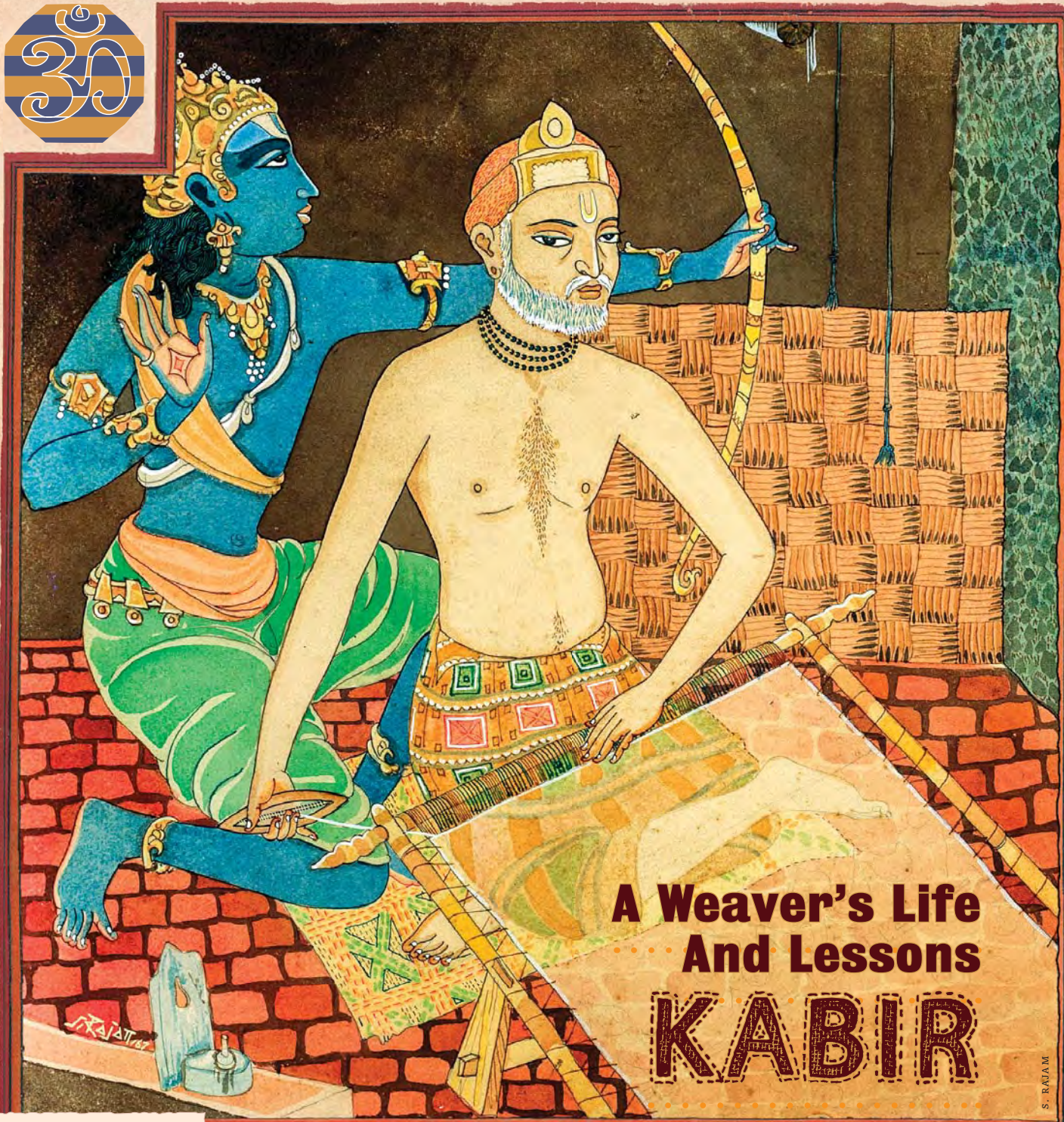


HINDUISM TODAY

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



(Cover) The fifteenth century Hindu mystic poet and saint Kabir, at his loom with Lord Rama behind him;
(above) black and white image of a lifelike marble statue of Shirdi Sai Baba (1836–1918) installed in an Indian temple.

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Bodhinatha Veylanswami www.gurudeva.org

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India Art Festival

**Correspondent
Rajiv Malik and
daughter Palak
(shown here)
take us inside the
major exhibition
held in New Delhi
in January, 2016**
...Page 26

*Palak Malik takes a
photo of artist Vivek
Kumavat, who painted
the zebu bull on
display to her right*



GLOBAL DHARMA

EDUCATION

UC Irvine Rejects DCF Gifts

IN FEBRUARY, 2016, FOUR GIFTS of \$15 million to the University of California Irvine to endow four professorships were withdrawn by the Dharma Civilization Foundation. The chairs were in Indic Civilization and Religious Studies, Sikh Studies, Jain Studies and the “Swami Vivekananda-Dharma Civilization Foundation Presidential Chair in Modern India Studies.”

Shortly after the gifts were announced, the History

Graduate Student Association at Irvine opposed the chairs. They charged that the donors sought influence in the process of selecting the individuals for the chairs in an effort to forward their own “social, religious and political agendas.”

.....
UC Irvine: *The Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities sought to create a center for the study of Indic religions at the prestigious university*

The gift documents state that the holder of the Indic Civilization and Religious Studies chair “will have a high level of proficiency in innovative, interdisciplinary research on Indic Religious Studies, ... the equivalent of native proficiency in Sanskrit and in at least one contemporary Indian language and deep familiarity with India and Indian tradition, ...[and] the ability to forge meaningful and productive

partnerships with the Vedic and India heritage community in the Western diaspora.” Contrary to the association’s claim, the actual authority to appoint the chair remained exclusively with the university, and—beyond making suggestions—the donors had no say. It’s not clear, then, how the association felt the donors could influence the selection process beyond the endowment’s stated list of qualifications.



PAKISTAN

Hindu Marriages Allowed

THE SINDH PROVINCE IN Pakistan has become the first in the largely Muslim country to give Hindus the right to register their marriage.

The bill was passed in February, 2016, by lawmakers in Sindh—home to many of the nation’s three million Hindus. Hindus in the nation have never had a legal framework to register their unions until now.

Many Hindu couples say that not having their marriage registered has given them logistical problems with basic activities

such as opening bank accounts, applying for visas, acquiring national identity cards and getting shares of property because they lacked proof of marriage. It can also be applied retroactively to existing unions.

However, the legislation also contains a controversial clause that allows the marriage to be annulled if any spouse converts.

The National Assembly is considering a wider bill on recognizing Hindu marriage rights, including issues of inheritance, divorce and child maintenance.



Lakshmi, Ganesha & Saraswati: *H.E. Mr. Yasukuni Enoli claims that more than 80 percent of Japanese Gods are originally Indian Gods*

TRADITION

A Bridge from India to Japan

A YOUTUBE VIDEO ENTITLED *Indian Deities Worshiped in Japan*, posted in January, 2016, explains how Japanese culture and worship originated with India and Hinduism. The 52-minute film is made and narrated by famed photographer and historian Benoy K. Behl.

The documentary cites research showing that Japan’s religious roots come largely from India. The Sanskrit language, first taught in Japan by an Indian

Buddhist monk named Bodhisena, is written and chanted today in a Japanese style.

The documentary interviews H.E. Mr. Yasukuni Enoli, former ambassador of Japan. He explains, “Japan and India are very closely interconnected. If you go to a Japanese tomb, you may find *Siddham* (Sanskrit) letters, which few Japanese people can read.” The film praises Japan’s ability to retain some of India’s culture better than India.

ART

Sartorial Statement

TANYA RAWAL, AN INDIAN American professor at the University of California, Riverside, started the hashtag #SareeNotSorry in September, 2015, as a campaign to discourage negative attitudes towards Indian-Americans and bring attention to the positive aspects of Indian culture.

Rawal has been tweeting and instagramming pictures of herself wearing saris in myriad colors and fabrics, sometimes accessorized with belt and boots.

At first, the idea was just a teaching investigation. “My experiment was on what does it mean to be brown and a woman.

I was hoping to generate some questions in the class around being a minority in this country,” Rawal told reporters.

“I wanted to perform the intersection of the multiple social identities and political systems that shape my everyday life. And being a brown woman is definitely a complicated position, especially since 9/11, and especially with the increasing hatred towards immigrants in the United States. The Gurdwara shootings in Wisconsin, the police attack on Suresh Bhai Patel in Alabama, and the death of Parminder Singh Shergill are just a few recent examples of the

violence experienced in Indian-American communities.

“Fashion can politically align you with a place. And right now is not the time for me to politically align with the United States. Now when people look at me they have to see a different culture. A different fashion. A different aesthetic.”

#SareeNotSorry has been used over 600,000 unique times since its beginning, as women share their stories and sari photos.

.....
Identity crisis: *“Being an Indian-American is painful for me sometimes, but I am grateful that my mother and nana gave me the tools to keep India close to my heart.”*



WORLD RELIGIONS

Missionaries Thwarted

AN AMERICAN COUPLE, Matthew and Jennifer Dickson, have filed a lawsuit against K.P. Yohannan in the district court of Arkansas in February, 2016, alleging that nearly 90% of all US citizens’ donations to his Christian organization’s missionary work in India and other Asian nations is being diverted to his multi-million-dollar personal businesses. Despite repeated and explicit promises made by Gospel for Asia for funds to spread Christianity in India through various charitable projects, such as health care,

education and a water ministry called “Jesus wells and water filters,” only a small portion of the money was so used, they claim. A similar petition was filed in 2011 but later dismissed.

The Gospel for Asia website (www.gfa.com) is designed to lure in well-meaning donors to “reach the unreached and transform communities.” In a way, Hindus should be thankful the money isn’t being used for its stated purposes, which only would serve to disrupt families and cause community discord in the name of religion.



Allegations again: *K.P. Yohannan, founder and president of GFA, says they are “unintentionally negligent” in their financial and management practices, which led to being dropped from the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability in 2015*

Settling in Their New Home

ARGENTINA IS EXPERIENCING a small influx of Indian contract workers, according to a report on the local Spanish-language news site, clarin.com. Hundreds of software engineers, businessmen, doctors, financial and business executives, even chefs, are making a new life in this South American country. The wave of immigration, primarily to Buenos Aires, has brought India's culture with it.

These young Indians are the face of a drastic change in the economy of India. More young professionals are being produced there than in any other country, including China, where the one-child policy has caused the number of university graduates to lag behind.



The first Indians to arrive in Argentina were Sikhs in the 19th century, brought there to help build a British railroad. Other Indians came in the 1970s who had failed to get into the US, Canada or Britain.

Some of those who came promoted yoga and ayurvedic medicine, staffed the kitchens of restaurants and traded in textiles. Little by little, Indian immigrants became part of the local culture.

Starting in 2007, software engineers came into high demand for Argentinian computer companies, so much so that the companies were not even waiting for them to graduate, but plucking those with the



best grade-point average right out of college. Seeing an opportunity, multinational companies including Cognizant started to bring skilled workers from India.

For their article, Clarin interviewed Vignesh, a young Indian man now living in Buenos Aires. He reports feeling culture shock, but is doing well living next to a Krishna temple. He wakes up at 3:30 am every day to pray, meditate, sing and perform a small *abhishekam* at his home shrine.

Although all these young Indian men come from a single country, Clarin points out, they're not necessarily from the same cultural, linguistic, racial background or jati. Hindi is the

Hard work pays off: (left) Rabendra Nath Jana arrived in the country in 2007, with a contract to work in an Indian restaurant, but at a grueling pace: no weekends, no holidays. When he finished his contract there, he opened his own Indian restaurant, Gungur.



BRIEFLY...

A LIQUOR BAN IN THE INDIAN state of Bihar, beginning April 1, 2016, has reduced the number of devotees in Hindu temples. A priest in Gaya district's Bhairav Sthan temple said the flow of visitors had fallen by around 70 percent. "As the tradition goes, the devotees offer alcohol to the Deity," said the priest referring to a unique practice here, "They

pour some of it on the idol and take the rest of it home or distribute it among other devotees."

IN APRIL, 2016, THE SHANI SHIN-gnapur temple in Maharashtra, India, has lifted the centuries-old ban that prohibits women from entering the shrine of Lord Shani Dev. Welcoming the decision, Maharashtra

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "discrimination on the basis of caste and gender should be eliminated from the minds of the people keeping with the modern times."

HAVING GENERATED VAST GLOBAL attention for the first International Day of Yoga in 2015, the Modi government is pulling out all stops to ensure that the next edition is equally impressive. Coming up in June, 2016, is an even longer (one-hour) yoga protocol, advanced yoga

A breath of fresh air: (above) Indian employees on break in front of their workplace in Monserrat district

most common language, but Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Oriya and Manipuri are also spoken. Mostly, they use English to communicate.

Music, art, clothing, cuisine and religion are all coming over from India and being shared with the people of Argentina—the land of the tango. This social phenomenon that is beginning to emerge is new and exciting, according to Clarin.

"I love this," Kalyan Shencottah, a software engineer from Switzerland remarks on the music he hears coming from an Indian classical percussionist influenced by the South American style. "It's a moment to realize that we are truly in a global village. And neither the mountains nor the seas can separate us when we understand each other."

retreats for foreigners in scenic locations in India and a mass yoga demonstration in one of the BJP-ruled states.

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



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IN MY OPINION

From Darkness to Light

One woman's story of her search for knowledge and understanding about her ancient faith

BY PUVANESWARY ROBERTS

THAI PUSAM IS THE ANNUAL festival celebrating Lord Murugan's victory of light over darkness.

Each year it is a great day for thousands at Batu Caves in Kuala Lumpur. On my recent pilgrimage there, I again witnessed the throngs of devotees who had kept me astounded for hours as a teenager and continue to do so. Their devotion is truly awesome as whole families and groups perform severe austerities.

I had grown up in Malaysia, but had not understood much about our Hindu beliefs, culture or traditions. This knowledge had been diluted in recent times throughout my multicultural community. Consisting of Indians, Tamils, Chinese, Malays and Europeans, my diverse surroundings did help make me and those around me tolerant and accepting of each other.

After losing my father, I grew up without much discipline or structure. My mother was rather shy and timid, and not very knowledgeable about our tradition. Thankfully, however, she showered us with an abundance of love. I witnessed many negative things in my community: child and wife abuse, alcoholism, poverty, racial discrimination and inequality. Because of this, I was in inner turmoil as a teenager, as I could not find understanding for all that I witnessed. It was the small Sivan temple in the Sentul district of Kuala Lumpur that helped me maintain an inner calm. It brought me contentment after each visit. I always came away feeling that everything was alright, light-hearted and happy.

People often casually speak about destiny, fate and karma without any clear explanation. As a youth, none of this satisfied me. There were not many books available to me at the time and the priests in the temples did pujas in Sanskrit without much explanation. After a half a century of my own search for answers, I found knowledge about Saivite Hinduism in the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. With



Siva's grace I have been fortunate to have met Gurudeva. It was his simple, clear explanations that set me on track. All my questions became an adventurous journey in my life.

My life became purposeful. I became tolerant of issues and accepting of situations and people. I now feel I have a bigger picture

of everything that is happening around me—both the good and the bad. I have sympathy and empathy for all of creation—for the many disasters, earthquakes, floods and political and religious wars causing pain and sorrow for millions of people. I try to help in whatever way I can, with the inner knowledge that everything will be alright. We are inseparable from God Siva.

As I reached the heights of the Thai Pusam celebrations at Batu Caves, I showered milk over Lord Murugan, and then stayed in the vicinity of the shrine for a couple of hours. Standing there, watching and observing, I felt the oneness of the spirit. People all around me were calm, happy and satisfied. Their faces were glowing. Tourists and others were enjoying the day and the lively vibration. Though we were physically, emotionally and physiologically separated, there is great oneness. I was happy for the opportunity to make this pilgrimage. My husband's encouragement made it possible.

I am appreciative for the teachings of Gurudeva, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami and their monastics, who help to awaken my desire to know myself. It is a stepping stone across the ocean, but their teachings keep me steady. I do have challenges, momentary slips between stepping stones, but each slip quickly restores awareness of the greatness within. I love God Siva and all of His creation. Vetri Vel Murugan!

PUVANESWARY ROBERTS was born in Malaysia and moved to the UK in 1969 for general nursing. There she met her husband Clive. They now have a son and daughter and three grandchildren.
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Dance and the Spiritual Path

What could success in the fine arts possibly have to do with progress in our religious life?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

MY GURU, SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI had the gift of bringing down to Earth in a practical way the guidelines for becoming a more spiritual person. It is easy to talk high philosophy in Hinduism: "Man is God. We are divine," and so forth. It is easy to say profound things such as, "You are a being that has unlimited power within you." However, to put these principles into practice to the extent that we really are a more spiritual person this year than we were a year ago—that is the challenge, and that is what we will explore in this article.

The ability to help us with that is part of Gurudeva's genius. He gives us high philosophy along with pragmatic guidelines and in the process keeps us feeling good about ourselves. He never took the approach that we have weaknesses and failings and therefore are imperfect. He makes the opposite point: we are divine beings, meaning we are the soul or spiritual being. However, we also have other qualities that come along with being human. We have instincts, we have an intellect, we have an ego, and we need to keep them all under control so that our soul, our spiritual nature, dominates our days. As Gurudeva says, "Peace is control, and control is freedom."

My reflections on dance and discipline were first shared in a 2003 talk I gave in California at an Arangetram, a young Hindu lady's first public dance performance. Her accomplishment inspired me to outline five ways that the attitudes involved in studying dance and the attitudes involved in striving to make progress on the Hindu spiritual path are indeed the same. Following Gurudeva's style, I took a practical approach to the subject. Afterwards, members of the audience came forward to express how applicable these insights were to their own spiritual quest.

Gurudeva himself was, in his youth, an accomplished dancer. Years later, on special occasions he would dance in the Indian classical Manipuri style. And when he spoke about dancing, he would regularly make the comment that in learning dance you are expecting and, in fact, paying the dance guru to point out your weakest areas, not to compliment you on what you are doing well. As our satguru, he was providing that same guidance in our spiritual life.

Gurudeva's comment leads perfectly into our first comparison of the spiritual path to the study of dance, which is the attitude toward strengths and weaknesses. Does a young woman become a better dancer by focusing on the movements she does well? Of course not. She must focus on the movements she has not perfected and strive to improve them. She becomes a better dancer not



by focusing on her strengths but on her weaknesses.

Looking at the spiritual path, let's take the example of someone who is happy to help coordinate activities at a nearby Hindu center. However, when she attends puja she doesn't feel much devotion for the Deity. Her strength is service, and her weakness is devotion. To further advance she needs to focus less on service and more on activities that will deepen her devotion, such as singing bhajans, making garlands for the temple using flowers grown at home, and sewing clothes for the Deity.

A second comparison is the attitude toward improvement. A good dancer has the attitude that she can perform a

dance better than she has ever done it before. She feels there is always room for improvement and her movements can always be further refined.

Looking at the spiritual path, let's take as our example the principle of ahimsa, nonviolence. It is indeed a central principle of Hinduism. Of course, most of us do not indulge in physical violence. Therefore, we may conclude that ahimsa presents no challenge to us.

However, let's look more closely at the definition of ahimsa, which is not harming others by thought, word or deed. This clear and complete definition points out that even though we may not be harming others with our actions, we can take the attitude of striving to improve our behavior even more by carefully watching our speech and avoiding harming others through our words. The most common forms of verbal violence are teasing, belittling, gossiping and backbiting. Every reduction we make in harming others through our words produces spiritual progress.

A third comparison of the spiritual path to the study of dance is our attitude toward mistakes. Many beginning dancers are self-conscious about mistakes. They make a mistake and get flustered and can't concentrate on the rest of the dance class. A good teacher will point out that such errors are natural; all dancers make them. With the teacher's encouragement, they overcome the fear of mistakes and take on a more mature attitude, which is if they misstep during a difficult movement, they resolve to perform the movement better next time. Each mistake becomes an opportunity to improve their craft.

For all of mankind, no matter where one is on the path, spiritual advancement comes from learning from one's mistakes in life. Unfortunately, this process is often inhibited by the wrongheaded idea that we are not supposed to make mistakes. A common first reaction to making a mistake is to become upset, get emotional about it, or, if it is a serious blunder, to feel burdened, even depressed. We



need, however, to be like the dancer and simply resolve to do better next time. Thus, a good second reaction is to think clearly about what happened and why and to find a way to not repeat the mishap in the future. Perhaps we were not being careful enough, so we resolve to be more prudent next time to prevent the problem from recurring. Perhaps we did not know something, and the experience gives us new knowledge to be used next time.

A fourth comparison is that dance, like spiritual practice, involves the disciplined control of willpower, awareness and life force. In dance, willpower is used to move the body through the challenging positions in time with the music and with grace. Our awareness needs to constantly focus on the meaning of the song and how that meaning is being expressed in our facial, hand and body language. Life force must constantly move through the body in a controlled manner. In fact, in teaching basic dance movements, Gurudeva would stress that first you move the life force, the prana, with your mind, and that prana moves the arm or leg.

For the spiritual side of disciplined control let's look at the practice of meditation. Willpower manifests in our ability to sit in meditation without moving. We need to focus awareness constantly on the object of our meditation without letting our thoughts wander off into other areas. Life force is controlled through the process of pranayama, regulating our breathing, and pratyahara, withdrawing our energies from our external senses into our spiritual center.

A fifth comparison is that both dance and spiritual striving are nonintellectual. You do not become a good dancer through reading a book. Though some study is involved, the focus is on the actual practice of dancing. Our physical body is significantly changed and gains new abilities through the many years of practice required to become

Perfection: Her hard work and long hours of practice in perfecting the dance will serve this young woman well in her spiritual efforts throughout life

an accomplished dancer.

Reading philosophical books is also part of making progress on the spiritual path. However, most important is the regular practice of spiritual disciplines, called sadhana. Our emotional, intellectual and spiritual natures are significantly changed through performing sadhana for many years. Gurudeva's satguru, Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, stressed this by telling certain devotees whom he saw spending too much time reading philosophy, "It's not in books, you fool." He urged them to sit, to be still, to control the mind.

The disciplines of dance are well defined, and they include exercises in strength, flexibility, grace and technique. Hinduism's spiritual disciplines can also be broadly divided into four categories: good conduct, service, devotion and meditation.

