the choice of Japan to build India's first-ever high-speed rail, planned to run some 310 miles between Mumbai and Ahmedabad at a top speed of 200 mph. The system will have a 13-mile underground tunnel, one-third of it under the sea. Above ground, the line will be elevated, at some points by 65 feet,



reducing the need for land acquisition. The proposal calls for construction to begin in 2017 and be completed in 2023 at a cost of \$15 billion, financed by a low-interest loan from Japan. The railway is expected to be operational in 2025.

3. World One Tower

World One is 1,450 feet tall residential skyscraper now under construction in Mumbai. It is located in Lower Parel on the 175-acre site of the defunct Shrinivas Mill, the site of two other impressive towers—World View and World Crest. World One carries a price tag of \$321 million. Construction began in 2011 and the target for completion is 2018. World One will be the tallest building in India and the world's second-tallest residential tower, topped only by Central Park Tower in New York City.

4. Gujarat International Finance Tech City

GIFT is to be a central business district between Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar in Gujarat. Covering 886 acres of land, it will provide high-quality physical infrastructure (electricity, water, gas, district cooling, roads, telecoms and broadband) so that finance and tech firms can relocate their operations there from areas like Mumbai, Bangalore, and Gurgaon, where infrastructure is either inadequate or overly expensive. GIFT will have a special economic zone, international education zone, integrated townships, an entertainment zone, hotels, a convention center, an international techno park, Software Technology Parks of India units, shopping malls, stock exchanges and service units.

5. Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor

The Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor

www.hinduismtoday.com

Project is planned as a \$100-billion commercial development project between India's capital, Delhi, and its financial hub, Mumbai. It is one of the world's largest infrastructure projects, a high-tech industrial zone spread across six states (Delhi being a Union Territory), along the 930-mile-long Western Dedicated Freight Corridor, which serves as its backbone. The high-speed DFC will reduce the time for movement of goods between Dadri (near Delhi) and Jawaharlal Nehru Port (in Mumbai) from the current 14 days to about 14 hours.

Project plans include 24 industrial regions, eight smart cities, two airports, five power projects, two mass rapid transit systems and two logistical hubs. The work is progressing at a rapid pace, with the dedicated freight corridor expected to be completed by December, 2019.



India may have missed the industrial revolution, but almost thirty years ago they more than caught up by taking the IT world to new heights. With these infrastructure projects (and others not covered by this video), India is once again entering new frontiers. The transportation, cities and integrated living structures India is developing now could well serve as models of advanced communities and society for the rest of the world.