In conclusion, we have looked at five ways in which the attitudes of mastering dance and progressing on the spiritual path are similar. An important area everyone can benefit from is improving our weaknesses. Apply this to your life by choosing one aspect of your practice which you feel you need to improve. For example, perhaps on some days you worship in the home shrine before leaving the home and on other days you skip it. Resolve to become more disciplined and spend time every single day in the home shrine. Once you are regular in this practice, you have strengthened a weak area and made tangible spiritual progress, just as, little by little, a great dancer improves her performance.



LETTERS

Following the Rules

I am saddened that UC Irvine has rejected the generous gift offered by the Thakkar family and the Dharma Civilization Foundation (DCF) for the creation of an endowed chair focused on Vedic and Indian Civilization Studies. Apparently the rejection was considered necessary because no chair donor is allowed to require that the chair holder be of a certain religion—while the DCF’s proposed qualifications were deemed by the university to ensure that only a Hindu would qualify.

To be sure, many religions are represented in modern Indian civilization—though India is and always has been predominantly Hindu. Perhaps the DCF erred in not using the term Hindu Studies, which would have put it on a par with the many university departments in Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, etc. Surely a chair of Jewish Studies must be deeply familiar with Jewish tradition, including the Hebrew language! Surely a chair of Islamic Studies must be deeply familiar with Islamic tradition and the language of the Koran! Yet when Hinduism is taught at all in US schools and universities, it is generally presented by non-Hindus. Can anyone imagine a Catholic chairing a department in Muslim Studies—or vice versa? Hindus want and deserve the same respectful treatment that is routinely granted by American universities to every other religious group in America. In a nation founded on the principles of religious freedom and separation of church and state, a public university—if it is to teach about religions at all—must surely treat all with equal respect.

I believe UC Irvine’s decision was made in good faith; they had to follow the rules. If the university were offered an endowed chair in Hindu Studies, I am confident the response would be more positive, and the qualifications proposed by the DCF would be judged fully appropriate in that context. But should UC Irvine still refuse such a gift, I hope the DCF will turn their attention to other universities. Rutgers University’s website, for instance, advertises an “18-chair challenge,” in which an anonymous donor has pledged \$27 million, intended to match others’ donations for the endowment of 18 chairs.

I should think the offer of an endowed chair in Hindu Studies would be irresistible. The recipient would join Oxford as one of only three universities outside India with such a department, so far as I can tell from a Google search (English language only).

CHAMUNDI SABANATHAN
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Teaching the Next Generation

I’m a devout Hindu. Every morning when I read the news, I ask myself, “Where is our society heading?” “Why so much decay?” When I see so many of our kids and youngsters becoming victims of an increasing number of social ills, I ask myself if we could have avoided all this or at least minimized its impact had we set our kids on the path of spirituality and religion right from the start.

Everyone asks what my country or community can do for me. But when I ask myself what can I do for my community and especially the younger generation, I strongly believe that if we can set up the right structure and impart the extraordinary treasures of Hinduism at a young age, we can surely guide our kids not only to become good Hindus, but also to become role models for society at large.

As such, I would like to start formal classes to teach Hinduism to kids, ideally from the age of six. However, given the complexity of the various Hindu scriptures, I know the task is quite challenging. On this very auspicious day of Mahasivaratri, I humbly request your assistance in setting up a proper structure with a formal syllabus of teaching.

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The Cambell Plan Book Review

Thank you so much for publishing the review of the amazing book, *The Campbell Plan*. The moment I read the review I ordered and read it. *The Campbell Plan* is an amazing book about food and our health.

In the modern world, with an array of diets and health issues, what we eat every day has become complicated. Author Dr. Thomas Campbell clearly explains everything from plant-based foods to nutrition and the effects of eating animal products to whole-some plant-based recipes. Many Hindu vegetarians assume their diet is nourishing and healthy.

The majority of Hindu vegetarians thrive on white rice, breads made with refined flour, and season vegetable and lentils with lots of refined oil. Milk in India is brimming with chemicals and harmful hormones. According to numerous studies, lifestyle diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure, are caused by a diet rich in animal products, such as meat, processed food items, and refined products such as, all-purpose flour, sugar and cooking oil.

Today, India is the diabetes capital of the world. Study after study has shown that a diet rich in vegetables and fruits will reduce

the risk of chronic diseases. According to Healthy Eating Plate, created by Harvard School of Public Health, half of our meals should consist of vegetables and fruits.

With some minor changes, Hindu vegetarians can lead a healthy lifestyle by substituting brown or red rice for white rice, substituting whole wheat flour for all-purpose flour, and reducing cooking oil. Meditating, *pranayama* (breath control) and doing some yoga every day is also great for a healthy body and mind.

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Various Philosophies

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your piece, “Hindu Philosophies” in the April/May/June, 2016, issue. The reason we have so many philosophies is because of the declaration thundered by the *Rig Veda*, “Truth is one; sages express it variously,” in Sanskrit, “*Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti*.” However, if truth is one, then there cannot be three entities, namely, God, soul, and world. Thus *monism*, *advaita*, which perceives a unity of God, soul, and world, is the only philosophy that sounds logical and rational. Advaita teaches, “All this is Brahman” or “*Sarvam khalvidam Brahman*,” which means that God, soul and world are nothing but manifestations of Brahman, just as the waves, bubbles and foams of an ocean are nothing but manifestations of the ocean.

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What Hinduism Means to Me

I like HINDUISM TODAY magazine. I want to clarify that the word Hinduism represents all faiths and religions of a geographical area of southeast Asia known as India or Bharat, or earlier also known as Hindustan.

Hinduism represents all minority or majority believers of different faiths. Hinduism is an ocean where rivers of all faiths comes to commingle with it. It stands for unity in diversity of different faiths. The majority of believers in India are sanatanis which emerged from the *Vedas*. Also this path is known as *Vedic Dharma*. Swami Vivekananda preferred to call it *Vedantic*. Therefore, my humble request to all is that we must clearly understand this and not confuse Sanatan Dharma with Hinduism.

SRIGOPAL SARAFF
KANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH

Connecting Past and Future

Embracing our millennia-old faith with contemporary wisdom, HINDUISM TODAY is unique in capturing the hearts of many generations during this global renaissance of the eternal truths. Nandri, HINDUISM TODAY team!

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Mother-Daughter Dance

On March 5, 2016, all roads in northwestern Austin led to one place: the Brushy Creek Community Center. It is here we celebrated the International Women’s Festival. From the impressive turnout, there is no doubt in our Indian community that every event organized by our beloved local trio, Rasna, Kalyani and Bhavani (Memories and Events, Austin) is an evolving thread that binds together the hearts of us all.

There’s nothing quite like returning back to our nostalgic memories of silk kurtis, dancing earrings and embroidered tops. This event was an adventuresome expression of honoring our shared sisterhood in a foreign land. One of the main parts of the event was the mother-daughter dances (photo at right)

done to the remixes of our local DJ Nish. The bonds of mother and daughter and of friendship were an essential feature highlighting the day.

The exhibition stalls held their own with displays of jewelry, baked goods, handicrafts and ethnic Indian garments. We flocked there to buy Punjabi suits, breezy skirts, tops and colorful saris. The aromatic food enticed the crowds, offering stiff competition to the cultural offerings on stage. As the sun began to set on the beautiful community center, the crowds eagerly settled down to dinner, relishing the vast variety of culinary delights. Everyone left with the feeling of having been treated as a beloved guest.

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Readers have asked for the address of the Sita Ram Bank in Ayodhya. It is:

Antarrashtriy Sri Sitaram Naam Bank,
Valmiki Temple,
Opposite Sri Maniram Das Chhavani Sewa Trust,
Sri Ayodhyapuri,
District: Faizabad,
Uttar Pradesh: 224 123 India



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

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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

Dispensing Scriptures’ Gold

How to help light find its way to people’s hearts

I had the good fortune to grow up surrounded by holy books and by people who loved them,” Mr. Asan Tejwani recalls of his early life in Sindh. His fondness for scripture has remained with him and given him a passion for gyan daan, the giving of holy books and sharing of words of wisdom.

Asan moved to the USA in 1964, worked in structural engineering, then in financial services, and is retired today. When he is not traveling, which he does a great deal of, he participates in charitable activities, maintains an email list to whom he sends daily inspired messages and—as ever—gives away lots and lots of books.

“I have given thousands of them to libraries and individuals,” he explains, “including hundreds of books by Gurudeva (founder of HINDUISM TODAY), and thousands of HINDUISM TODAY’s history lessons. It is my constant and blessed sacrifice. You never know when a holy word will find its way to someone’s heart.”

In HINDUISM TODAY, Asan has found a fellow dispenser of teachings. “The magazine has picked up the spirit of Swami Vivekananda, articulating the Hindu renaissance

in a way that welcomes, includes and uplifts everyone, showing the divine essence of us all. It is inclusivist, not exclusivist. This is gold.”

Mr. Tejwani is especially passionate in holding that, because their teachings on ahimsa, love, acceptance and tolerance are so clear, the Hindu people themselves inherit a special responsibility to be outstanding examples of those qualities.

“Ancient scripture tells us, *dharma rakshati rakshitaha*, dharma protects those who protect it. We protect ourselves and our progeny when we promote and live dharma. HINDUISM TODAY is a constant supporter of this concept, and that is why I support it.”

Mr. Tejwani has given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. Recently, he has also made it a beneficiary in his estate plan.

“I want to do all I can to help the magazine reach as many people as possible for as long as possible. It is our generation’s duty to fortify this fund so HINDUISM TODAY stays strong for 1,000 years, no matter what the world goes through. We can all make that effort and give whatever we can, even if it’s



Asan Tejwani at Angkor Wat: “I love to travel and discover new forms of culture and ways of life that souls migrate through on the way to their destiny. I see myself reflected everywhere.”

only one dollar a day. Let’s do it!”

If, like Mr. Tejwani, you are enthusiastic to help HINDUISM TODAY dispense the gold it contains, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund or including in your estate plan.

Read about the fund at hheonline.org/productionfund. Subscribe to the Production Fund newsletter at: gurudeva.org/email-news. Ask for our *Planned Giving Toolkit* by contacting one of our monastic staff at 1-888-464-1008 or hhe@hindu.org.

QUOTES & QUIPS

The greatest service one can do for people is to help them experience God

Swami Omkarananda (1930–2000), founder of Omkarananda Ashram, Rishikesh

Association with sages should be made because thoughts are so persistent. The sage has already overcome the mind and remains in peace. Being in his proximity helps to bring about this condition in others, otherwise there is no meaning in seeking his company. The guru provides the needed strength for this, unseen by others. **Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

Disciple: O wise and all-knowing one, take me to the realm of perfect peace.

Master: If I take you to that realm, it will no longer be peaceful. *Anonymous*

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! **William Shakespeare** (1564–1616), *English poet, playwright and actor*

Do not look upon yoga as something beyond you or as calling for any extraordinary efforts. You can remain in your station of life, carry on your work and at the same time embark on the yogic path. Do japa, prayer, kirtan, meditation and asanas regularly. **Swami Sivanada** (1887–1963), founder of Divine Life Society

He does not live in vain who employs his wealth, his thought, and his speech to advance the good of others. *Anonymous*

On the terrace of a monastery high in the mountains, an old Zen Buddhist monk stood next to a much younger monk while they both contemplated the unspeakable void of misty space above. After a silence, the old monk gently declared: “Ah, my son, one day all this void will be yours.”

Where seekest thou? That freedom, friend, this world nor that can give. In books and temples, vain thy search. Thine only is the

hand that holds the rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament. Let go thy hold, sannyasin bold! Say “Om Tat Sat, Om!” **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902), *Song of the Sannyasin*

The suffering that ignorant men inflict upon themselves can hardly be contrived by their enemies. *Tirukural*, 843

What you seek is seeking you. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *poet*

A man trying to understand the nature of God asked him: “God, how long is a million years to you?” God answered, “A million years is like a minute.” Then the man asked, “God, how much is a million dollars to you?” And God replied, “A million dollars is like a penny.” Finally the man asked, “God, could you give me a penny?” And God said, “In a minute!”

Openness has no location in particular. It contains everything. It contains thoughts and the absence of thoughts. It contains feelings and no feelings, sights and no sights, sounds and silence. Within openness, everything is invited and Everything is accepted. There is

no way to be open because there is no difference between being open and being. **Wu Hsin**, (403–221 bce?), *Taoist philosopher*

Be humble, for you are made of the earth; be noble, for you are made of the stars. *Serbian saying*

They know not the evil fruits karma brings. They choose not to find jnana for liberation from karma. “Renounce karma and be liberated”—this Vedic teaching they know not. They who wallow in karma will never the rich harvest reap. *Tirumanthiram*, verse 2557

It is fitting to describe the Self as awareness dissolving into itself, as when you come out of it, there is no experience to remember, only a new perspective, a total perspective from which you then view the mind. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

The Self is so simple, so uncomplicated, that the ramified external mind overlooks



it. From birth to death and back to birth, we live in the ocean of being and see only the fishes of objective perception. We neglect to notice that these swim in the ocean of being. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

DID YOU KNOW?

The Beloved Saint Andal

EACH HINDU SECT HAS ITS OWN SAINTS, sages and gurus. For Vaishnavites, the twelve Tamil poet-saints called Alvars were devoted to Vishnu and His avatars. Among them was Andal, the 9th-century poet-saint who was in love with Krishna.

As a baby, Andal was left at a temple in Villiputtur, near Madurai. A devotee of Vishnu found her, believed the child to be a sign of God’s grace and raised her as his own. She was named Godai or “gift of Mother Earth.”

Godai was renamed Andal after her father had a dream of Krishna demanding that His garlands be gifted to devotees only after Godai had worn them. Thenceforth she was known as Andal, the girl who ruled over the Lord.

Andal is credited with two literary works, the *Tiruppavai* and *Nachiar Tirumozhi*, both rich in philosophical, religious and aesthetic content. These works form an important part of the daily religious life of Vaishnavites in South India. Daily services in most

Srivaishnava temples and households include singing portions of the *Tiruppavai* with great religious fervor by women, men and children of all ages, especially in Tamil Nadu.

Andal’s works, particularly the *Thiruppavai*, have been studied extensively by scholars and translated into a number of languages over the centuries. Andal’s life and legacy forms an important part of the Bhakti movement. Historical records suggest that by the 12th century she had become a major inspiration to Hindu women in South India and elsewhere.

From the *Thirupavvai*: “Worldlings, listen to what we shall do to observe these sacred days. We shall sing the feet of the Supreme One; lying on the milky sea, bathe betimes.

No ghee, no milk;
No shade for eyes;
No flowers for hair.

Avoid all sins;
Spread no scandal;
Give alms, make offerings, all we can, and joyfully seek our savior.”



BASICS

Daily Yoga Practices

DEVOUT HINDUS PERFORM DAILY vigil, called *sandhya upasana*, usually before dawn. This sacred period of puja, japa, chanting, singing, haṭha yoga, meditation and scriptural study is the foundation of personal life.

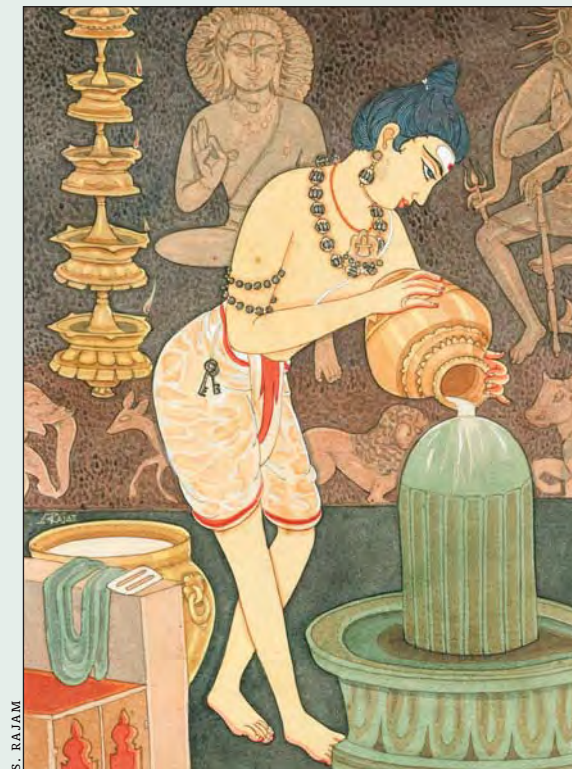
Each day hundreds of millions of Hindus awaken for the last fifth of the night, bathe, don fresh clothing, apply sectarian marks, called *tilaka*, and sit in a clean, quiet place for religious disciplines. Facing east or north, the devotional puja rites of bhakti yoga are performed. *Hatha* yoga, hymn singing, japa and chanting are often included. Then follows scriptural study and meditation, listening to the sound current and contemplating the moon-like inner light during *brahma muhurta*, the auspicious

hour-and-a-half period before dawn.

The duly initiated practice advanced yogas, such as those revealed in *Merging with Siva*—but only as directed by their guru, knowing that unless firmly harnessed, the *kundalini* can manifest uncontrollable desires. Through the day, karma yoga, selfless religious service, is performed at every opportunity. Besides these yogas of doing, Hindus practice the central yoga of being—living a joyful, positive, harmonious life.

The Vedas declare, “The mind, indeed, is this fleeting world. Therefore, it should be purified with great effort. One becomes like that which is in one’s mind—this is the everlasting secret.”

From *Dancing with Siva* by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

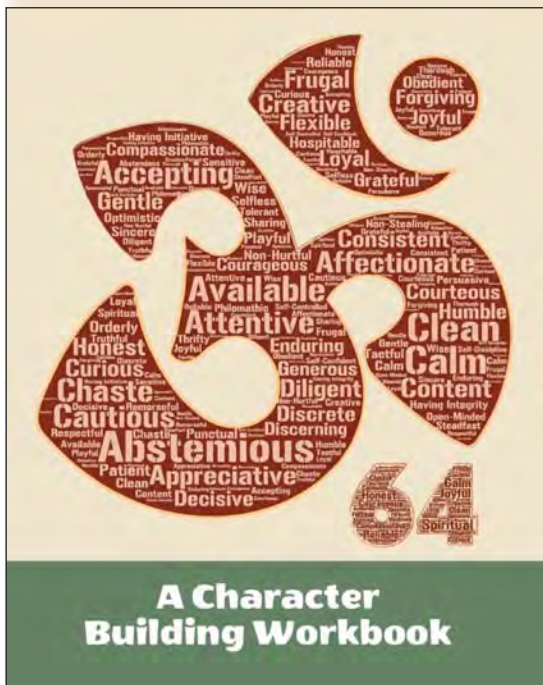


Tools for Transformation

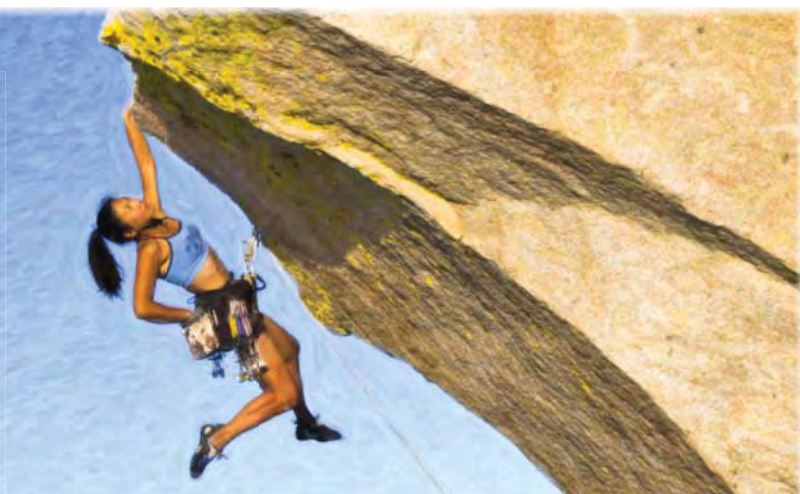
A Character Building Workbook

64 Character Qualities to Help Build, Transform and Improve Life

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



As a tool to help children and adults build, transform and improve their character, Satguru has developed a list of sixty-four character qualities and presented them in this workbook. A sample two-page spread is shown below.



50. Self-Confident

Read here—bit.ly/self-confident50—how young Anand acquires self-confidence through mastering woodworking and other skills with the help of his father, empowering him to face the most difficult challenges as he goes through life.

Gurudeva explained: "All you can do in living your life every day is to make today just a little bit better than yesterday was. You will then have confidence in yourself, so that tomorrow will be all right, too, and you won't fear the tomorrows."

"In order to be confident within yourself, have no fear. In order to have no fear, say to yourself, 'I am all right, right now.' This will quickly bring you into the here-and-now consciousness."

"Someone who meditates has confidence in all departments of life. You can build that confidence. If you sit down to meditate, meditate! Don't get sidetracked on anything else, no matter how attractive it may be."

ASSIGNMENT: During these two weeks, if when starting a new project, you don't feel confident, use the affirmation "I can, I will, I am able to accomplish what I plan."

Date you began this assignment _____

MY THOUGHTS ON THE BENEFITS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE: _____

Self-confidence means trusting in one's abilities and skills. I practice it by remembering my past successes when embarking on a new project. The opposite is self-doubt.

Comparing the actions of one who is self-confident to one who is self-doubting		
Situation	Self-Confidence	Self-Doubt
You get an unexpected offer to start a promising new business, and...	remembering past successes, bravely accept the challenge.	are assailed by self-doubt and tell the principals you have enough happening in your life.
When the guru gives you a new spiritual assignment that seems impossible, you...	rely on your conviction that we are each a divine being and set out to succeed.	fear you are not as strong as he seems to think and decide to ignore his instructions.
One day you wake up with a great idea that will change your life forever, so you...	use affirmations to enhance your confidence and set out on the new journey into the future.	conclude this is just another wild idea for which you have neither the knowledge or the skills, and do nothing.

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FROM THE AGAMAS

How Does Siva Create?

A philosophical discussion on the nature of Siva's body and its ruling energy

The following is a translation from the Mrigendra Agama, chapter three. This begins a two-part series as an analysis on the nature of the Supreme Lord, Siva, and His body, consisting of Sakti's power. The author presents an argument for those questioning the philosophy and gives the answer to help solve the mystery of Siva and His sakti.

THE ULTIMATE AND EVER-EXISTING REALITY (VASTU) IS ETERNAL, being not conditioned by time. It is all-pervasive, being not conditioned by space. It creates the bodies, body organs, worlds and the worldly objects in a successive and simultaneous order. So, it should be known that the supreme reality is endowed with unrivaled power (*sakti*) for effecting such creation.

Since that *sakti* is active in nature and since action could be possible only when associated with necessary instruments (organs), it is ascertained that the ultimate Lord who performs five functions (Siva) is possessed of a body. Moreover, since action and instruments are intrinsically present in Him, it should be known that such presence of body and organs has not occurred to Him in some intermediate stage, and that such occurrence is spontaneous. Even such body and organs are made up of *sakti* only. That *sakti*, the essential conscious form of Isvara, is not an unconscious entity. Even though this body is only one, it becomes innumerable in view of the countless things to be known and countless actions to be done.

Karma cannot be the causal force for the creation and maintenance of the world. Nor could *prakriti* be the cause. Since karma and *prakriti* are inert, they cannot function without being activated by an intelligent being. Nor could an individual self create the world, since it is dependent on some other source for knowing and doing. By the process of elimination, it is ascertained that the great Isvara is the ultimate cause.

For the enlightened, He presents Himself as Siva only (Siva being free from the fivefold function). From the point of view of liberated souls, Siva shines forth as the ultimate, transcendental reality alone, being not involved in the cosmic functions.

Some persons object: "Since the relationship between the effected things (products) and the Supreme Lord of the world is not evidently proved, this inferential process of ascertaining an ultimate doer is impaired with a defect of non-apprehension of the relationship between the cause and the effect. There cannot be a relationship between the smoke in a kitchen and the fire on a mountain"—their argument goes like this.

True. Even though there is no relationship between the kitchen smoke and the mountain fire, certainly there is an irrefutable relationship between the fire and the smoke. Thus there is no defect in inferring the presence of fire from the smoke.

Another objection is raised: "It is observed that an action is possible only for him who is associated with a body. Isvara may be the ultimate doer, but He is not to be considered as bodiless. He should be considered an embodied being. Even in the worldly phenomena, action is seen only in him who is an embodied being. In that case, Isvara, being an embodied lord, becomes like us." (*To be continued.*)



One form, two forces: Ardhanarishvara is both male and female, both body and power. The two energies remain inseparable yet distinct.

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



Shirdi temple: The marble image of Shirdi Sai Baba (1838-1918) is enshrined just behind the crypt holding his earthly remains (under the garland); (inset) photo taken about 1915, three years before his death



IN 1855 A YOUNG BOY THOUGHT TO BE 16 years old arrived in the town of Shirdi. According to the traditional account of his life, *Shri Sai Satcharitra*, he was an ascetic. He took up residence under a neem tree, meditated almost continuously and remained for three years before leaving as unexpectedly as he arrived. He returned again in 1858 and remained in Shirdi for the rest of his life. The villagers called him Sai Baba, but the holy man was of unknown origin and even religion—he dressed like a Sufi, but his teachings were more Hindu than anything else. During his lifetime, he gained a local following among Hindus and Muslims.

Today those who worship him number in the millions, and the Shirdi temple's income is second only to Tirupati. He has hundreds more temples not only in India but in the UK, Malaysia, Germany, France and the US. Shrines for the saint have been installed for worship both in Vaishnavite and Saivite temples in India and elsewhere. There is no worldwide or even India-wide organization of devotees driving any of this—it is all at the inspiration of local devotees.

HINDUISM TODAY's editors have long been aware of Shirdi Sai Baba's popularity, and last year personally encountered the movement at the Sri Siddhi Vinayaka Cultural Center in Sacramento, California. It was a Thursday evening, and dozens of devotees had gathered for bhajan, worship, arati and prasadam before a life-sized statue of the saint that had been installed in this small Ganesha temple. The experience of this devotional evening inspired us to look further into the life and present-day worship of this saint whose popularity is on the rise.

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Rise of Shirdi Sai Baba

The great Maharastrian saint whose austere, miracle-filled life changed all who came in contact with him is attracting an ever-growing devoted following today

HERE ARE TWO MAIN BIOGRAPHIES OF Shirdi Sai Baba. The most influential is the *Shri Sai Satcharitra*, written in Marathi in 1916 by one of Baba's devotees, Shri Hemand Pant Dabholkar, then adapted and translated into English by N. V. Gunaji in 1944. Also important are the writings of B.V. Narasimhaswami of Tamil Nadu. He popularized the saint in South India, and between the 1940s and 1960s held yearly conferences on Shirdi Sai Baba.

According to the *Sai Satcharitra*, the young Sai Baba led an ascetic life, stayed aloof from the people, and meditated under a neem tree day and night. When he returned in 1858, he took on his now famous dress of a one-piece kafni robe and cloth cap, both normally associated with Muslims, and interacted more with the local people, some of whom considered him mad. Those who came to rever him convinced the sadhu to move into an abandoned mosque. He continued to live on alms and, in the manner of Hindu sadhus, kept a constantly burning *dhuni*, or sacred fire. He would give ash to devotees from this fire for use in healing. That fire still burns today in Shirdi. From 1910, his popularity spread outside Shirdi to Mumbai, and many people started to visit him.

He was known for performing miracles, including lighting lamps fueled with water, restoring a blind man's sight and having the wounds of another's beating appear on his



own body. He observed both Muslim and Hindu forms of worship, and taught the importance of charity, devotion, the guru and the dangers of atheism.

Devotees often cite eleven sayings of Sai Baba which include: "No harm shall befall him who steps on the soil of Shirdi;" "Trust in me and your prayer shall be answered;" "My mortal remains will speak from my tomb;" "Those who see my advice or help will immediately receive my answers;" and

"There will be no dearth of anything in the houses of my devotees." An impressive collection of the saint's photos and sayings is the 200-page coffee-table book, *Shirdi Sai* (available from kumarannavarapu@gmail.com).

Among his prominent disciples was Upasani Maharaj who in turn was the teacher of Meher Baba. Meher Baba was born in a Zoroastrian family and became quite popular in the West from the 1930s onward. He was one of the early Indian teachers to achieve fame in the West. It is an unusual connection of Shirdi Sai Baba to the import of Eastern mysticism to the West, as Sai is otherwise not well known outside the Indian community.

The popularity of Shirdi Sai Baba has grown in two separate movements. About 75 percent are direct followers of Shirdi Sai Baba and 25 percent of Satya Sai Baba of Puttaparti. The latter knew Narasimhaswami in the early 1940s, declared himself the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba and became quite widely followed. At any individual temple or shrine to Shirdi Sai Baba, one or the other of these groups tends to predominate. The main temple in Shirdi itself is solely in the hands of direct followers, although in 2004 its management was taken over by the state government of Maharashtra on account of issues with institutional responsibility. It is the only government-run Shirdi Sai Baba temple.

Where the groups connect is in the ever-growing popularity of the saint. Satya Sai

Baba was instrumental in the making of the 1977 Bollywood film, "Shirdi Ke Sai Baba," starring Sudhir Dalvi. According to Sekhar Boddupalli of California, it was this film that launched Shirdi Sai Baba's present-day popularity. The film is a dramatic account of the saint's life, including numerous miracles. Since then, eleven films have been made on him, the latest in 2012.

Excerpts from the movie's Wikipedia entry give some sense of the movie: "He showed Ganpat Rao that he is one with Vithoba and Bhagwan Shri Krishna; he demonstrated to Som Dev that he is one with Bhagwan Shri Shiv; former jailbird Heera regained his eyesight with Sai's blessing. During all of these miracles, Sai went door to door begging for alms and food. The legend grew, people flocked all over to witness this new Messiah, one whom the Muslims called Allah Sai, Christians Jesus Sai, Sikhs Nanak Sai, and Hindus Bhola Sai. He always blessed Hindus with Allah Malik (Allah bless you) and Muslims

.....
World of Sai: (counter-clockwise from top left) with devotees in Shirdi toward the end of his life; the gold roof of the samadhi temple in Shirdi; (inset) tens of thousands a day visit the temple; map showing temple location, about four hours' drive from Mumbai; the ornate temple to Sai in Sikkim, north India; part of the Shirdi temple's halls which feed 40,000 people a day; the kitchen's state-of-the-art solar-powered steam generator



An Abundance of Gold Adorns the Temple of Shirdi Sai Baba



with Ram Ram.”

The Main Temple at Shirdi

It is for boons that most devotees come to Shirdi, and there are many stories of those boons being granted. The saint himself promised, “He who comes to my samadhi, his sorrow and suffering shall cease.” Faith in real world miracle is a major factor in the Shirdi temple’s great wealth, which has included gifts of millions of dollars at a time and allowed the temple to develop huge facilities for pilgrims and large philanthropic projects. More than half the temple’s income goes to such work.

The 2,100-square-foot main temple is called the Samadhi Mandir. Its central hall, with pillars and arches encased in gold, can hold about 600 people at a time in front of the statue and burial crypt of the saint. The area around the central hall displays artifacts from his lifetime, such as his shoes, cooking pot, grinding wheels and some garments.

Worship here follows the standard pattern of a Hindu temple, with morning arati at 4:30 and abhishekam or bath at 5:05. From 5:40 am the temple is open to devotees. There are various other ceremonies through the day,

.....
Shirdi Sai around the world: (below, left to right) shrine in Shree Ganapathy Temple, London; Sai Pragma Dham temple in Delhi established by Swami Pragyanand (upper right in photo)

until at 11 pm the saint’s statue is wrapped in a shawl, a mosquito net is lowered around it and he is considered at rest till morning. In addition to visiting the temple itself, devotees pay their respects at various places around town associated with Shirdi Sai Baba’s life, such as the neem tree where he first meditated long hours upon his arrival in the village.

Harun Trikha wrote of his experience upon entering the temple, “The walls of the Shirdi sanctorum were resounding with the chant of ‘Om Sai, Om Sai, Jaya, Jaya Sai.’ My eyes took in scores of devotees giving vent to their emotions in sync with the raising of their arms, their eyes shining with tears. Others had their eyes tightly shut, their faces ecstatic with bliss, unquestioning faith and devotion. A magnificent aura of the saint’s spiritual power permeated the atmosphere.”

Temples in India and Worldwide

India today has many independent temples to Shirdi Sai Baba. In Delhi itself there is the Shirdi Sai Baba temple at Lodhi Road, founded in 1968, and the Sai Pragyadham, founded by Mahamandaleshwar Swami Pragyanand in 1994. Swamiji first visited Shirdi town in 1970, and it was upon forming an inner connection with the saint that he left his teaching post at a university and took sannyas.

Swamiji estimates there are 100,000 temples large and small to Shirdi Sai Baba in India. Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh alone has four hundred; Delhi has 15 large temples and many small ones. Outside of India, Swami

estimates 80 percent of the temples have installed the saint’s statue at the request of devotees. He believes that 98 percent of Shirdi Sai Baba’s devotees are Hindus.

Asked the secret of the saint’s popularity, Swami Pragyanand replied frankly, “It is very plain and simple: you ask him anything and Baba grants it to you. There are many stories of people saved from illness, blessed with children and wealth. His life was full of miracles. Clearly people get associated with him because they got something from him.”

In Wimbledon, London, the Sai Mandir inside the Shree Ghanapathy Temple was opened in 1981 as a place for devotees of Satya Sai Baba to congregate. At a recent gathering there, our contacts inform us, about 200 people were present, ranging in age from young to old. There was bhajan, recitation of Gayatri Mantra 108 times, arati to both Satya Sai Baba and Shirdi Sai Baba and prasadam served to all.

Several organizations have established dedicated Shirdi Sai temples in England, including Shri Dam in Nottingham and the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple in Leicester. There are individual shrines for the saint in the New Malden Murugan Temple, the Shree Venkateswaran Temple and others.

The worship of a statue of Shirdi Sai Baba installed in a consecrated Hindu temple has attracted some criticism, most notably by the Shankaracharya of Dwarka in 2014 when he stated the saint “should not be worshiped with Hindu Gods” in temples. A court case



followed, as did further critical remarks by the Shankaracharya on the saint. The following year he submitted a formal apology, and the case was dropped.

We asked the opinion of Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar, an expert in *Saiva Agama* whose translations are featured in each issue of HINDUISM TODAY. In his view, a separate temple may be built for any saint, ancient or recent. But the statue of a saint can be installed in a Siva Temple only if he or she was of the Saivite lineage and long recognized as a great religious leader. The recommended time is a thousand years, but he allowed that a saint of widespread celebrity could be installed sooner. The proper location in the temple for the statue would be in the southern or northern side of the second outer walkway around the central sanctum.

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Devoted worship: (above) Shirdi Sai devotees at the Sri Siddhi Vinayaka Cultural Center temple in Sacramento, California, pose for a photo during Thursday evening satsang; (below left to right) London temple; Sacramento temple priest blesses the food offerings before devotees themselves perform arati (the temple’s central Ganesha murti is at back left)

He was also of the view that a non-Saivite saint should not be installed in a temple where Agama-based Siva Lingam worship is performed.

HINDUISM TODAY spoke with Vishal Khanna, who maintains a popular shrine to Shirdi Sai Baba in his Mississauga home. He said the saint’s statue has been installed in ten temples in Ontario. Vishal explained, “He is boon giving. Here in Canada devotees have been blessed with children and cured of cancer. The goal of worshipping Shirdi Sai Baba is to be a good human being. You can get moksha by just chanting ‘Sai, Sai’ if you can come out from your desires for family, wealth and fame.”

After visiting the Sacramento temple, we spoke with Sekhar Boddupalli, who had inspired the local group there. As a child he had attended a Shirdi Sai Baba temple in his

home town in Andhra Pradesh. At the time, he said, hardly anyone went. Today, the whole street is closed for the Thursday night worship. Sekhar left India 30 years ago and is now an executive in a biotech company.

Asked about the worship of the saint in temples, Shekhar pointed out, “At one point in history, even Krishna was a human being, but He ultimately became an object of worship.” Shekhar offered a simple explanation for the installation of the saint in existing temples: “It is the temple committees who want the statues, because they want the devotees.”

“To me,” Shekhar confided, “Shirdi Sai Baba doesn’t belong to Hinduism; in fact, he doesn’t belong to any ‘ism.’ His focus was on harmony in the life of his devotees.” Part of his appeal today, Shekhar went on, is that “his devotees do not feel bound by the tradition that only the priests go near the statue. Many of the temples in the US don’t even have priests; the devotees do everything. It is like a socialist Hindu God, an open-access God, independent of caste, creed or gender.”

From Delhi to London to California, Devotees Seek His Boons and Blessings





Touring Shirdi: (counter-clockwise from top left) Ramnavami celebration; Khandoba Mandir where the temple priest first called Baba "Sai;" 1000-room facility for devotees; vendor selling single roses, the recommended offering to Sai; Lendi Garden in the temple complex is popular with visitors; outside the huge feeding hall is a sculpture of Shirdi Sai Baba preparing food for devotees—it is said he mixed a boiling pot of food with his bare hands; his personal effects on display at the temple; main temple complex entrance



Scenes from the Temple Town of Shirdi



Drawing on Delhi's Artistic Depths

A major exhibition in the capitol showcases India's remarkable trove of creative talent

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

WHILE THERE ARE 35,000 CITIES AND towns in America, India is home to over 640,000. This unusual demographic dispersal, and the consequent resilience of local cultures, gives rise to an astonishing array of artists and craftsmen on the Indian subcontinent. This cultural remoteness has protected traditional craftsmen and artisans from the modern erosions to which most nations are susceptible, resulting in an array of art not seen elsewhere in the world. This is especially important if you believe, as the American journalist Hendrik Willem Van Loon did, that "The arts are an even better barometer of what is happening in our world than the stock market or the debates in Congress."

Indian art was celebrated in a big way at the National Stadium in New Delhi from January 14 to 17 this year, under the banner of India Art Festival (IAF). Included were nearly 40 galleries and over 300 individual artists, from fifty different cities from India and overseas. I was sent to report on the event, and my daughter, Palak, joined me as one of the photographers.

Part of our mission was to assess whether the nation's traditional arts are surviving. It is well known that contemporary trends are the driving force of art, in India as elsewhere, so we were there to discover evidence that the spiritual centrality of Indian art was still alive and well. While we found some strong survivors, it was clear after hours of walking the halls that modern art is the rage, at least in the commercial world of art represented here. No surprise, then, that the event was billed as "a contemporary art fair." Indeed, that very billing may have discouraged some of the more traditional artists from participating.

For the past five years IAF has assembled the movers and shakers of Indian art from Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmadabad, Jaipur and a few overseas countries like Canada, UK and Singapore. This year 150 booths housed art galleries and individual artists who participated with a wide range of artworks, including paintings, sculptures, installations, photographs, digital prints and video art—all forms of visual art in all mediums. Conversations, seminars and tutorials rounded out the events.

The festival was inaugurated by Vinay



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Sahasrabuddhe, the National Vice President of the BJP, Indian art scholar Saryu Doshi and Sharon. Special guests seen at the VIP opening included Arpana Caur, Ramesh Bidhuri (Member of Parliament), Sandeep Marwha and Anurudh Lal, General Secretary, Delhi Pradesh Congress.

Speaking during the inauguration, Mr. Rajendra, India Art Festival Director, proudly offered, "I am delighted to bring this festival

to Delhi, having organized it successfully for the past five years in Mumbai and arranged one international event in Korea. We bring democracy to art, offering emerging, independent artists the opportunity to get discovered and enjoy the attention alongside the established, master artists."

Harish Kumar: We strolled through the exhibit, stopping to interview those artists

The visual arts: (clockwise from opposite page) Harish Kumar stands by his modern, vina-playing Ganesha; Sunando Basu with his contemporary Siva behind; village ladies by Narahari Bhawandia; Akshita Aggarwal holds one of her creations

who had a spiritual dimension to their work. The first we met was Harish Kumar, age 43, whose Studio Endless Thoughts is based in Faridabad, Haryana. Harish spoke of his lifetime of work at the easel. "I have been painting for the past 25 years. Most of my paintings are inspired by Radha and Krishna. I have also been inspired by Buddha.

"I enjoy my craft the most when working on paintings of Radha, Krishna and Lord Ganesha. I have made thousands of paintings on the subject of Radha-Krishna. While painting Radha-Krishna, I can visualize so much about their dancing movements and also how they see and relate to the gopis. The love of Radha-Krishna is selfless and, therefore, very inspiring. Whenever I go to Vrindavan and visit the ashrams, interact with the saints, I find as if I am in a different world altogether. There I meet some women who are like gopis and they are ever blissful. Even some foreigners I see there are blissful. I like their state of mind. I like the way people in Vrindavan forget the world and live in a divine world of their own.

"One story about Lord Siva narrates how during the Holi festival, while all other devatas and Gods played Holi with colors, Lord Siva played it with the vibhuti or ashes. This inspired me to also paint Lord Siva. I try to use colors to express my feelings and ideas."

"Once I had determined to become an artist, I did not bother whether I would get any payment or recognition. I only wanted to become an artist and create paintings. It seems it is due to some samskaras from previous births, because in this birth I have no one in my family who had interest in art or was an artist. I see all the Gods in my dreams." Visit: www.pbcnet.com/artgallery/artists/HarishKumar

Akshita Aggarwal: Next we visited the gallery of an energetic 26-year-old Delhi artist, Akshita Aggarwal, who also responded enthusiastically to our queries: "I have made Tanjore paintings for the past seven years. My mother wanted to be an artist but could not. She inspired me, and I became an artist to fulfill her dreams. She is very possessive about certain of my paintings and would not allow me to sell them at any cost.

"I did a lot of research into the famed Tanjore style. My work improved under the guidance of my guruji, Ritu Singhal, who is an art teacher. She taught me how to paint in the never bel Tanjore way. In Tanjore today



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you find the original southern style. Then there are northern and fake styles also. I do my work in the original, classical, pure South Indian style. You will see the embossed portions in my paintings, which are not present in the North Indian style.

"Today we have forgotten or are ignoring our ancient art forms, including Tanjore paintings. Fake Tanjore are being made, and instead of real gold people have started using synthetic materials. Instead of the kundan stones they have started using glass stones. But I am trying to preserve the old forms.

"I have done a lot of work on Lord Ganesha. I have painted Goddess Lakshmi, but somehow cannot sell it. I have painted many other Gods but mainly focused on Lord Ganesha.

"I have never painted with commercial success in mind. My paintings come from my heart. To earn money, I teach painting to others. But I believe true art comes from one's heart. If someone asks me to do something for money, that is not possible for me. I survive mainly from my income from teaching. When a painting is sold, a part of the money is offered to God." Visit: behance.net/akshitagarwal

Sunando Basu: This Kolkata-based artist, 38, is also a pranic healer. "Right now my focus is on spirituality. I am trying to blend my spiritual practices with my art. Ten years back a miraculous incident happened in my life and I connected to higher beings. It is the guidance of the higher beings that helped



me in pursuing what I did thereafter. In fact, it is not just one miracle that happened. All this started in the year 2005.

"There is a popular term in the Western world, drawn originally from the East, known as akashic records or akashic knowledge, which is accessible to everyone who is open to it. I am trying to deeply explore it and understand it. I used to experience something like this from my childhood but got disconnected with it for some time and then again was reconnected. At one stage I started seeing light in my vision; I used to get up at night and have visions of light, but at that time I could not understand what was happening to me. In low lights I could not see people but could see their auras. Then I started doing research on these subjects. I studied pranic healing, which explained many things. It was related to akashic records. It is said that a lot of inventions happen in people's dreams. I want to connect with the blue power. I have felt it around me many times, but to see it

with my eyes, that will be the real privilege.

"I have tried to connect Lord Siva with quantum physics. Siva is an icon. Similarly Krishna is an icon. Rituals are something that matter to me. I want to go to the core and to the base of all these. There is a relation between quantum physics, kundalini yoga and Lord Siva. In my Siva painting I have tried to highlight the snake and also connected it with kundalini, vortex and quantum physics. I am a devotee of Ma Kali and have painted Her as well.

"Perhaps the whole point of having idols and worshipping them is this exchange of energy. In all religions, whether they worship an idol or not, they have mass congregations in which prayers are done together, in a sacred place. It is considered to remove obstacles and provide more peace to the individual. For instance, during Durga Puja, a popular religious event in which the idol of Ma Durga is worshiped by hundreds of people at a time, a similar exchange of energy takes place in which positivity is restored within the energy field of those who are involved in the rituals. Perhaps this was the ancient way of healing the masses." Visit: sunando.com

Narahari Bhawandia: This traditional artist from Hyderabad, 60 years young, has spent his life capturing the culture of the Telangana region in Andhra. "My paintings depict the rustic lifestyle of the people, especially the women of Telangana region. I minutely cover the kind of dresses they wear

Energetic aesthetic: (clockwise from right) a divinely endowed zebu bull by Vivek Kumavat; Naresh Kumar with several of his smaller sculptures; visitors to the festival shop for art supplies; inside the hall each artist was given a gallery to display their work

in the villages. I have been doing this for the past fifteen years. I have gone deep into the tribal areas and villages of this region where the women sometimes just wear saris and do not wear anything on the upper portions of the body. They wear the saris in a particular style of their own. One can never see that kind of life and dresses in the cities.

"They wear very big nose pins, which are also a special characteristic of the women of those areas. They even tie and arrange their hair in a very typical way. They wear crown types of things on their head which have a golden look and are rich ornamentally. Their hair pins and other diamond-studded jewelry add to their unique character. I use my creativity in portraying these women in graceful and beautiful ways." Visit: artzolo.com/users/bhawandla-narahari

Nisha Jaiswal: This amazing illustrator generously shared her story. "I believe artists are born and art is innate, and it is due to the good karmas of my past life that the Almighty has graced me with His eternal inspiration. In my village as a small girl I would see some Marwari girls decorate their hands with henna in a beautiful manner.

"One day I did the same kind of art work on my own palm, emulating them. Everyone appreciated my work and made me realize that I could do much better than those girls. That was the moment I realized that I should be painting intricate figures on canvas. That is how my journey began in the world of art, at the age of sixteen.

"In the past three decades I have created around 20 paintings. All of them are at display here. For my livelihood I depend on my job as a university professor. I have never compromised quality for the sake of quantity, and perhaps that is why I am not a professional painter. I have always had a passion for precision and perfection in my work.

"Through my paintings I offer myself to the Almighty. For me working on them is like a tranquilizer. Working on making the Deities is a means to connect with God. Deities are my favorite subject, and through them I express my dauntless faith in God. While I do my art work, I feel like a yogi, and after completion I feel like bowing before the painting as if the Deity were actually there. I think Deities will never be out of date. People are always interested in them. Moreover, the scope in working on Deities is endless.



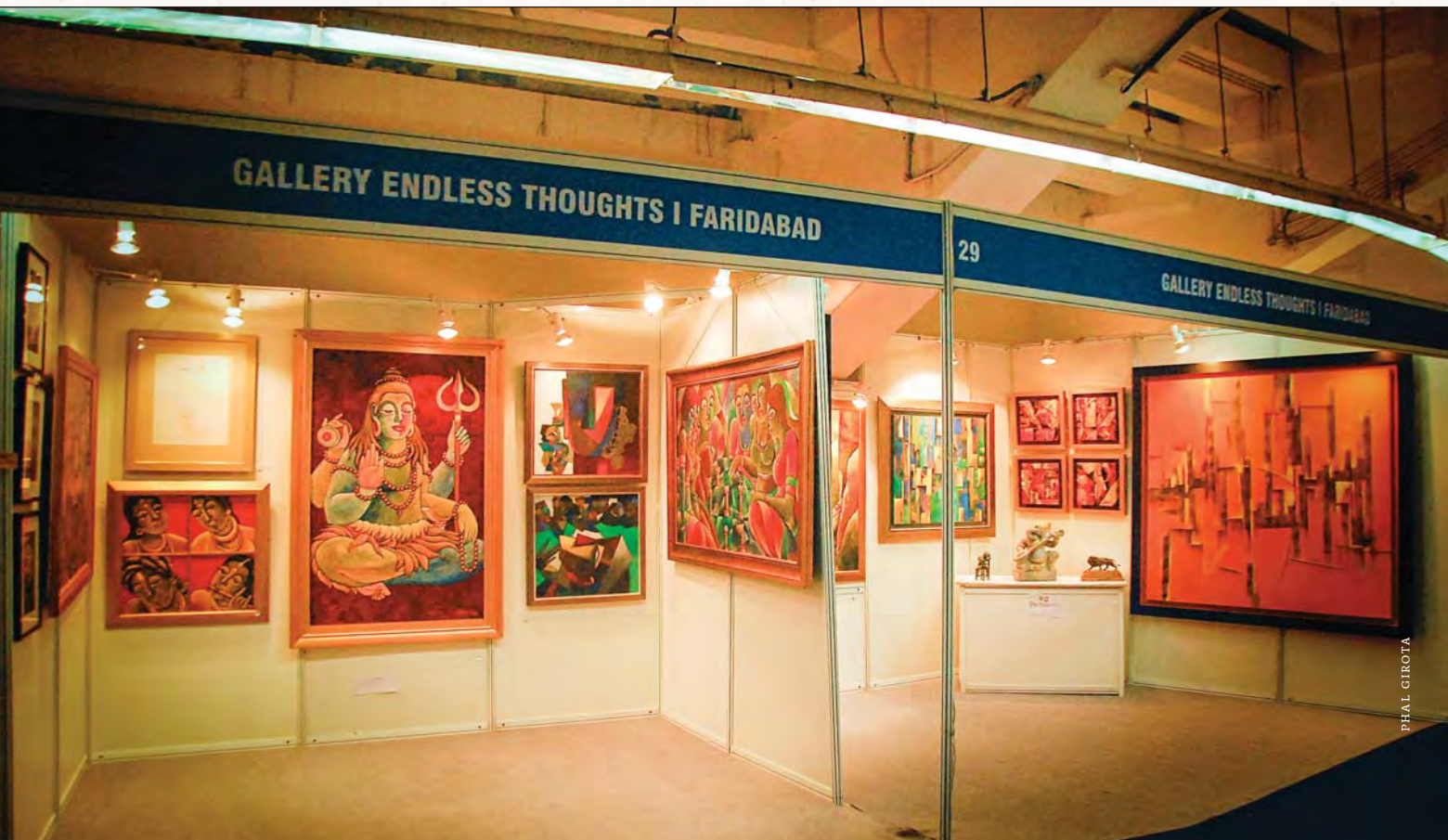
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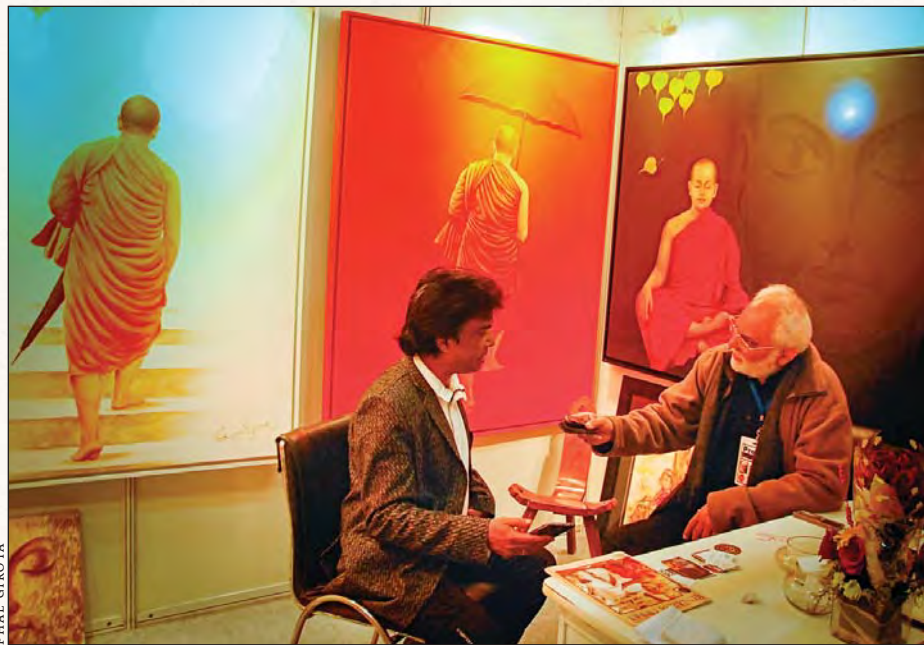
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It may take me more than a hundred births to paint 330 million Hindu Deities!" Visit: nishaminiatures.com

Vivek Kumavat: This 38-year-old is in love with Siva and with zebu bulls. "For the past twelve years I have been painting bulls and have done a lot of research on this subject, creating a style of my own. All these paintings that you see are of Nandi bulls. Nandi plays a big role in the epic and in the context of Lord Siva. We all know that Nandi is the vehicle of Siva. In Hindu mythology the bull is considered to be a very powerful animal.

"In the background I have used different faces and figures of Siva; Sanskrit verses can also be seen. Inside the figures of the Nandis I have portrayed many of our Gods and Goddesses and even the characters that were seen around them. Most of my sketches are related to the Siva family.

"My bulls are stout and strong-bodied, but you will see their faces are gentle, peaceful and even blissful. They are always in a good mood. None of my bulls is in any way aggressive or violent. They are at peace with themselves.

"Once, after drawing a Nandi, I suddenly had a vision of a golden bull coming out of my painting. There are times when I see the bulls making gestures by moving their necks and trying to communicate with me. My wife and I are both very spiritual, and sometimes both of us feel that the bulls are communicating something to us through the movement of their necks and eyes." Visit: artzolo.com/users/vivek-kumavat



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Umakant Tawde: Umakant, 35, is both artist and photographer. "This series of my paintings is based on Buddhist monks. I have focused on the Buddhist monasteries at Dharamshala and nearby McLeod Ganj. There the lamas are called Baudha bhikshus (beggars). Every year I go to these places and cover their puja, path and other activities. My photographs become the basis of my paintings. With the help of computers I try to give them a digital effect also. So my paintings have a digital touch. Finally the paintings are made with the help of oil and acrylic." Visit: umakanttawde.blogspot.com



PALAK MALIK

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Virtuosos and visions: (clockwise from top left) Umakant Tawde, surrounded by his monks, is interviewed by Rajiv Malik; gallery of Harish Kumar; a playful Siva shows another side of the mostly contemporary exhibition; Nisha Jaiswal points to her amazingly detailed black and white illustration of Durga as Mahishasura Mardini



PALAK MALIK

Naresh Kumar: "Our company, Matu Ram Arts Centres, is one of India's oldest and most reputed firms specializing in sculptures and towering statues. We have designed and developed a large number of iconic sculptures of Hindu Deities. These are prominently located not only in India but all over the world. One project now nearing completion is to be India's largest Lord Siva statue, fully 351 feet tall.

"To give a sense of the size, His feet are around 90 feet in measure. We are making it with concrete, then covering it with metal; it will be bronze in appearance. This is being created in Rajasthan and will be located in Nathdwara town. Elevators inside the body will take visitors to Lord Siva's shoulder level, from where they can see not only the entire town but Lord Siva's face as well. We are trying to use glass work in a way that one can have full darshan of Lord Siva.

"You may have seen our first mega project, a 65-foot-tall Siva statue on national highway eight, Mahipalpur, at the entrance to Delhi from Haryana. We have also built a huge Siva statue in Mauritius and two Hanuman statues, one in Durban and one in Toronto.

"Three generations of my family have been doing this work, all begun by my grandfather.

My father took it forward, and now I am trying to take it even further. The well-known industrialist family of Birlas once asked my father to make a 20-foot statue. My father daringly offered to create 40- and 80-foot statues as well. As a result, the family awarded us the prestigious Siva Murti project on the national highway. Since then there has been no looking back.

"I initially wanted to become a doctor, but when I could not clear the entrance exams, I decided to join my father's team. Partly due to hereditary influence and also due to hard work, today we have achieved a lot of success. We have made 127 super structures all over the world. Eleven are outside India.

"Each of these statues costs around sixty to seventy lakh Indian rupees (\$90,000 to \$105,000). We also have to consider treatment of the surface, as the whole weight will have to be born by that surface. Mostly it is the temples, institutions and trusts who commission these statues. We have never faced a dearth of business, because my father, Matu Ram Verma, has a name in the field of construction of towering structures.

"It used to take us around two years to create the super structures, but with the help of advanced technology we can now complete

some of our projects in six to seven months. We have imported a lot of machinery from abroad to enable us to finish our projects expeditiously. We also make small sculptures, and at this exhibition I am introducing our work to a wider audience, including the art galleries.

"In 2007 my father advised me to undertake the recitation of Sundar Kand for 21 days, saying things will be better for us. That's the fifth chapter of the *Ramayana*, which speaks of the adventures of Lord Hanuman. I decided that if it is such a good thing to do, why just do it for twenty-one days? Why not every day for the rest of my life? I have been doing this daily from that moment.

"My father taught me that when we are doing this kind of spiritual work, we have to be strictly pious. Therefore, I keep myself away from all kind of bad habits and addictions. I think it is because of these samskaras and the moral values my father taught us that we have been able to achieve new heights in our business. You can't separate spiritual and secular life." Visit: templesmac.com

Organizers have planned the next India Art Festival for October 6-9, 2016, at the Nehru Center in Mumbai. For full information visit: indiaartfestival.com



TRADITIONAL SCIENCE

The Innovative, World-Class Patanjali Food & Herbal Park

Baba Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna repackage ancient ayurveda with high-tech processing and marketing savvy to snatch \$1 billion of market share

While researching our story about Haridwar for *Hinduism Today's* Apr/May/June, 2016, issue, our correspondent Rajiv Malik and photographer Devraj Agarwal also toured the state-of-the-art Patanjali Food and Herbal Park 20 miles south of Har Ki Pauri Ghat. This is their report.

BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI

MOVE OVER, COLGATE PALMOLIVE, AN upstart Indian company's toothpaste brand is gaining national market share at the expense of your 110-year-old, US\$16 billion multinational corporation. Domestic brokerage houses estimate Colgate's overall earnings could drop 10 percent from the competition of Patanjali Ayurved on just this one product. The company, founded in 1997 by sadhu and yoga teacher Baba Ramdev and

ayurvedic doctor Acharya Balkrishna, both of Haridwar, has rattled more than just one of India's biggest corporations.

This spring, we visited Ramdev's Patanjali Yogapeeth, Ayurvedic college and research hospital in an industrial area of Haridwar near the Ganga river. And we explored, via electric car, the nearby 150-acre Patanjali Food and Herbal Park (www.pfhppl.com).

My family have been using Patanjali products for years, so I was fascinated to see where and how many of them are produced. Yes, we use the tangy toothpaste that is impacting Colgate's bottom line, along with spices, murraba fruit preserves, papad wafers, rice, wheat flour, candies, chawanprash tonic, health drinks, fruit juices, biscuits, other foodstuffs, medicines and personal-care items such as shampoos, soaps, etc. We have found all to be of high quality.

Moreover, they have an appealing swadeshi aura about them. *Swadeshi*, literally, "of one's own country," was conceived in the 1850s to counter the influx of British goods that was decimating India's local industries. The "made in India" strategy later became a mainstay of Gandhi's fight for independence. By focusing on ayurvedic products and traditional Indian foodstuffs, Patanjali has tapped into the swadeshi ideal, while utilizing the most advanced production machines available worldwide.

Baba Ramdev and his long-time friend and colleague Acharya Balkrishna have made good use of the sadhu's popularity across India, developed through his televised yoga programs. The brand was automatically trusted. Guided by some skilled managers, manufacturing and marketing have grown rapidly. As of March, 2016, annual sales were



US\$670 million and increasing. The company proudly uses its profits for social service projects, which boosts its swadeshi appeal even more, especially coupled with Ramdev's long-standing anticorruption campaign.

Traditional Goods, Modern Methods

The Herbal Park focuses on juices, herbal products and personal goods such as toothpaste. Medicines are produced at other locations, and various food products, such as biscuits, are outsourced. The sheer range and scale of Patanjali ayurvedic, herbal and food products is amazing. On their website, www.patanjaliayurved.net, I counted 147 individual medicines for sale and 69 formulations of

those medicines for the treatment of specific diseases, including multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, infertility, hepatitis A, B and C, diabetes, mental disorder and cancer. The site follows Amazon's pattern of swift delivery to the customer's home.

Driving the company's current growth is its move into the "fast-moving consumer goods" (FMCG) market. These are products sold through an extensive distribution network in high volume at a relatively low profit margin. In general these are items consumers use daily, such as food, toiletries, drinks and common medicines. The website offers over 200 FMCG products—which are also available at 20,000 franchised outlets through-

An herbal empire: (left) The Patanjali Food and Herbal Park occupies 150 acres south of central Haridwar; (inset) the modest sign by the entry gate lists divisions of food processing; (above) Acharya Balkrishna and Baba Ramdev address a press conference at the launch of Patanjali Atta (wheat) Noodles in Delhi

out India, according to a recent report in *The New York Times*. Hundreds of them can be purchased in North America at Amazon.com.

An instructive comparison in Haridwar itself is with the Gurukul Kangri Pharmacy, a company associated with the Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya university, where Ramdev himself studied as a young sannyasi. This pharmacy, once famous, fell on hard times due to management issues. On a recent visit we found its production methods a century out of date and unable to compete with Patanjali's clean, high-speed production lines.

"High tech" only begins to describe the Tetra Pak packaging machines at the Patanjali Food and Herbal Park. The scene could be a backdrop in a futuristic science fiction movie, with its network of stainless steel

Everything you might need: (left to right, top to bottom) adult toothpaste, kids' toothpaste, body lotion, coconut oil, aloe vera gel, medicated shampoo, rose water, foot cream, body lotion, medicated face cream, almond oil and eye drops





Inside the factory: (left top) A huge shipment of aloe vera awaits processing; (left bottom) tens of thousands of sacks of ingredients are stacked high in a 100,000 square-foot warehouse; (right top) the ultramodern Tetra Pak pasteurization and bottling line; (right center) workers man a bottling line for chawanprash; (right bottom) the in-house testing lab

pipes, computerized processing units and filling lines, all supervised by a skeleton staff in a virtually sterile environment. Some processes are decidedly low-tech, engaging dozens of workers, such as peeling the skin off the tons of aloe vera that had been delivered shortly before our arrival. And while fast-moving machines pack toothpaste into tubes, humans must inspect the tubes, pack them into boxes and manage the huge flow of product on the main floors.

K.K. Mishra, head of the park's public relations, told us this is one of the largest multi-product herbal facilities in the world. "To give you an idea," he explained, "25 truckloads of amla fruit are delivered to us daily. From these we can produce 6,000 liters of amla juice an hour with very little waste. The Tetra Pak machines can produce up to 27,000 juice packs, 200ml to one liter, per hour." He told us 10,000 people work at the park, most on a permanent basis. A 100,000-square-foot warehouse stores 500 high-quality herbal ingredients procured from all over the world, and each finished product is fully tested in a central lab.

Talented engineers designed this state-of-the-art facility to operate with admirable efficiency, thus keeping prices affordable to the ordinary Indian household. Everywhere we saw attention to cleanliness, quality of ingredients and packaging. It is a testament to the dedication and managerial skill of Baba Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna that they could create an industrial project of this size and scale in less than one decade.

Social Emphasis

We met with Baba Ramdev's personal assistant, Siddhartha Bhargava. He told us the food park is more a social project, than a commercial venture. He argued that products offered by multinational companies are out of sync with the Indian lifestyle. It has been Ramdev's goal to develop products with an Indian soul, and to end the country's dependency on multinationals. Bhargava explained that the need of the hour is to offer food, herbal and cosmetic products based on ancient ayurvedic traditions and science. The company, he said, takes no subsidy from the government and is competing well in the open market, since there is great demand for its products.



Another Patanjali business basic, K.K. Mishra added, is that farmers be paid a fair price as a means to alleviate rural poverty.

Acharya Balkrishna is the managing director of Patanjali Ayurved, Ltd. During our brief interview with him he shared this message, "The propagation of ayurvedic products is a role God has given us to perform and which we are doing with passion and commitment. The ayurvedic products given to us by our ancient seers have immense power to cure diseases. We have forgotten this, but now are getting back to it." The problem with health care today, he explained, is that people wait to get sick, then have to take medicine to be cured. The Indian ideal is to save ourselves from disease in the first place by living a life based on ayurveda and yoga. We must learn to find moments of peace in the midst of today's hectic life, so full of stress and strife.

Balkrishna admitted, "There are vested interests in not letting ayurveda become popular again in India. The medicines are very reasonably priced, so diseases can be fought with a few dollars worth of ayurvedic products, rather than the thousands of dollars which would be spent on hospitals. The benefits of ayurveda and yoga are explained in my book, *A Practical Approach to the Science of Ayurveda*. We are also working on a World Herbal Encyclopedia."

"We are happy that God is using us as his tool to perform all this," Balkrishna concluded. "With the blessings of the Almighty and the hard work of Pujya Swami Ramdev Ji, we have been able to do things not only in India but at the international level, too. I feel this is just the beginning, and we will be able to do a lot more in times to come."

The Mystic Mind and Music of

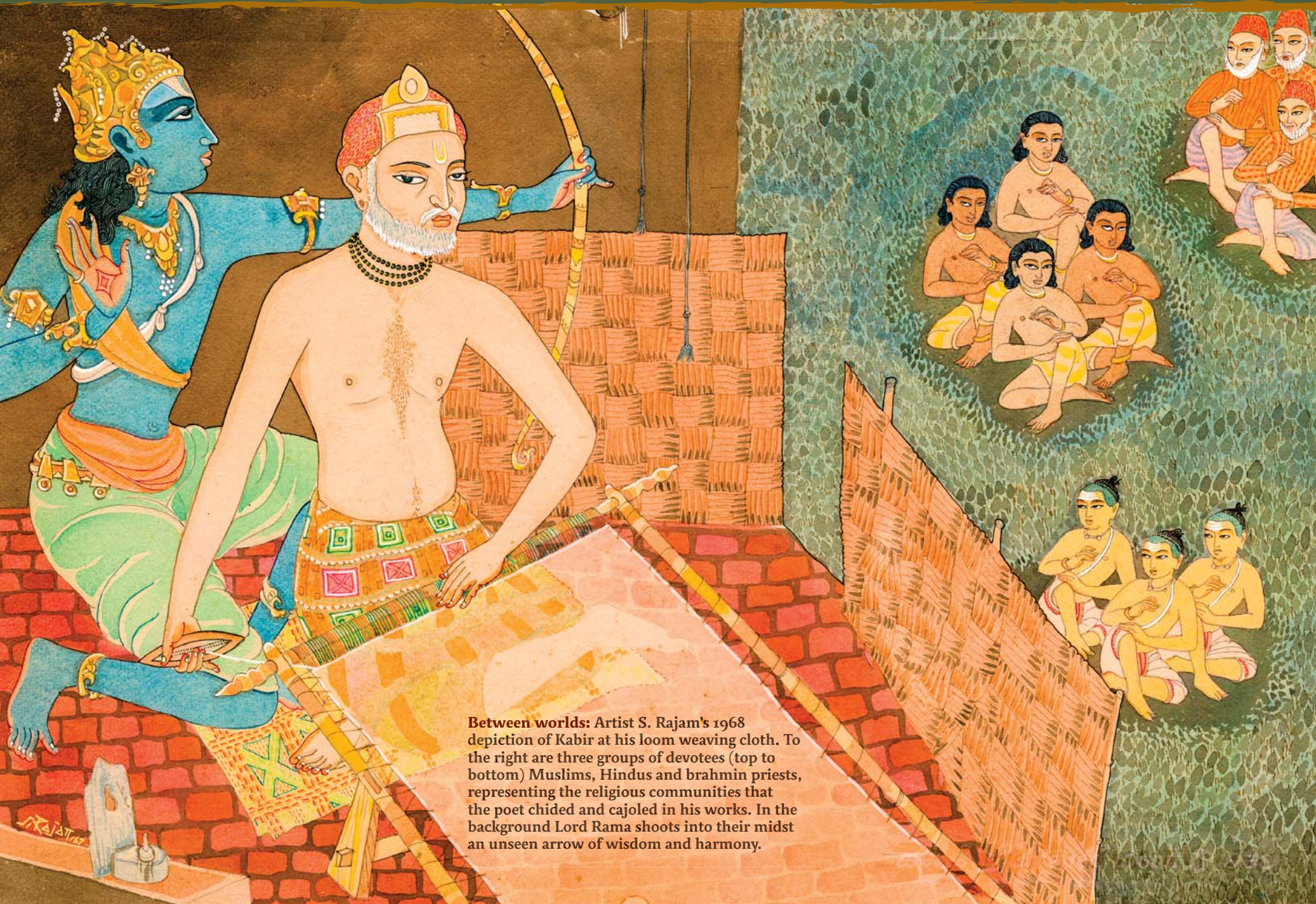
KABIR

A Fifteenth Century Poet-Saint's Wisdom on Life, Death, Guru & God

By Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian

"Drop falling in the ocean: everyone knows.
Ocean absorbed in the drop: a rare one knows."

Kabir, Sakhi 69, Bijak (Hess)



Between worlds: Artist S. Rajam's 1968 depiction of Kabir at his loom weaving cloth. To the right are three groups of devotees (top to bottom) Muslims, Hindus and Brahmin priests, representing the religious communities that the poet chided and cajoled in his works. In the background Lord Rama shoots into their midst an unseen arrow of wisdom and harmony.

For over five hundred years, Kabir's poetry has been remembered, recited and sung throughout North India and today in various parts of the world due to the Indian diaspora. Sant Kabir (ca. 1398-1448 or 1518) is one of the most renowned poets of the Indian vernacular languages. Also known as Kabir Das, "servant of the Great (God)," he belonged to the weaver (julaha) class in Varanasi, the ancient city in the present-day Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Kabir's works are known for their *nirgun bhakti*, personal devotion to the formless, impersonal Divine. Recurring themes in his poems include a focus on the name of God, critiques of religious customs, the transience of life, and the spiritual need for a true teacher, or guru. His approach defied convention and questioned orthodoxies, not unlike other luminaries in South India, including Virashaiva poet-saint Basavanna, and contemporaries in the North, like Guru Nanak and Mirabai. Categorized historically, Kabir's works can be placed outside of the Hindu/Muslim binary, and later influenced the nascent Sikh community. Today various Hindu, Sikh and Sufi communities claim Kabir; and his *dohas* (couplets) are taught in secular education systems in India and Indian international schools abroad. Kabir's wisdom is widely invoked through bhajans (devotional song) performed in classical, contemporary and film music scenes. His works are studied in academic circles and even referenced by political groups. The social contexts in which Kabir's poems were composed and received are relevant, as they were a part of the oral tradition, generally sung or heard rather than silently read. Especially in the case of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Kabir's poems were collected to be sung and are organized in ragas. Kabir composed in a mixed Hindi dialect, often termed *kari boli hindi*. The language, content and poetic style contextualize the poet in a larger devotional tradition; his poems fit into the historical backdrop of the bhakti movements that arose in multiple regions and languages throughout India. During this period of several centuries (ca. 500-1700 CE), there was a fervent attempt to make religion accessible to common people regardless of language, gender or social status, with special emphasis on devotionism expressed in India's many local languages. To underscore this, A. K. Ramanujan quotes Kabir: "Sanskrit is as the water of a well, but the vernacular (*bhashya*) [is] like a running brook" (Ramanujan, 1999: p. 330). The Kabir poems we encounter in this educational feature are waters from this brook.

S. RAJAM

Nirgun Poems: Devotion to the Formless Divine

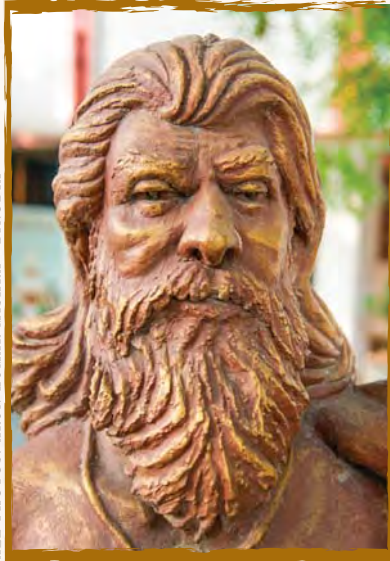
KABIR'S POEMS INVITE US TO RETHINK OUR ideas of devotion and of God. While affirming some traditional aspects of worship, he decimates others. This epigram draws out two basic aspects of Kabir's bhakti: all-inclusivity, and God as protector.

So I'm born a weaver, so what?
I've got the Lord in my heart.
Kabir: secure in the arms of Ram,
free from every snare.

Adi Granth, sakhi 82; Hawley and Juergensmeyer 2004: p. 58

The first line suggests the non-importance of jati in the world of devotion, and the following two lines underscore the principle. Kabir makes a brazen statement about his profession that denotes jati. His mention of being born a weaver problematizes the idea that one's birth determines one's religious status. The indication here is that bhakti is an active choice rather than a matter of birth or legacy; it is something that one has to cultivate. His nonchalant tone conveys a bold stance: bhakti should be accessible to all. But there is a prerequisite, which is to have the lord in one's heart. Kabir states that as long as one is truly devoted to Ram, he or she is a devotee. The fact that Kabir lived and spoke out against orthodoxy in 15th century Varanasi, where Brahmin priests played a crucial role in society, makes the poet-saint's provocation all the more powerful.

The second half of the poem demonstrates the fruits of devotion in the form of divine protection. Having God as protector or guardian is a common theme in bhakti literature, and it is this sentiment that is reflected in Kabir's epigram. Hindu Deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Durga and Hanuman are known for their protecting disposition, and the list includes Lord Rama. The image in Kabir's poem of being "secure in the arms of Ram" conveys the notion that once devoted to God, the devotee will be taken care of, "free from every snare." Kabir's use of corporeal imagery is intriguing as the "heart" and "arms" indicate the physicality associated with bhakti, as well as the *sagun* ("with qualities") nature of God. This reminds us of the



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body-mind argument raised by the issue of jati in the first half of the epigram, in which Kabir advocates mind over matter, although in this instance, imagery concerning the body is used in a positive context.

Nirgun God

Kabir uses his words to intimate the formless divine that lies beyond words. Nirgun (literally, "without attributes") names the view that God cannot be positively conceived and should not be worshiped through images or other visual forms (Hawley and Juergensmeyer 2004: p. 230). In this way, God can be interpreted as "the One," "the All," and "knowledge without duality," which is the facet of the Divine that Kabir refers to in the following couplet:

The One is one with the All,
the All is one with the One.
Kabir is one
with the knowledge without duality.

sakhi 272 / Dharwadker 2003: p. 184

Here Kabir states that the One, referring to nirgun God, is the essence that permeates the All in the world of externalities. In his cryptic and laconic style, he emphasizes that it is human beings who have to realize this oneness just like Kabir did. The idea of "knowledge without duality" is indicative of 8th Adi Shankara's *advaita* (nondualist) philosophy, in which Brahman (cosmic being) and *atman* (individual soul) are viewed as one. This is a case where similar ideas that were earlier limited to Sanskrit philosophy are being opened up to people at large through easily accessible languages. This is a key trait of the *bhajans* of India's vernacular poet-saints. In other poems Kabir is more direct in his language and style. In a poem

.....
An earnest quest: (clockwise from above) Kabir in bronze, one of numerous sculptures adorning the grounds of Kabir Chaura Math depicting Kabir's story and the history of the math; Vivek Das (center), head of the math, singing *bhajans* with devotees; Kabir's *samadhi* shrine at the math, inside a small temple established in 1521 at the place where the mystic used to meditate and worship



Praise to the Guru

THE NECESSITY TO SEEK GUIDANCE FROM A GURU OR "TRUE teacher" is underscored in the poetry of Kabir, an ideology parallel to traditional Hindu thought. Kabir's stance on the role of the teacher is clear in this popular couplet that begins with *guru gobind dou khade / kake lagoon pay?* His answer is definitive:

Guru and God are before me. Whose feet should I touch?
I offer myself to the guru who showed me God.

(Hess 2015: p. 288)

It is significant that *guru* is the first word in this couplet, and appears even before *God*, since according to Kabir it is with the

guru's grace that God can be reached. Sometimes God is the perfect guru. He also elevates the status of the guru in poem *Aivi aivi sen*.

Such signs my true teacher showed me—
it can't be spoken with the mouth, O sadhu
in my country there's no ground, no sky
no wind, no water, O sadhu
in my country there's no moon, no sun
no million stars, O sadhu
in my country there's no Brahma or Vishnu
no Lord Shiva, O sadhu
in my country there's no Veda, no Gita
no song, no couplet, O sadhu
in my country there's no rising or setting,
no birth, no death, O sadhu
Step by step a truth-seeker arrives.

Kabir, a seeker, climbed to nirvana, O sadhu.

(Hess 2015: p. 283-4)

Kabir speaks of the greatness of the "true teacher" by stating that what the guru gives, or shows in this case, "can't be spoken with the mouth." It is beyond words and necessarily needs introspection. Kabir scholar Linda Hess explains that the concept of guru is both inner and outer. "The reference may be to a human being who gives priceless guidance or to an innate source of knowledge that is always with us" (Hess 2015: p. 288). This is a key facet of nirgun poetry which this poem serves to demonstrate. Kabir refers to key Hindu Deities and texts (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, *Veda* and *Gita*), and states that the Truth he speaks of is beyond all of them. He dedicates this knowledge to the "true teacher," thereby eliminating the seeker's ego. In this case, the seeker is Kabir himself.

from the *Kabir Granthavali*, he says, “He’s Brahman: unmanifest, unlimited. He permeates everything as absolute knowledge” (Dharwadker 2003: p. 148).

Although we have encountered two poems that conceptualize the Divine in abstract terms, there are other ways that Kabir played with the concept of nirgun. For example, there are two poems in the *Adi Granth* in which God is personified as the bridegroom who has come to take away his bride, the spiritual seeker, in marriage. Kabir says, “I will walk around the fire with Ram Rai, my soul suffused with His color” and “Ram, my husband, has come to my house,” (Dass 1991: p. 8–9). The poet has used the motif of unity in marriage as an analogy for spiritual unity, an idea that Guru Nanak also adopts in some of his poetry. Although the portrayal of the Divine appears to be sagun (with qualities) in this context, the poetry does not describe specific personality traits or physical form and hence can still be characterized as nirgun in spirit. In addition to demonstrating a novel way in which the nirgun God can be represented, these poems create room for speculation about the intertextuality between the works of Kabir and other poet-saints such as Nanak, wherein Kabir’s poems may have directly influenced Nanak’s works.

Challenging Orthodoxies

Kabir often stressed the shortcomings of established Indian religiosity, usually that of popular Hinduism and Islam. For instance, he mockingly called out to siddhas (Hindu adepts) and pirs (Sufi masters) to expose their hypocrisies. However, one should be wary of interpreting his words as encouraging religious unity between the two faiths, as this was hardly his agenda. Rather than building a bridge between the two, he condemned the follies, rituals and orthodoxies of both—following a facet of nirgun theology that questions all worship of form. Instead of solely criticizing organized traditions, his poetry reflects his personal idea of transcendence of all conventional



religious practices. This could be why Kabir is often categorized as a mystic rather than a saint, with the attending religious associations.

In the following poem from the *Adi Granth*, Kabir not only questions the significance of religious structures, both ideological and physical, but also the role and authority of leaders such as priests (*mullah* in Persian/Urdu).

Broadcast, O mullah, your merciful call to prayer—
you yourself are a mosque with ten doors.

Make your mind your Mecca, your body the Ka’aba—
your Self itself is the Supreme Master.

In the name of Allah, sacrifice your anger, error, impurity—
chew up your senses, become a patient man.

The lord of the Hindus and Turks is one and the same—
why become a mullah, why become a sheikh?

Kabir says, brother, I’ve gone crazy—
quietly, quietly, like a thief, my mind has
slipped into the simple state.

(*Adi Granth*, Raga Bhairava, shabad 4)

The vivid Islamic imagery in this poem—mullah, call to prayer, mosque, Mecca, Ka’aba, Allah, sheikh—serves as the backdrop for

.....
A lasting legacy: (clockwise from above) One of several artifacts from Kabir’s life, a 500-year-old wooden weaving device called *charkha*; centered around an ancient well, an array of eight bronzes depicting scenes from history, including Kabir fetching water, ladies at the well, and Pandit Sarvanand (right) arriving to debate with the poet, his bull loaded with dozens of books; Kabir’s wooden footwear, on display at the Math, 22.5cm (8.85”) in length

Life & Legends

THERE ARE TWO KABIRS THAT WE ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY NEGOTIATING within our understanding: the Kabir of legend, and the actual man who belonged to early modern times. The latter Kabir, the historical poet-saint, lived in North India at a time when there was political unrest, with the Persian invaders’ rule in decline. Kabir, and Guru Nanak in the following century, were placed well between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Kabir’s home city, Varanasi, was diverse, with people from different jatis, social backgrounds and religious traditions. Based on his poetry and popular tales, we can assume that his words were controversial both for Hindus and Muslims. Kabir was a social critic who spoke against inequality and abuse of power, so we infer that these facets of life were a part of the social climate in his world. But the special interest in Kabir’s socio-political persona has been most evident in the late twentieth century onwards, which serves as a commentary for the pressing issues of that time in history.

As Hess explains in *The Bijak of Kabir*, having converted to Islam in 15th century North India often meant being half Hindu. “For several centuries the Muslim invaders had been waging warfare up and down the subcontinent, taking over kingdoms and propagating their



faith through the points of the sword,” (Hess 1983: p. 5). Thus, people often converted to the rulers’ religion without completely forsaking the beliefs and practices of their former faith. Legend has it that Kabir was no stranger to that oppression, as Sikandar Lodi, ruler of the



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Delhi Sultanate, made multiple attempts to kill the outspoken poet.

It is safe to say that there was political unrest during Kabir’s time, leading up to the downfall of the Delhi Sultanate and rising of the Mughal empire in 1526. “He was alive at a time when the divisions between Hindu and Muslim were feverish: recent demolitions of sacred sites, and frequent confrontations between Muslim rulers and the Hindu kshatriya communities,” says Brahmachari Vrajvihar Sharan, priest of England’s Edinburgh Hindu Mandir. However, there was also the flourishing of devotional poetry in various regions—Namdev in Maharashtra (14th century), Narasinha Mehta in Gujarat (15th century), Mirabai in Rajasthan (16th century) and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal (16th century), to name a few of the renowned Hindu poet-saints. Sufi poetry, then in its ascendancy, illumined this era as well. Hess concludes that Kabir’s poetry reflects the rich interplay of religious traditions of that period in history, including but not limited to Hinduism, Buddhist tantrism and the tradition of the Nath yogis.

Manuscripts exist for some of Kabir’s poems, but certainly not all; most poems were transmitted through oral tradition, and later in musical and written form. We are unable to find many reliable or dated early written sources, and this is where the Kabir of legend gains prominence—the memory that was created, accessed and expanded by musicians, traders, travelers and devotees down the centuries in North India. What we have available today was recorded

a century after Kabir is believed to have died. These include well-documented manuscripts of the Sikh scriptures *Adi Granth* and *Goindval Pothis*, the *Kabir Granthavali* of the Dadu Panth, and the *Bijak* of the Kabir Panthis. Written biographical narratives about Kabir’s life include Anantadas’s *Kabir Parchai*, composed around 1625, and *Bhaktirasabodhini* by Priyadas, composed around 1712. Both biographers placed Kabir into a rigidly sectarian model of Sagun Vaishnavism (Dharwadker 2003: p. 20). Subsequently, a different set of birth stories originated from the Kabir Panth (organized community of Kabir followers), which even today portrays Kabir as a divine child born under miraculous circumstances.

It is impossible that Kabir composed every poem attributed to him. We thus come to terms with the realities of collective authorship: Kabir as the idealized songster whose body of poetry has been amplified by those who have heard, received, performed and added their own works—something John Stratton Hawley outlines in his book *A Storm of Songs* (2015).

Another point to note is the difference between authorship and authority. In *Three Bhakti Voices* (*Mirabai, Surdas and Kabir in Their Times and Ours*), Hawley asserts that authorship is secondarily relevant, since the manuscript sources we have today are scarce. Instead, it is the poet’s authority—whether it is Kabir’s characteristic signature, “*kahat kabir suno bhai sadho*,” or stylistic particularities—that counts most in the scholarly engagement with his poetry.

Kabir's rejection of orthodox practices. In my reading, the crux of the poem is in the second stanza, where Kabir says, "Make your mind your Mecca," an indication to seek spirituality within rather than in external structures. It suggests that a person's mind should be pure and serve as the holy place of worship, not to mention that the relevant journey is considered to be more mental than physical. The corporeal imagery carries over to the second line of the stanza and beyond, where the human body is compared to the sacred Ka'aba. This is an extension of "you yourself are a mosque with ten doors." This can be interpreted as a reference to Hindu theology in which the human body is believed to possess ten faculties (indriyas) at its gross level, consisting of five faculties for action (karma indriyas): grasping, moving, speaking, eliminating and procreating; and five for perception (jnana indriyas): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. These could be the ten doors Kabir is referring to, as the human being is thought of as a building with ten doors in traditional yoga philosophy. Moreover, "your Self itself is the Supreme Master" is likely an indication to the concept of Brahman, and hence Vinay Dharwadkar has chosen to capitalize the word "Self" in the English translation. In this poem, Kabir uses the name Allah in suggesting reform. In other poems, he uses the name Ram to appeal to his fellow men to give up base emotions, such as anger, and adopt a more spiritual lifestyle. Given the largely Hindu socio-cultural context of 15th century Varanasi and the hub of Brahmanical orthodoxy that it was, it is evident why *Ram* was more appealing than *Allah*, thus explaining Kabir's choice. The lines "The lord of the Hindus and Turks is one and the same" refer to God as Supreme Master, untainted by sectarian or religious



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In the bhakti tradition: (clockwise from left) A bronze of Mirabai at the Kabir Chaura Math, the 16th century singer/poetess and devotee of Krishna; an artist's depiction of Kabir, the weaver, seated on a veranda contemplating the universe while selling his freshly made linens

structures. This is a marker of nirgun poetry, in addition to the focus on interiorization (seeking God inward) rather than grosser externalities. The phrase "I've gone crazy" in the last stanza is reminiscent of the Sufi concept of wajd (spiritual ecstasy), and it is not surprising that today Sufi qawwali singers almost always include Kabir poetry in their repertoire. The key word in the final line of the poem, "my mind has slipped into the simple state," is *simple*. We can interpret Kabir's words to mean that everything that he has mentioned in the poem is simple, and the practice of religion can be simple as well. The overarching

question is: are man-made religious orthodoxies simple? On the other hand, Kabir's emphasis on craziness could suggest the opposite of simple. The last line could also be tongue in cheek, where Kabir is referring to the naivety of a simplistic outlook.

In confronting the ideas of religious orthodoxy, Kabir draws from the vocabulary of both traditions to communicate his stance: God does not live in temples or mosques, but within one's own body, mind and soul. But was Kabir a Ram bhakta, since he mentioned Ram in his poems? The poet uses "Ram" as a synonym for Truth or inner experience, and as a goal that one should meditate on and strive toward. Despite not referring directly to the Deity Rama of Ayodhya, the word has strong Hindu connotations.

"If all the land were turned to paper and all seas turned to ink, and the forests into pens to write with, they would still not suffice to describe the greatness of the guru." Kabir

Legendary narratives are situated somewhere between history and myth, and embody the characteristics of both (Lorenzen 2006: p.102). This holds true for Kabir legends, which have been retold and rewritten numerous times over the centuries. Anantadas's *Kabir Parchai* contains the earliest hagiographical account of his life; Priyadas retold some of those legends in his 1712 work. There are also many narratives, not mentioned in the *Kabir Parchai*, that have emerged from the Kabir Panth. Other sources for Kabir legends include the *Bhaktavijay*, written in Marathi by Mahipati in 1762, narratives from the Dadu Panth, and some Persian accounts. Today, David Lorenzen's *Kabir Legends* (1991) is the one of the most comprehensive compilations of these narratives, and serves as a primary resource for this article.

Among the popular stories propagated by the Kabir Panth, the poet's birth narrative tells us how Neeru and Neema, who belonged to a weaver community, found the infant Kabir at the Lahartara pond and thereafter raised him as their own child.

Perhaps Kabir could be seen as his own poet-saint rather than linked with any guru, but he is widely known to be a disciple of the famous Saint Ramananda of Kashi, founder of the Ramanandi order.

Ostensibly, this is supported by his mention of Ramananda in the *Bijak*, sabda 77 (thought to be the only reference to his guru in Kabir's poetry): "One builds great hopes of himself; but none has found the secret of Hari. Where can the senses find rest? Where has he gone, whom men call Rama? Where are they gone that were wise? After death they were absorbed in the song. Ramananda drank deep of the juice of Rama. Says Kabir, I am weary with repeating this" (*The Bijak of Kabir, Translated Into English*, Rev. Ahmad Shah, 1917). However, today's scholars tend to interpret the word *Ramananda* in this verse as "the bliss of Rama." For example: "Many hoped but no one found Hari's heart. Where do the senses rest? Where do the Ram-chanters go? Where do the bright ones go? Corpses: all gone to the same place. Drunk on the juice of *Ram's bliss*, Kabir says, I've said and I've said. I'm tired of saying" (Hess: 1983, p. 68).

As per legend, Kabir desired for Ramananda, an orthodox brahmin, to be his teacher. However, Kabir feared that he wouldn't be accepted as he hailed from a humble community of Muslim weavers. Thus, one day at predawn, when Ramananda was on his way to bathe in the Ganges, Kabir lay stretched across the stairs blocking the guru's



UNKNOWN

way. Ramananda tripped over Kabir in the dark and exclaimed his mantra "Ram! Ram!" and Kabir took the encounter as his initiation. Whether or not this story is historically accurate, Kabir's poems are full of the Ram mantra. Kabir also probably knew other nirgun poet-saints, such as Raidas, who was also believed to be a disciple of Saint Ramananda. By some accounts, Kabir had a wife and a son, though many, including those of the Kabir Panth, maintain that he was never married and lived a celibate. Kabir Panth sources also contain many travel accounts of Kabir not found elsewhere, including a purported meeting with Guru Nanak.

Saint Ramananda belonged to the Vaishnava tradition. In an article to be published later this year, John Stratton Hawley asks—to quote his title line—"Can There Be a Vaishnava Kabir?" He responds thus: "Certainly the scribe of Fatehpur thought so. All except two of the fourteen Kabir-signed poems in this earliest firmly dated manuscript

give God a Vaishnava name (especially Ram), and I'd argue that it hovers over more." He refers to the widespread use of the names *Ram* and *Hari* in Rajasthani and Punjabi collections of Kabir's poetry, and expresses the view that while in North America it is the Kabir of the *Bijak* who has triumphed, other early collections of Kabir's poetry bring out a different flavor. Hawley concludes, "All across the various traditions of reception that give us the Kabir we 'know' today, Kabir was in significant measure a Vaishnava—a Vaishnava of the sort I have called 'vulgate.' This was the world he lived and breathed, whether he was heard and collected by Kabirpanthis, Dadupanthis, Sikhs or Vaishnavas of the Fatehpur sort."

A famous encounter between Kabir and Sultan Sikandar Lodi, ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, is an oft-quoted legend. Anantadas's *Parchai* describes how all the orthodox members of the community—including mullahs, Brahmins and even Kabir's own mother—complained to

The Kabir Lineage & Institutions

THE TWO KABIR MATHS IN VARANASI, AS well as those in other cities in India, are facilities through which the poet-saint's teachings are kept alive and current, with dedicated spaces and committed monks and leaders who spread Kabir's messages to people today. These centers are run by Kabir Panthis, a religious sect of Kabir followers who attempt to live the social and religious ideology embodied in his teachings. They are strict vegetarians and refrain from alcohol, and often tobacco. The Kabir Panth traces its lineage back to Kabir himself. According to Kabir Panthi lore, four of Kabir's direct disciples founded four distinct branches of the Panth, with Shruti Gopal Saheb establishing the Kabir Chaura Math (considered the mul gaddi, original seat) in Varanasi, with others in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Today the Kabir Panth is a large fellowship, with various branches and sub-sects, which do not always see eye to eye, except when it comes to revering the *Bijak*, which they all regard as their primary scripture. The *Bijak*, an anthology of Kabir's verses compiled in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and/or Bihar, is one of Kabir's most influential works.

The largest Kabir math in Varanasi is built around Kabir's legendary place of origin, including the famous pond at Lahartara where the infant Kabir was found. The Kabir Math Lahartara houses the senior monks and hosts grand events every year. The second Kabir math is Kabir Chaura, regarded as the official headquarters of the Kabir Panthis. The current head of the Kabir Chaura Math is Acharya Vivek Das, the 24th teacher in the lineage (kabirchaura.com/index.htm). This math houses the Bijak Mandir, a name apt for a temple



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dedicated to Kabir.

There are various personal artifacts displayed at the Kabir Chaura Math, which the Panth considers to have been Kabir's own. One such item is Kabir's khadau (sandals), and others include the mala his guru, Swami Ramananda, is said to have given him, and his weaving machine, all of which visitors can see. There are also many spaces to visit within the kabir maths. These include the Lahartara pond, Samadhi Mandir, Kabir hut, Neeru Teela (Neeru Hill) and the Sadguru Kabir Pustakalaya (library), which holds selected manuscripts of the works on Kabir and other saints.

Each of these places is associated with a popular Kabir legend, may it be Kabir's birth narrative at the Lahartara pond or the story of Neeru and Neema (the Muslim weavers who brought Kabir up) with the Neeru Teela, where the adoptive parents' remains are buried.

Today, in addition to being a site frequented by tourists, pilgrims, and Kabir enthusiasts, the maths remain active as places of learning. The Kabir Chaura Math propagates Kabir's philosophy via publications by its in-house press Kabirvani Prakashan Kendra, as well as through acharyas giving lectures and performing bhajans of the poet-saint. Visitors are encouraged to meditate, surround themselves in nature, and reflect on Kabir's verses at the maths.

Focused on God: (above) a portrait of Kabir inside the Samadhi Mandir sanctum at Kabir Chaura Math; evening satsang in the temple; the *Bijak* Mandir, built on the site where crowds would gather to hear the poet's dissertations



Sikandar about Kabir's provocative philosophy and activities. Upon being summoned and questioned, Kabir announced his faith in Ram. This so infuriated Sikandar that he ordered that Kabir be chained and thrown in the Ganges. But when the rebel was tossed into the water, the chains broke away and he floated unharmed. In the next ordeal they tied him to firewood and lit him up; but the flames burned as cool as water. Then he was to be trampled to death by a wild elephant, but the pachyderm refused to attack him. Having witnessed all this, Sikandar accepted Kabir's innocence and rewarded him with riches, which the saint refused, returning home.

In his final days, Kabir moved from Varanasi to Maghar, a Muslim weavers' town near Gorakhpur district close to the Nepalese border. When he died there, legend has it that his followers, Hindus and Muslims, argued over how to conduct the final rites; each group wanting to follow its own customs. They agreed that, regardless, the body should be covered in flowers, which they did. Returning later, the corpse had disappeared and only the flowers remained. The Hindus cremated one portion of the blossoms, and the Muslims buried another. Anantadas ends his retelling of this story with Kabir's being invited into heaven by gods and sages. Today there is a samadhi shrine at the Kabir Chaura in Varanasi and another at Maghar which thousands of followers visit every year to remember and honor the revered poet-saint.



A Beloved Rascal

THE POETRY OF KABIR TRANSCENDS THE ORTHODOXIES OF THE religious traditions that claim the mystic as their own today. Practices that he challenged include undertaking pilgrimage, visiting places of worship and engaging in ritualistic prayer. Kabir's focus instead is on popular, practical wisdom, infused with nirgun ideas of guru, God, life and death. He grabs his listeners' attention through enigmatic questions and riddles. Perhaps this is what makes his verses appeal to diverse groups of people—from religious leaders to academics, Indian classical musicians to folk singers, school children to rickshaw walas. Other religious figures, including the Sikh Guru Nanak and poet-saint Ravidas (also known as Raidas), regarded themselves as belonging to the same family of bhakti poets, and we can see thematic parallels in their poetry.

Kabir is often categorized as a "sant" (saint/seeker of Truth) rather than a "bhakta" (devotee/lover of God), because he conceptualizes Divinity without attributes or personality traits (Hawley and Jurgensmeyer 2004: p. 4-5). This differentiates Kabir and Ravidas from bhaktas like Surdas and Tulsidas, who sang about the qualities of Krishna and Rama. Other facets of Kabir's poetry, such as the rejection of organized religion and emphasis on yoga and primordial

sound, also make him relevant in today's trending "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) landscape.

Popular media has greatly assisted in spreading Kabir's messages in this century. Numerous films and documentaries have been made in the last decade; Shabnam Virmani's four films as part of the Kabir Project are especially noteworthy (www.kabirproject.org). There are annual Kabir festivals held in India and abroad. The Kabir Festival Mumbai (thekabirfest.com) is one of the most happening. It brings together singers, dancers, storytellers and filmmakers to share Kabir's works through the arts. The 15th century poet-saint even has a Bollywood presence! In *Dulhan Hum Le Jayenge* (2000), Salman Khan and Karishma Kapoor quote Kabir dohas in their dialogue. In *Highway* (2014), A.R. Rahman's song "Heera" is a collection of three dohas, all describing a worthy diamond. Other creative projects, such as Indian-American composer Aks's *Kahat Kabira* (2014), have also been inspired by Kabir. It is an album of nine songs that sets his poetry to electronic dance music. In fact, the poet-saint now resides in the palms of our hands in smartphones and other handheld devices; a quick search for "kabir" on YouTube fetches over 600,000 results with dohas, bhajans and documentaries.

The material structure of the Kabir Chaura Math, with its many spaces including kabir ka ghar (Kabir's home), physicalizes the significance and remembrance of this poet-saint. Kabir Jayanti (birthday of Kabir) is celebrated every year as a central festival, and attended by several followers of Kabir.

In addition to celebrating Kabir, his life and works, the Kabir Chaura Math also glorifies those who followed his teachings, respected him or otherwise showed commitment to Kabir. For example, among more than a dozen life-size bronzes, there is a statue of Shruti Gopal Saheb, formerly known as Sarvanand, a Brahmin pandit from South India. Despite visiting Kabir to prove his intelligence, he eventually became Kabir's disciple and is believed to have been appointed by Kabir to lead the Kabir Panth in Varanasi. There is also a bronze of Gandhi at Kabir Chaura, which commemorates his visit to the Math



The Kabir heritage: (clockwise from left) Priest Shri Balu Bhai inside the meditation room at the Kabir Lahartara Temple, located near the site where the infant Kabir was discovered by Neeru and Neema, who raised him as their own; a modern reproduction of a vintage painting of Kabir sitting with Muslim visitors who have brought offerings of pomegranates and bananas; artifacts from Kabir's life: two trishulas, two fire pokers and a wooden water vessel; a painting of the poet wearing a turban adorned with a peacock feather

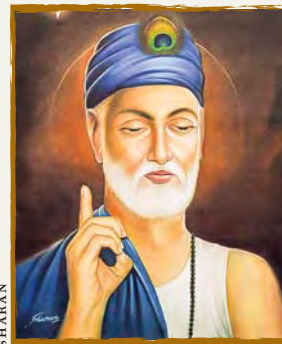
in 1934. These statues of devotees and followers are displayed alongside kiosk signs sharing the history and stories with visitors. One source claims there are nine million adherents to the Kabir Panth.

Champion of the Downtrodden

By Dr. Rajani Kant, Director/General Secretary Human Welfare Association, Varanasi

THE WORDS OF KABIR RELATE MOST DIRECTLY TO the common man, the disadvantaged section of society, the marginalized communities that face struggles and discrimination based on financial status, jati, creed and gender. He demonstrates in his poetry a revolutionary attitude toward the rulers of his society in favor of the common community.

Sant Kabir has several times said that God is much closer to the poorest of the poor, who are open-hearted, honest and dedicated towards their life, than



to so-called religious people who have created the myth that only they can afford God's blessings through their resources. His dedication to uplifting the poor and the humble relates directly to the social service work to which my life is devoted. His attitudes in this regard stem from his own early life, growing up in a community of poor handloom weavers. He spoke boldly against the religious orthodoxy of his day, preaching respect for everyone, without discrimination, and arguing that all places are equally holy if your heart is transparent, open, sensitive and service oriented.

Kabir's Way with Words

KABIR'S WORDS WERE PRIMARILY IN TWO LITERARY GENRES: rhymed couplets (known as *doha*, *sakhi* or *shalok*) and lyric poems (*shabda*, *shabad*, *pad* or *bhajan*), in addition to the *ramaini* and folk song forms. The lyric poems, commonly known as bhajans, vary in meter and are usually six to eighteen lines in length, while the couplets are comprised of four half-lines (Hess 1987: p. 113). These forms are placed in separate sections in written compilations such as the *Bijak*, but are fluidly presented in oral performative contexts. For example, a bhajan is oftentimes preceded by a thematically related *doha* or a string of *dohas*. The meter and melody of the couplet is often different from that of the main song. Additionally, the singer has the poetic license to repeat certain words or phrases, instilling additional layers of meaning and emotionality in the listeners' hearts. A literary device often found in Kabir's poetry is repetition with variation, and this can appear as a series of negations, repeated words, or grammatical structures. Hess, in *The Bijak of Kabir*, makes an insightful comment about how, while other bhakti poets such as Mirabai, Surdas and Tulsidas address most of their poems to God, Kabir addresses his words directly to us. This

gives rise to the art of the rhetoric, using language to engage, affect and awaken people. Kabir's verses are filled with verbs and calls to action, tucked into extended metaphors, compelling arguments, dialogues and monologues (1983: p. 9-15).

Good translations allow non-Hindi speakers to appreciate the genius of his poems. A common rule when translating is that the smallest element of translation may not be a word, but a phrase, sentence or even paragraph, as there is much more than literal meaning to communicate. The most famous English translations of Kabir's poems were, until in more recent decades, those of Rabindranath Tagore published in 1915. Later, in 1976, American poet Robert Bly published newer versions of Tagore's translations. Both of these are still talked about, though we have more contemporary and arguably better English translations today; most notably those by Kabir expert and Stanford University professor Linda Hess. Her renderings pay close attention to meaning, structure, as well as the orality that is the backbone for all of his words. Hess's books, articles and intuitive translations have served as a foundation for this educational insight.

Kabir was a master of language, evidenced by the way he used

powerful words to communicate the subtlest of ideas in the most blatant way. He was a fierce social critic and iconoclast who probed and questioned, challenged and exposed, and ultimately jolted his audience into facing the many truths of life and death. This was the case especially in the *Bijak*, as the other two major manuscripts with Kabir's works, *Guru Granth* from Punjab and *Panchvani* from Rajasthan, contain more bhakti-oriented (Vaishnava, in this instance) sentiments and language (Hess 1987: p.117). Kabir's poetry most often includes an element of ridicule that makes his words not only poignant but also highly provocative. More often than not, the opening line would grab a listener's attention:

Hindus, Muslims,
both deluded, always fighting.
Yogis, sheikhs, wandering Jains,
all of them lost in greed.

(Hess 2015: p.294)



Kabir's language was at times so biting that the Sikhs did not include those portions in their texts. At an earlier stage, some poems were considered in line with Nanak's teachings, but were later viewed as too problematic with the evolution of the Sikh tradition. The *Guru Granth* consists of hymns of the Sikh gurus, as well as works of Hindu and Muslim saints, including Kabir. Of all the bhagats and Sufis whose works were included, Kabir's contribution was the largest, with 541 poems (Dass 1991: p.7). Hess refers to the fascinating work of Gurinder Singh Mann, who found that two Kabir poems were included in the *Kartarpur Pothis* (1604), but later marked as "useless" and excluded from the *Adi Granth*. She explains, "Both were *ulatbamsi*, 'upside-down language' poems with outrageous, nonsensical, sometimes shocking imagery" (Hess 2015: p.141). His *ulatbamsi* poems belonged to a long-standing Indian poetic tradition that expressed concepts in bizarre forms but served as rhetorical and teaching devices, though it was certainly not everyone's cup of tea.

Couplets from the *Bījak*

If you know you're alive,
find the essence of life.
Life is the sort of guest
you don't meet twice. 10

The three worlds are a cage,
virtue and vice a net.
Every creature is the prey,
and one hunter:
Death. 19

Color is born of color.
I see all colors one.
What color is a living creature?
Solve it if you can. 24

Who recognizes Ram's name,
the bars of his cage grow thin.
Sleep doesn't come to his eyes,
meat doesn't jell on his limbs. 54

The best of all true things
is a true heart.
Without truth no happiness,
though you try
a million tricks. 64

So what if you dropped illusion?
You didn't drop your pride.

Pride has fooled the best sages,
pride devours all. 140

The mind: a mad killer-elephant.
The mind's desires: hawks.
They can't be stopped by chants or charts.
When they like, they swoop and eat. 145

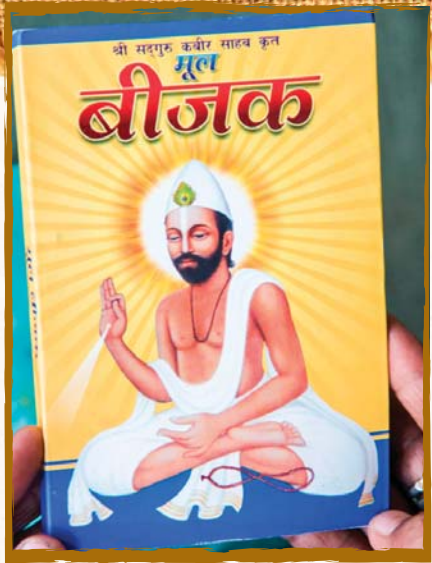
From good company, joy.
From bad company, grief.
Kabir says, go where you can find
company of your own kind. 208

Three men went on pilgrimage,
jumpy minds and thieving hearts.
Not one sin was taken away;
they piled up nine tons more. 214

Do one thing completely, all is done;
try to do all, you lose the one.
To get your fill of flowers and fruit,
water the root. 273

A sweet word is a healing herb,
a bitter word is an arrow.
Entering by the door of the ear
it tears through the whole body. 301

If you're true, a curse can't reach you



and death can't eat you.
Walking from truth to truth,
what can destroy you? 308

Dying, dying, the world keeps dying,
but none knows how to die.
No one dies in such a way
that he won't die again. 324

Source/references:
Hess, Linda, and Sukhdev Singh. *The Bijak of Kabir*. San Francisco: North Point, 1983.

Popular Bhajans

Jhīnī jhīnī binī chadariyā
Subtle, subtle, subtle is the
weave of that cloth.

What is the warp
what is the weft
with what thread
did he weave
that cloth?

Right and left
are warp and weft
with the thread at the centre
he wove that cloth

The spinning wheel whirled
eight lotuses, five elements,
three qualities, he wove
that cloth

It took ten months
to finish the stitching
thok! thok! he wove
that cloth

Gods, sages, humans wrapped
the cloth around them
they wrapped it
and got it dirty
that cloth

Kabir wrapped it with such care

that it stayed just as it was
at the start, that cloth.

Subtle, subtle, subtle
is the weave of that cloth.

Tū kā tū
You, only you

Hey wise wanderer, what's the
secret?
Just live your life well.
In this world, flowers, branches—
wherever I look,
you, only you.

An elephant is you
in elephant form,
an ant is just a little you. As
elephant driver
you sit on top. The one who drives
is you, only you.

With thieves you become a thief,
you're among the outlaws too.
You rob someone and run away.
The cop who nabs the thief is you,
only you.

With givers you become a giver,
you're among the paupers too.
As a beggar you go begging.

The donor is you, only you.

In man and woman
you shine the same,
Who in this world
would call them two?
A baby arrives and starts to cry.
The babysitter is you, only you.

In earth, ocean,
every creature, you alone
shine forth. Wherever
I look, only you.

Kabir says, listen seekers,
You've found the guru
right here, right now!

Sākhīyā vā ghar sab se nyārā
O friend, that house is utterly
other where he lives, my
man, my complete one.

There's no grief or joy,
no truth or lie,
no field of good and evil.
There's no moon or sun,
no day or night,
but brilliance
without light.

No wisdom, no meditation,
no recitation, no renunciation,
no *Veda*, *Quran*,
or sacred song.
Action, possession, social

convention, all gone.

There's no ground, no space,
no in, no out, nothing like
body or cosmos,
no five elements, no
three qualities,
no lyrics, no couplets.

No root, flower, seed, creeper.
Fruit shines
without a tree.
No inhale, exhale, upward,
downward,
no way to count
breaths.

Where that one lives,
there's nothing.
Kabir says, I've got it!
If you catch my hint, you find
the same place—
no place.

Source/references:
Hess, Linda. *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in Northern India*. New York: Oxford UP, 2015.
Hess, Linda. *Singing Emptiness: Kumar Gandharva Performs the Poetry of Kabir*, p. 60–101. London: Seagull, 2009.

Poet's Praise

"Singing Kabir is always an uplifting experience. Kabir, the no-nonsense mystic poet, talks of yoga (awakening of the kundalini) as the only way to reach God/higher planes of existence. His singular message of looking inwards and finding the entire universe there is timeless. I no longer feel compelled to enter big temples or other such holy places, which have become commercial business hubs under

the garb of religion. Kabir's message of doing away with discrimination of all kinds is still relevant today in an era rife with religious-social hatred and global terrorism. Kabir brings me peace and hope. He is a guiding light for my spiritual journey."

Pushkar Lele, Hindustani classical vocalist who specializes in Kabir and sings in the style of the legendary Kumar Gandharva (www.pushkarlele.com)

"To me, Kabir's appeal comes from the fact that you cannot place a finger on his affiliation with just one religious tradition. He

personifies the nature of life, with its lack of clearly defined boundaries. Today we live in a world where people function as fluid entities more than ever before, and in this current context his appeal is great. From a musical standpoint, he speaks to that part of my identity that seeks to create outside borders. His ideology complements artistic identities that incorporate a myriad of influences."

Aks (Ashwin Subramanian), Indian-American composer and vocalist who features Kabir extensively in his albums and live shows of contemporary devotional music (www.akscomposer.com)

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Special Acknowledgement: Dr. Rajani Kant Director/General Secretary Human Welfare Association, Varanasi (www.hwavaranasi.in), was instrumental in our photo shoot at the two Kabir maths in Varanasi.

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Where to Place Kabir?

An Interview with Professor John Stratton Hawley, Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, Conducted by Archana Nagarajan

WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON KABIR'S HINDU-NESS? The Sikhs claim him, the Muslims also. While his God certainly transcends the proprietary claims of faiths, it seems to us he stood most firmly on Hindu soil. Would you comment?

JH: One of the striking things about Kabir is that in a certain cluster of very well-known poems he sets Hindus and Muslims opposite to one another, rhetorically speaking—what the *qazi* does wrong and what the *pundit* does wrong. And those “wrongs” look an awful lot alike. So I find it pretty hard to locate Kabir as standing on either side of the fence. What he's really saying is: There is no fence! Or if you think there is a fence, well, I don't care about it very much.

You mention the Sikhs. We have a story about how Kabir met Baba Nanak in Banaras—a great story, but I'm skeptical that any such meeting happened in historical time. Certainly we don't have anything in Kabir's poetry that reveals an awareness of Sikh teaching as such. And yet it's crucially important that the Sikhs were among the first to collect Kabir's poems and set them down on paper—in 1604 in the *Kartarpur Bir*, which formed the backbone of the *Guru Granth*. He also appears in the *Goindval Pothis*, which may have been composed as early as the 1570s, though we have no dated manuscripts. That's early! If what would make Kabir Hindu is that Hindus have embraced him—which by all means they have—then we'd have to make him Sikh by the same token.

So I'm worried about calling Kabir Hindu or Sikh—or Muslim, for that matter. I think he would rebel. But what about Vaishnava? There you could make a case. Maybe you think of that as a subset of “Hindu,” but as it relates to Kabir, I wonder. At least, I don't think that's how he thought about things.

Think of all those poems where he intones the name of Ram. There's nothing in his poetry to suggest that he cares at all about the *Ramayana*—he never tells any part of that story, so far as I know—and yet: Ram! Ram as the name of the place where Kabir takes refuge. I've just been putting together an essay entitled “Can There Be a Vaishnava Kabir?” In the end I think we have to say yes to that. How can we not? There are poems in the first dated text that gives us access to Kabir—the 1582 anthology from Fatehpur, which especially features Surdas—and they just don't make sense if you try to get rid of the names of Krishna that appear there, Madhav or Banvari. If these poems belong to Kabir—and I can't see how we can cast them out—then he has to be a Vaishnava.

But what is this Vaishnavism? It's a sort of “vulgate” Vaishnavism—a very big-tent Vaishnavism. It makes us stand outside the yard that we usually think of as being bounded by a Vaishnava fence. That's where Kabir's Ram is: beyond any fence.

So is Kabir Hindu? I guess I'd like to turn that question on its head. I'd ask not whether Kabir fits the Hindu mold, but whether we can think of Hinduism in somewhat different terms than we usually do. This kind of Hinduism would have to be a religion eager to embrace Kabir without denying that Muslims and Sikhs have a perfect right to do so at the same time.



AR: Professor, you know Hindi and have encountered his works more directly than most of our readers will be able to. How would you characterize his vernacular? Was he a Shakespeare? An Omar Khayyam? A Kahil Gibran? Please compare his linguistic style with poets and songwriters we know.

JH: Well I'll tell you what comes to mind: Bob Dylan! I guess it's the contrarian voice, and the way Dylan undermined what counted as music in his time. And you know what? People couldn't get Dylan's music out of their heads—just like Kabir. But you could go farther—the Beatles, maybe, or Chuang Tzu, or Luther. And we better not forget about the American poets who have been so eager to take on Kabir themselves—Robert Bly in our own time, and earlier, Ezra Pound.

AR: How would you connect the poet with the bhakti movement?

JH: If Kabir is part of what we call the bhakti movement, it's only because that idea has been fashioned in significant part precisely to make him so. I've tried to make that case in my recent book *A Storm of Songs*. I love it that we look back and try to find analogies between aspects of Kabir and what we find in much earlier South Indian bhakti poetry. But I doubt there's a real lineage there, certainly not one that got passed from guru to pupil through the ages.

And the idea that bhakti might just be the groundwork for higher self-realization? Oh man, would Kabir have a few things to say about the conceits built into that one! I think he would have rejected it out of hand.

AR: Does the bhakti of Kabir allow for a pure non-dual perception of the cosmos? Can his God be All and in all? Is his God all-pervasive? Is his God transcendent as well as immanent?

JH: Yes to all of that. But I wonder whether Kabir would have liked the self-ascribed purity that your question seems to imply—“pure non-dual perception.” He did seem to hold himself up as an example of what he was trying to get across—he talked out of his own experience—but I don't think it was because he thought he was purer than anybody else. More non-dual than thou? I don't think so.

AR: Kabir has been heavily criticized for his depiction of women. Most say that he deemed them contemptuous and the main reason for male sin. Yet, there a disparity in his writing when he goes from this: “Woman ruins everything when she comes near man; Devotion, liberation, and divine knowledge no longer enter his soul;” to actually taking up a female persona: “My body and my mind are in depression because you are not with me. Then what is this love of mine? The bride wants her lover as much as a thirsty man wants water.” Can you comment?

JH: You've put your finger directly on one of the great Kabir debates. Purushottam Agrawal has been eloquent in trying to explain how we can live with this disparity, and Linda Hess no less so. It's a big job, but I love this debate because it keeps us honest. It keeps us from deifying Kabir—or at least granting him sainthood. It makes us aware that he was a man of his times: how could he not be? And maybe it helps us feel a little more comfortable with the unruly paradoxes of sexuality that continue to confront us all.

AR: Given Kabir's contribution to the bhakti movement, would you say that his view on women would be a good representation of that of the movement? The Bhakti movement strived for equality and attempted to ignore the jati system, was this of any benefit to women at all?

JH: Well, I guess I have to confess right off the bat that I've



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, MANHATTAN

recently spilled a few words trying to call into question the historical reality of the very bhakti movement you've just affirmed. It's my *Storm of Songs* again. But never mind. Speaking of Kabir's own time, the sixteenth century, Mirabai comes to mind. Now there clearly is a figure who's come to serve as an example of how bhakti can be liberating for women—I mean, some women have felt that. Others have not. But in any case we have to remember that there is only a single poem of Mira's that can be firmly dated to the sixteenth century, her own. One! So who is this Mira we're talking about? Yes, her story was being told even then, and already in different ways, but who was she?

With Kabir it's much clearer. Here we have a flood of words that were remembered as his own in the sixteenth century itself. Some of them, we know, concern women—either to fend them off or to

Luminaries in conclave: This art is based on a well-known Mughal miniature from the 1650s on the theme of a gathering of holy men of Indian faiths. The main figures have been identified (from left to right) as Ravidas, Sena, Namdev, an Aughar, Kamal and Kabir. The work, by artist Mir Kalan Khan ca. 1770–75, hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan, New York.

embrace what they stand for. But when Nabhadass praises Kabir in his *Bhaktamal*, we don't hear about any of that.

AR: Would you like to add anything that we haven't already talked about that you think is important with regard to Kabir?

JH: I can hear Kabir trying to shut me up.

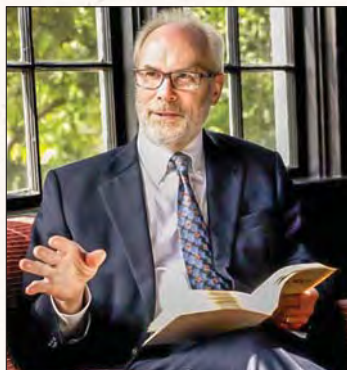
EDUCATION

Our Interreligious Future

The president of the Graduate Theological Union explains the school's vision as a unique center for multi-faith studies

BY RIESS W. POTTERVELD

THE GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION IN Berkeley, California, where I serve as president, is the largest interreligious and interdisciplinary graduate school in North America, offering masters and doctoral programs. Comprising over twenty schools, centers and institutes, it is a consortium begun in 1962 and accredited by the Western Senior College and University Commission and the Association of Theological Schools. Graduate students at the GTU enjoy cross-registration privileges with the University of California, Berkeley, Dominican University, Holy Names College and Mills College.



In the past, when courses here have addressed the religions of India, they were often taught by Christian scholars who had become interested in and intensively studied Hindu theology and traditions and who then expanded their repertory by including consideration of Hindu traditions in a course. Our teaching faculty now are largely comprised of scholar practitioners. A professor teaching the New Testament is likely to be an adherent of a particular brand of Christian belief, while a professor teaching the Vedas is apt to personally engage in contemplative practices of Hinduism.

Started as a joint PhD program and common library by Protestant and Roman Catholic seminaries, the GTU has always considered itself ecumenical and interreligious in mission. It added a Center for Jewish Studies in 1968, an Institute of Buddhist Studies in 1985 and a Center for Islamic Studies in 2007. Last December the GTU announced the opening of a new Center for Dharma Studies with an inaugural gift of \$4.4 million from Mira and Ajay Shingal. Dr. Rita Sherma has been named the first Director and faculty member of the Center.

In the Center for Dharma Studies' first year of operation, seven students applied to undertake a PhD with Hinduism as a concentration. This is just the beginning, of course, and the school hopes that many other students will enroll in the masters or doctoral program. The GTU is also offering Jain and Sikh studies for the first time, in cooperation with these communities in the Bay Area, and an MA concentration in interreligious studies. This interreligious expansion recognizes the profound importance of these Asian religions over millennia and their important role in the contemporary world, and underscores that interreligious education today needs the robust presence of all of the major world religious traditions at the table.

To support these changes, the faculty members of the Graduate Theological Union adopted a major revamping of the doctoral- and masters-level curriculum that will go into effect next fall. Traditional academic categories like Biblical Studies (long associated with Judaeo-Christian approaches) have been replaced by broader categories, such as Sacred Texts and Their Interpretation; likewise, Preaching and Worship has become Religion and Practice. These curricular changes are intended to be more inclusive of the variety of religious traditions and to create a better framework for students and faculty to pursue interreligious and comparative study.

There are four departments in the revised doctoral curriculum: Sacred Texts and Their Interpretation, Theology and Ethics, Religion and Practice, and Historical and Cultural Studies of Religion. Under these four departments, students can invest in 30 different areas of concentration, such as Hindu Theology or Comparative Ethics in Hinduism, Jainism and Indian Buddhism.

While the normative standards of academic scholarship are rigorously practiced and valued, it is very common that faculty and students understand themselves as adherents of a particular religious tradition that informs their own personal identity, beliefs and practices. The distinction here is that meditation or contemplation can be studied by a careful neutral observer who describes what he or she sees or understands from external study, but the GTU also welcomes consideration of the interior knowledge that comes with actual religious experience and practice.

This is an key distinction that separates a secular university context from that of the Graduate Theological Union. In my own case, I taught courses in religious studies at a large state university in California for twelve years, mostly in the 1980s. At the time I was also a minister in a Protestant church in the same community. It was subtly suggested that I keep my "pastoral identity" as concealed or cloaked as possible so that the university students would not see me as biased or as having lost my objectivity and neutrality in dealing with theological questions or biblical material. In that context there was a certain pride in being a scholar in the religious studies department where students were unable to determine whether the instructor belonged to a particular faith tradition or to no faith tradition at all. One student finally saw my name and church affiliation on a billboard and said, "Really....I thought Potterveld was a Buddhist." That cloaking of identity was taken as a mark of value and academic professionalism—it was considered important not to let one's own belief system intrude on the classroom presentation or discussion or to exhibit even a subtle bias.

A professor of Hindu Studies and Sanskrit at a major university confided to me her decision to record a traditional chant on her university phone as a blessing to those who would call her when she was out or unable to answer a telephone call. She reported that this created quick pushback from colleagues because, they stated, the practice revealed her own personal belief system and this was considered an incursion on the objective, scientific study of religion that



COURTESY GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION



dominated the culture of the university department.

What is different at the GTU is that it is *expected* that faculty and students can both be located within a particular religious tradition and still be able to express critical views and interpretations that vary according to the particular lenses utilized. Being clear about one's starting point or frame of reference helps others to account for a given viewpoint.

The task of finding and hiring a scholar practitioner comes up with every new religion that we add to our graduate programs. For example, we are working with a Mormon Higher Education Council in Northern California to fund a Chair in Mormon Studies. Questions emerge from the donors: Will the professor always have to be Mormon himself or herself? Does being a "member" automatically mean that the professor is incapable of critical judgment or of holding non-orthodox positions? These are questions that are particularly asked when new religions or less familiar religions are being introduced into the GTU's educational platform. In an educational environment where academic freedom is essential and rigorous scholarship and critical thinking are high values, it is important for search committees to find candidates who are comfortable living in both the academic world and within a particular faith tradition. At the GTU we have learned over the past 50 years that persons can function as teachers, researchers and mentors while being transparent about their own religious affiliation. We have also learned that there are a plurality of interpretations and beliefs that operate within the core of every human religion.

In addition to the centers and institutions already comprising the GTU, two more schools are currently pondering whether or not to become members of the consortium. The Institute of Buddhist



A center for all religions: (above) the main library and administrative offices of the independent GTU are located adjacent to the University of California Berkeley campus; (inset) the GTU logo; (below right) display cases and book shelves inside what is the largest circulating religious studies library in the world

Studies is currently an affiliate of the GTU but is in the process of seeking separate WSCUC accreditation and might choose to become a member school in the future. The addition of these schools would add even more educational resources to this unique consortium dedicated to the study of the world's major religious traditions.

Today students may choose to study religion even when they do not situate themselves within any particular religious tradition. An increasing number of persons classify as "nones" (not affiliated with any particular religious tradition) and may not go to church, synagogue, mosque or temple. They may practice a wide and eclectic set of religious or spiritual ideas drawn from multiple traditions. All of these realities suggest that a formal program of religious graduate education needs to provide flexibility and an opportunity for students to shape their own study.

Our hope is that the capacity to offer deep study of Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Sikh traditions along with the other major religions of the world will create a unique and needed platform for interreligious and interdisciplinary study in the 21st century.



ALL PHOTOS: SUSAN CAPERNA LLOYD



Reverence for the Divine Feminine:
(clockwise from far left) Goddess Kali is worshiped at one of the Pandals, a temporary structure built to house the Goddess throughout Navratri; Saint Sara Kali is dressed in 57 capes by the Roma gypsies in France; Sara Kali is paraded through Saintes Maries de la Mer before being submerged in the Mediterranean Sea; signs announcing Kali puja are seen everywhere throughout Kokata's streets; Kali's Dakshineswar Temple just outside Kolkata

Mediterranean Sea the following year.
It is said the Roma have roots in India.

They began their westward migration from there a thousand years ago. Perhaps it is within Sara Kali that the Roma had not fully forgotten the Hindu Kali, an important Deity in India? I wondered, "Is there any connection between the two?" These were questions for a cultural anthropologist. So, with my camera in hand, I became something of one, hoping to find answers to questions that so fascinated me.

But this curiosity to find Roma roots or meet the Hindu Kali wasn't the only reason I went to India. Just a few years before this journey, my two younger sisters had tragically died. Then my father died, and lastly my mother. I was alone. I could not let go of these deaths. My family's souls were like ghosts

that haunted me. Anger and grief hung over me like a cloud, and I now feared my own death. This affected the way I was living; it prevented me from living.

I began to talk with Hindu friends in the US about the Goddess Kali. She was the female aspect of God. She was dark, they said. I could bring to Her my anger and fears and She would absorb them. I was told that Kali emanated from Durga and battled demons, and that sometimes She got carried away in Her fight. I could easily relate to this in myself. Siva—Kali's consort—had to stop Her in Her fury and is thus found laying down at Her feet. Who or what might stop my fury, I wondered? And so I went to India, to speak with Kali.

THE GODDESS

Discovering Divinity in Dissolution

How one woman's curiosity led her to a profound encounter with Goddess Kali, affording her peace in the aftermath of personal loss

BY SUSAN CAPERNA LLOYD

MY INSPIRATION TO TRAVEL TO KOLKATA was thanks to the saint of the Roma gypsy people, Sara la Kali. I had recently watched her immersion in the Mediterranean Sea during what is known as her annual feast day, on May 24th in Saintes Maries de la Mer, France.

Sara la Kali is a Catholic saint who is traditionally dressed with 57 robes. Each year, thousands of gypsies carry this delicate,

Asian-faced Goddess to the shores of the sea to be submerged. During the event that year, I, too, entered the water.

I knew this immersion was of Goddess Shakti, although no one mentioned it at Saintes Maries. But I knew Shakti was important. I had followed the trail of other black deities in France and Italy—dark Catholic saints revered in sanctuaries, healing those who came to them. Deities which had mysteriously floated to Mediterranean shores a

thousand years ago or more—by all accounts I heard, they had come from the East.

I noted that the gypsies at Saintes Maries faced Sara Kali to the east when they brought her to the sea. Four horsemen on white steeds sheltered their saint in the water and held tridents aloft. A symbol of the Greek's Poseidon maybe, or perhaps of the Hindu God Siva? Following her immersion, Sara Kali is then returned to the church to await another feast day and immersion into the





A sacred art: (above) A sculptor in Kolkata's Kumartuli district works on a clay image of the Goddess; (left) another craftsman in the district works on the painted designs that will be applied to a Kali whose face is yet to be completed

I arrive in Kolkata during Kali Puja (Navaratri), at the end of October, 2014. Huge posters of Kali are everywhere in the teeming city—Her fierce face, Her tongue out, six flailing arms, three with weapons and three in gestures of healing. I immediately walk to Babu Ghat, where Kali will soon be immersed in the Hooghly River, a tributary of the Ganga. Tomorrow it begins. Brahmins sleep in the ghat's entryway. Other pilgrims bathe or gather water from the river in terracotta pots. I am a foreigner, but the pilgrims smile at me as I sit on the ghat's steps.

There I ponder the impossible; I have been told that by tomorrow night, 10,000 statues of Kali will come here.

That first afternoon, I visit Kolkata's Kumartuli District workshops—literally “God’s own Workshop”—in one of the oldest areas of the city. It is here that these sacred forms of the Goddess are created. A guide, Shekar, accompanies me. It is a tented area covering several city blocks. Intricate and elaborate statues of Kali in all sizes crowd the alleyway studios in various stages of completion. Artisans show me how the Kalis are

made. From gathered Ganga mud, they are put into molds. Armatures are created from wood and straw. Molded parts are affixed and faces painted on Kali, on Siva beneath Her and on Siva's Naga, the snake. Black hair is attached to Kali and crimson saris cover Her body. She wears necklaces of the heads of demons. What craftsmanship. I want to take one home with me. There are thousands.

The workers heave the Kalis onto trucks and bring them to the pandals—the Kolkata neighborhood altars where they will be worshiped until their submersion. There are thousands of pandals across Kolkata. Some large with faux marble columns and fine fabrics, all on stages with lights. Some pandals are small and humble. The neighborhoods sponsoring them are proud no matter the size or complexity.

That night fireworks rocket through the sky as priests at the pandals chant prayers to Kali from ancient scriptures. Incense billows as She watches. The priests offer Her sweets, red hibiscus flowers, rice and lentils. Private homes even have mini pandals and hire priests to chant prayers through the night. At one large pandal I am invited to have a late supper in the community room of the apartment block.

This is all building up to Kali's fate: She will soon be immersed in the Hooghly. All 10,000 images of Her. The pandals must give Kali up. But this is exciting. Her true home is the river. After all, the river, its mud, is what



Worship: (above) another stunning Kali at a neighborhood pandal; (right) devotees give offerings of incense to the Mother Goddess at a streetside shrine

forms Her.

The next afternoon is the big day. I gather my camera gear and head to Babu Ghat. The first Kalis come in. Small ones, maybe three feet tall. Some families bring them in rickshaws. They carry Her down Babu Ghat's stairs and through the mud. At the river's shore they turn Her three times clockwise, reverse clockwise, again, repeat, and again. She is now ready for immersion. They take Her into the water and the carriers tip Her. Down She goes. The beautiful Deity floats for a moment, then sinks.

More Kalis come. Now they are ten feet tall, then fifteen feet. The fierce-looking Kalis come to the water. Over they go. They sink. So many beautiful statues destroyed.

Through the night, thousands more Kalis come to the ghat. They get bigger and bigger. By 4 am the largest Kalis arrive. Trucks line up for miles, loaded with the Kali from their pandals. Each waits its turn. Emanations of Kali appear—the *Mahavidyas*, in all Her forms. So many Kalis. I am dumbstruck. The biggest is 40 feet tall. It takes 40 carriers to get Her off the truck, onto a sledge, through the mud and down to the river—a gargantuan effort. The crowd is in a frenzy. They dance around Kali. How can they now tip the gigantic Kali over? It is difficult. A final strain by the crowd of carriers and She goes over. Then down in a huge splash. Her face floats in the water, then She disappears.

Dissolution. Impermanence. I think of the Catholic statues of the Black Madonna I have seen brought to other far-off waters and immersed—Sara Kali being one of them. But





ALL PHOTOS: SUSAN CAPERNA LLOYD

Embracing the end as a new beginning:

(top from left to right) one of thousands of Kalis is paraded to the river, accompanied by dancing devotees; one of the largest is brought to the River; the Goddess is submerged in the waters; Kali emerges from the river; (below from left to right) the clay Kalis are all pulled from the river and piled together on the bank; the ghats at Varanasi; a puja is performed for the author's deceased family, releasing them to move on; in the morning, Mother Ganga shines golden in the light of the rising sun

these Catholic deities are then saved. I wonder what they are saved for, or what from? From death? They are not destroyed; they are brought back to their respective churches for another immersion the following year.



Here, all of the remains of Babu Ghat's Kalis are soon fished out of the water. But She is nothing now. Her beauty has disintegrated. A giant crane lifts the remains out of the water; unrecognizable; parts. Who is this Diety? The crane deposits the remains in a giant mountain of debris to the side of the water. Women scramble up the mountain to find a fragment of a sari or perhaps a silver crown. The wooden armatures are recycled. The people tell me they will be reused the next year. Kali will be made again.

With the other women I climb up the heap. I want to experience the dissolution of Kali. Her angry, smashed face, Her parts torn asunder. We step on Siva, as She has stepped on Him. We all step over our fears and our demons. Everything is a jumble. Siva, His face is mixed in with parts of Kali. The Naga, in pieces. All returned to the earth, to the river,

and now, perfect nothing.

I have spoken to Kali through the night. I have seen Her fierce beauty. The demons around Her neck which She has killed. I see what Her lesson is. She has concluded, the fury has stopped. She must now return to the river.

Shakti experienced in a new way. Madness, and anger become nothing. But it is not death. It is something else. Is it possible that by joining with these women on this heap, my own anger and fears can dissipate? I have experienced this dissolution with the pilgrims at Babu Ghat. A ritualization of mourning. Thousands of people with their own special Kalis, perhaps feeling things similar to mine. That is the point. Sometimes one cannot do it alone. I walk along the shore and see remnants of Kali. The water and the tide will soon take every vestige of Her away.



A few days later I take this lesson to Varanasi. There I am on the Ganga proper. Varanasi is called Kashi, India's holiest place. This place is Siva's, and it is Kali's. They are tied together in creation and destruction. She is the mother to whom we must return. There are cremations at the ghats in Kashi. I am fascinated by them. I watch a family at a mother's cremation. The son officiates. When the body is fully burned, the son finds his mother's hipbone in the ashes. With a stick he hurls it into the Ganga. She, the mother, is returned to the mother water.

Shakti. Eternal Shakti. Hindus come to die in Kashi so they can return to the mother. I hope some day I can be returned like this to

the water.

And what about the grief I have felt for my family? I talk with a brahmin at Kashi about this. He says I should do my own puja. In my obsession with my family's deaths, I am hanging onto their souls. This may be trapping them in the in-between. They may not be able to reincarnate yet, the Brahmin says.

We take a boat to the other side of the Ganga. There, we create panda rice balls for each of my family members and recite mantras. We consecrate the pandas and throw them into the Ganga. I throw my family's souls away. Like Kali, at Kolkata, they sink into the Ganga. I release my suffering, I feel good. Their souls can now travel on. I then



bathe in Mother Ganga.

I experienced dissolution myself. Impermanence. Everything returns to the water, to Shakti. Although I have been raised as an Italian Catholic, I think I am a Hindu at heart. Thank you, India, and thank you, Kali.

SUSAN CAPERNA LLOYD, has been documenting cultural rituals through photography and film for many years. Specializing in black and white, she has photographs exhibited at UCLA, Columbia College (Chicago), Valparaiso University, Meridian Gallery (San Francisco), Italy, the UK and in private collections. susanlloyd2001@hotmail.com





ALL PHOTOS COURTESY STEPHEN HUYLER

CULTURE

Lord Ganesha's Sweet American Ride

With Ganapati bolted onto the hood and dancing on the doors of his Ganeshmobile, this anthropologist drives the culture of India across America

BY STEPHEN HUYLER, MAINE

EVERYWHERE I DRIVE IN THE UNITED States I am greeted with smiles. People wave, children laugh and point, occasionally someone will make a pranam in my direction. It is all because of my Ganeshmobile. It entrances everyone.

It began about twenty years ago when an elderly friend here in Maine purchased a 1930s Daimler hood ornament that he affixed to the front of his beat-up 1960s Ford pick-up. I thought it was a great idea and asked him if he could tell me where he found it. Then I realized that it truly made no sense for me to have one on my car. What would it symbolize? My work is in India. Among other things, I write books and organize exhibitions about Hinduism. Wouldn't it make much more sense for me to employ a Hindu symbol on my car?

The next time I was in Tamil Nadu, I made of point of traveling to Swamimalai, the capitol of fine, South Indian lost-wax bronze sculpting and casting. I met there with Radhakrishna Sthapati, a master artist I had previously interviewed. I commissioned him to sculpt for me a dancing Ganesh, eight inches tall, with a heavy bolt cast into its base that could be secured through the hood

of my car.

Friends had warned me that to mount such an unusual and fine sculpture on my car would be tempting fate—that it would be torn off the hood by vandals or thieves. Even though I tend to trust people, I had the sthapati create two identical sculptures for me. I was thrilled when they arrived in the mail a few months later: each an excellent rendition of a masterful Chola-style bronze. I put one aside for safety, had a hole drilled in the front of my Audi station wagon's hood, and mounted the other. I also had ordered a vanity plate from the Maine Department of Motor Vehicles that stated simply: "Ganesh".

Together the two were an immediate success. I drove the car everywhere—to Boston, New York, Philadelphia and later across the country to California and back. People would honk and wave when they saw my license plate. When the car was parked, many people would examine the dancing Ganesh with delight. It was certainly never ripped off, even when parked overnight on a Manhattan street. And although many might pass it off as pure superstition, my luck in finding parking spaces changed dramatically. All I would need to do was visualize an empty space, acknowledge Ganesh, and one would

open up wherever I needed it!

On my cross-country drive, I stopped for gas at a Navaho station in the middle of New Mexico. Near the gas pumps was a long table lined with strings of glass beads sold by a colorfully dressed Native American woman. I purchased a simple string for two dollars and doubled it to hang over Ganesh's neck like a mala. I did not even wire it on. It remains there to this day, still on the original Ganesh although mounted on a different vehicle, still only loosely hung around His neck. It has been through rain and windstorms, blizzards and even a tornado and never has even blown off! I consider it a good example of Ganesh's protective nature.

In 2005, I helped host a group of Sufi musicians from Rajasthan who came to give a concert in my small coastal town. When they first saw my car, they immediately and spontaneously gathered in front to chant a Ganesh mantra to the murti on its hood! I was deeply moved. Here was a group of Muslim men on their first visit to a foreign country singing a Hindu Ganesh mantra to an American's car!

In 2008, I wanted to be more environmentally proactive and decided to purchase a Toyota Prius. At that time demand for this



car was so high in the US that the waiting list was four months. I could not choose the color of the vehicle or what extras might be included. When I picked up my new car from the dealer in Portland, Maine, I was dismayed to discover that it was dark grey. Four decades in India has taught me to love bright colors. I never wear black or grey and I didn't want to drive such a dull-hued car. I told the Toyota dealer that I was planning to have the vehicle painted and he responded that that would be a bad choice. It would devalue the car for future resale. However, I could instead cover the grey with a vinyl wrap. When I asked what that was, he told me that it is the same process used to put graphics on the sides of busses or commercial vans. For a relatively inexpensive cost (less than having it painted), I could have my car covered with a solid shade or make it two-toned or perhaps give it a racing stripe. I am an artist. This opened for me a palette of choices!

I contacted a local design shop, Adventure Advertising, to execute the process. For the pattern to cover the car I chose my grandmother's late nineteenth century paisley shawl. In the midst of a heavy Maine winter, the designers sculpted a life-size Prius out of a snow bank and draped the shawl over it, photographing it at high resolution from each angle. To complement the Ganesh theme, we scanned a painting of a dancing Ganesh and digitally imbedded it into the shawl. They then copied these images into a template of the Prius and printed the entire thing onto adhesive vinyl, carefully adhering it to every external surface of the car. Once that was complete, they drilled the hood and remounted my Chola-style dancing Ganesh at the front. The car was finished.

When I first saw it, I was delighted, but concerned that it would be too ostentatious to drive. But as soon as I took it out on the

road, I realized I had a winner. First of all, there is something very gratifying about driving down the street with the image of Ganesh leading me wherever I go. Then the response of almost every person I pass is heartening. Frowns change to grins, eyes light up, people wave and call out. My car is boldly festive.

It has been driven across the entire country twice. Once in Asheville, North Carolina, and again in Santa Fe, New Mexico, large groups of pedestrians spontaneously broke into cheers and huzzahs, while many immediately put their hands together in a pranam and sang out praises to Ganesh. The trip each way went smoothly, unobstructed by any difficulties.

In the years since then, my Ganeshmobile has held up perfectly through rain and storms and the harsh Maine winters. The paisley finish still looks new, unblemished by any scratches, dents or peeling. Ganesh Himself still dances proudly in front, assuring me that I will always find a good parking space and that everything during my drive will go smoothly. In my cupboard at home is a second unused bronze Ganesh with a bolt in its base. It was never required to replace the first. No one would dream of harming my car or its murti. As I drive, the Navaho beaded mala blows gently back in the wind. And I am safe—assured of the best possible experience.

Stephen Huyler is a renowned cultural anthropologist documenting the peoples, arts and rituals of India. For forty-five years, his writing and photography have served as a bridge of communication between India and the rest of the world. see: www.stephenhuyler.com

Driving his talk: (opposite) Huyler in his Ganeshmobile in the driveway of his home in Camden, Maine, 2008; (clockwise from left) Steven says his Ganesh license plate and the bronze dancing Ganesh hood ornament have opened up parking spaces and protected his journeys for years; detail of the dancing Ganesh printed on the Prius' back door is derived from a Rajput miniature in Stephen's collection; Stephen and his wife Helene with in front of Mingei International Museum in San Diego where Stephen curated two large exhibitions of Indian art in July, 2009



The Battle to Thwart a New Threat: Denial of Sanskrit's Sacred Dimension

Rajiv Malhotra's new book is a tactical campaign to return the translation and interpretation of India's spiritual literature back to devout Hindu hands

BY DR. KOENRAAD ELST

RAJIV MALHOTRA'S LATEST BOOK IS NOT a work of Sanskrit scholarship. It deals not with grammar or literature, but with the politics of Sanskrit scholarship itself. *The Battle for Sanskrit, Is Sanskrit Political or Sacred? Oppressive or Liberating? Dead or Alive?* (TBFS, Harper-Collins, Delhi 2016, 468 pp) reveals and examines mechanisms of knowledge production and intellectual control in the globalized post-modern world. In particular, the author documents the American attempt to wrest control over the Sanskrit tradition from the indigenous pandits, thus disempowering the backbone of Hindu tradition.

The Battlefield

Rajiv Malhotra, now living in Princeton, New Jersey, took early retirement at 44 from a very successful business career as a computer scientist working as a senior executive in the telecom industries. He then founded the Infinity Foundation to study the power equations underlying the way Western scholars construe India. He calls himself an intellectual *kshatriya*, a warrior who fights on the field of ideology to protect Hindu culture and our scriptures from the onslaught by the West. Though he is well-informed and productive in developing and documenting relevant concepts, Western academics and even Hindu nationalist detractors have lambasted him as not having the *adhikara* (prerogative) to criticize the academic world.

In the feudal age, one's status trumped the humble consideration of whether one's words were true. In the modern age things work differently. Albert Einstein was a mere clerk with no *adhikara* when he launched the revolutionary Relativity Theory. Closer to home, Shrikanth Talageri was belittled as a mere bank clerk when he showed academics that the very readings and Vedic analyses on which they swore as evidence for an Aryan invasion from outside of India, did in fact logically prove that India itself was the homeland of the Indo-Europeans.

Malhotra may not have academic status, but the thesis of his present book is essentially right, and it is a direct challenge to the academic India-watchers.

Malhotra observes that most Hindus are not aware that a war is raging for the destruction of their civilization. They don't come out of their comfort zone, out of their career and family concerns, and hence have never developed a sense of the enormous hostility that is targeting them in the ugly wide world. Foreign experts in Arabic or Chinese tend to sympathize with the civilization or polity they study, and to defend it against prejudices and hostile stereotypes; but in South Asian Studies (the terms *Indian* and *Hindu* are taboo in those circles), the opposite is the case. When, like every immigrant group, US-based Hindus wish to correct the schoolbooks to make them less hostile and more accurate regarding Hindu history, South Asia scholars move in not to support but to thwart them.

In the face of this aggression by "experts," Hindus think that since Sanatana Dharma has survived several onslaughts, it has noth-

ing to fear from the present one. Here then is a meritorious role that Malhotra has increasingly played since he started his series of books: getting Hindus up from their cosy unconcern and into reality. In particular, he has taught them to scan the forces in the field and take an objective look at the hostile agents approaching Hindu society with flattering smiles and idealistic-sounding pretexts.

For the past, this job was done by the likes of late historian Sita Ram Goel. But very few people are equipped to map out the situation in the present, particularly the interaction between the academic world in the US and the intellectual sphere in India. The Americans' agenda of national self-interest has joined with that of the Indian secularists, who use American universities as a staging ground for their anti-Hindu assault.

Under British rule the foreigners' view of India had only limited consequences, though they did bequeath to India a Nehruvian elite. Today, the "deconstruction" of Hinduism by "experts" influences policies and socio-cultural evolutions inside India and gets broadcast into every Indian village. Indeed, even some Hindu leaders have come to intone destructive messages, such as "All religions say the same thing" (so don't worry if your daughter converts to another faith) and "Yoga is not Hindu." The Sringeri Math was about to entrust its traditions to the care of American Sanskritists, but Malhotra warned them, hopefully in time.

So, on one side of the battlefield is a sleep-walking Hindu society that doesn't realize what's happening. On the other is an ever-growing army of foreign scholars and India-watchers, allied with every divisive force inside India.

The Case of Professor Pollock

The knowledge production machine relating to Sanskrit—translations into English, commentaries, analyses, texts for university students and personal opinions of so-called experts that

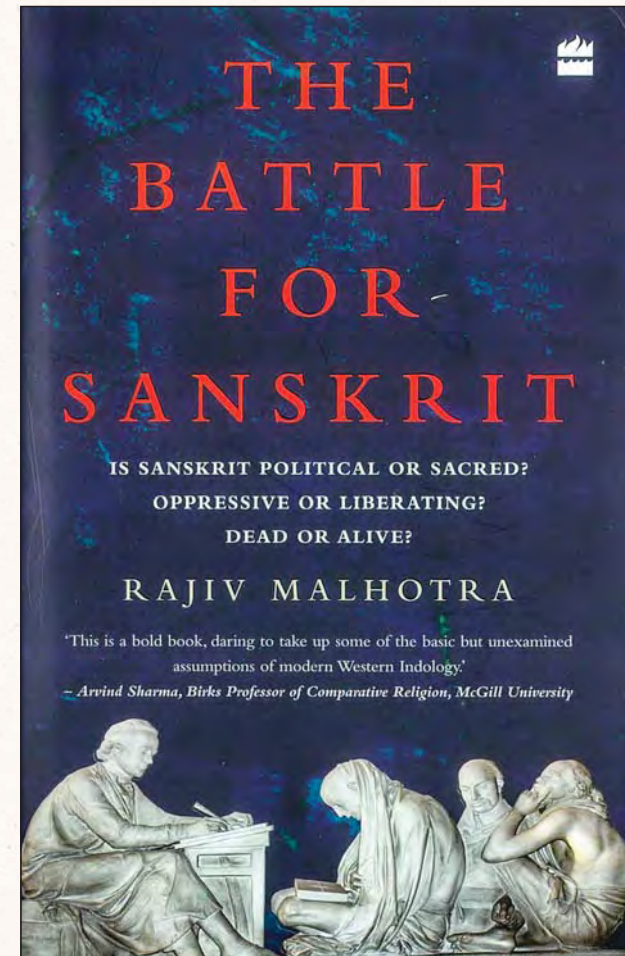
are adopted as truth by modern media, and then our own young Hindus—has moved from old school European indologists to a new breed of American scholars. In his book, Malhotra dives deep into the work of one such scholar, Sheldon Pollock—a professor at Columbia University. In a bizarre transfer of control over our literary heritage, Professor Pollock, not Hindu scholars, is now in charge of the translation and editing of hundreds of classical Sanskrit texts. Why bizarre? Malhotra shows how Pollock's approach to Sanskrit studies consistently undervalues the spiritual dimension that Hindus associate with this ancient tongue, portraying it as a language of oppression. Pollock's motives deserve the benefit of the doubt; he has for instance deplored the decline of classical studies in India, and he is attempting to fill that void. But he reproduces the negative valuation of Hinduism, which Western India-watchers are spoon fed. Do we want that aversion for Hinduism to hold sway over the Sanskrit heritage? Malhotra observes that it "would hand over the authority of Sanskrit studies to Westernized scholars using [Pollock's] political philology and not Sanskrit's own literary theories or Indian socio-political resources. Persons who are outsiders to the Indian traditions would call the shots, and even become the proxies to represent the downtrodden" (p. 178).

Ever-more born Hindus are patronized by the likes of Pollock or Wendy Doniger. In a sad scenario, these second generation Hindus become part of the academic cabal that is attacking Hinduism. The author writes, "The effect of Pollock's project on some Hindus is alienation from their roots and the development of an inferiority complex.... This alienation spreads quickly. Bright young Indians... rush to enter the university factories of this nexus and end up spreading the indoctrination to the public." (p. 327)

Many Hindus are under the impression that scholarship, including translation, is an ideologically neutral job. In reality, translation comes with an interpretative framework that insinuates a number of anti-Hindu assumptions.

Reinterpreting the Ramayana

According to Malhotra, Pollock's earlier works give us a clear indication of his position. He has openly declared that the Sanskrit language is dead. His treatment of Valmiki's *Ramayana* displays a contrived



politicized interpretation, which he terms "political philology." Anything good in the book is, of course, the product of "borrowing from Buddhism" (in accord with the reigning assumption: "Hinduism bad, Buddhism good"). So he juggles the chronology to make the Buddha predate Valmiki. Malhotra writes, "Pollock's over-arching motive is to make a chronology according to which all Hindu innovations came only after the Buddha, the idea being that prior to Buddhism the Hindus were incapable of innovation as a result of their oral tradition.... Rationality entered India only after the Buddha came, according to him, and only then did it become possible to compose complex rational texts." (p. 390)

At heart, Pollock argues the epic to be evil—a trick by Brahmins and monarchs to justify royal power, priestly authority and caste apartheid. Moreover, he claims that, in justifying the war against Ravana, the *Ramayana* essentially declares war on all outsiders, particularly the Muslims—though these invaders would only arrive a thousand years later. So Pollock champions the Muslims along with the low-castes and Dravidians against Rama's wicked aggression, thus to dislodge whatever remains of the oppres-

sive Sanskrit tradition's power and prestige.

In this now-dominant construct, Ravana is presented as a resister against Aryan aggression who is shown his place by the Aryan hegemon Rama.

The Way Forward

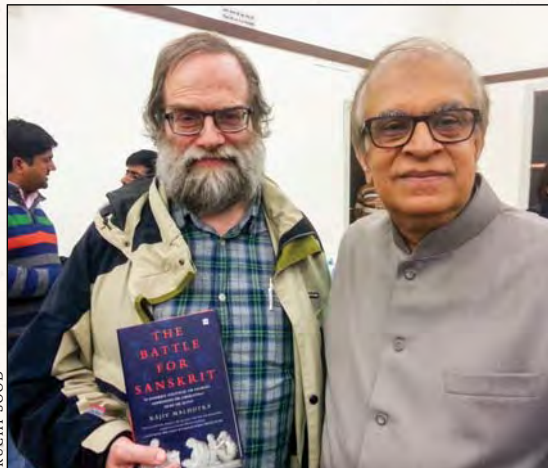
Malhotra concludes his book with a summary and a strategy. "Among the Western and Western-based indologists there are those leading an aggressive and well-organized movement to position the study of Sanskrit as a political battle ground. They claim it is infused with toxic elements supporting Vedic, brahminic and royal hegemony and that it encodes oppressive views of shudras, women, Muslims and all those who can be construed as 'others.' Most academic Sanskrit research is being taken over by two different vested interests: (a) social scientists and humanities scholars wanting to reinterpret India's past and re-engineer its future by exhuming the toxicity they perceive in Hinduism; and (b) scientists, environmentalists, spiritual seekers, self-help experts and 'new thought gurus' intent on mining its treasure of knowledge."

"I am proposing what I call a 'sacred philology,' rooted in the conviction that Sanskrit cannot be divorced from its matrix in the

Vedas and other sacred texts, or from its orientation towards the transcendent realm. Its stance would be quite different from that of the Western, secular academy. Sacred philology involves first of all a respect for, and preferably a practice of, the sadhanas that have supported the dharmic traditions for centuries, including tapasya and meditation."

Hindus Need to Study the Issues

Rajiv Malhotra has taken a powerful stand to ward off a clear and present danger and appeals to us all: "It is clear to me that many present-day Hindu leaders are ineffective in understanding and engaging the world of non-Hindus. We tend to either avoid the differences that arise or become defensive or, in a good many cases, tragically capitulate to the other side. What is needed is a dispassionate analysis of the other side that does not slip into any of these modes. We must look deeper if we are to understand the capacity (or lack thereof) of Hindus for intellectual engagement with groups that have a different world view." Every Hindu who can contribute is called upon to do their *purva paksha*—read about and understand the issues. Then, join in the struggle.



Dr. Koenrad Elst and Rajiv Malhotra: at The Battle for Sanskrit book event, organized by Samskrita Bharati at Constitution Club, Rafi Marg, New Delhi, February, 2016, one of 25 such events held across India that have ignited a fire storm of awareness to restore control of Sanskrit scholarship to Hindu practitioners



SPICE WORLD

Bitter Is Better—the Magic of *Methi*

For thousands of years fenugreek and its seeds have wielded their powers on our plates, our palettes and in nature's home pharmacies

BY LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, PHD

THOUGH LITTLE KNOWN IN THE WEST, fenugreek—called methi in India—has a three-thousand-year history of medicinal use in Egypt, southern Europe, India, Asia and northern Africa. Its medicinal value is noted in ancient writings such as the papyri found in Egyptian tombs and the records of the Roman emperor Charlemagne.

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum graecum*) also called Bird's Foot, Bockshornklee, and Greek Hayseed, is indigenous to North Africa, the Middle East, Morocco, and eastern Mediterranean countries. It is widely cultivated in India, Egypt and the Far East. Even in cold-winter areas it can be grown during spring and summer.

It is a member of the pea family, growing approximately two feet high with small trifoliate leaves. Tiny yellowish aromatic seeds are enclosed within sickle-shaped pods. The seeds are rich in nutrients, and high in protein content (about 22%), dietary fiber (about 48%) and mucilage (25%). It is a good source of minerals—phosphorus, magnesium, calcium and iron in easily absorbable form, and selenium; vitamins thiamin, niacin, riboflavin, vitamins A, E and C, and amino acids such as

isoleucine, 4-hydroxyisoleucine, histidine, leucine, lysine, l-tryptophan, and arginine. The seeds also contain a huge number of biotherapeutic compounds, including sterpenoids, alkaloids, flavonoids and phenolics.

Time-Proven Medicinal Uses

Among the six tastes classification in ayurveda, methi falls in the bitter category, which plays an important role in balancing out pitta and kapha doshas—the heat and fluid humors in our constitution. Ayurvedic, Unani and Chinese medicine all use fenu-

greek seeds and leaves for treating a wide variety of ailments, including allergies, bronchitis, diabetes, dyspepsia, edema in leg, emphysema, fever, flatulence, flu, high cholesterol, hypertension, kidney problems, and more. Its potent anti-inflammatory action helps fight a whole spectrum of ills cause by inflammation. Fenugreek seeds are widely used for female issues: menstrual cramps, childbirth pain and cervical cancer. Taken as food, methi promotes lactation in nursing mothers.

Modern Scientific Verification

Several modern scientific animal and human clinical trials have confirmed the therapeutic applications of fenugreek seeds.

Oils in the seeds and several antimicrobial compounds in the leaves have demonstrated toxicity to bacteria, parasites and fungi. Fenugreek seed sprouts have increased antioxidant profile and antimicrobial activity against *Helicobacter pylori* (H-pylori), the cause of most stomach ulcers. Fenugreek strongly inhibits the growth of *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* in a petri dish. Leaf extracts have



Methi muthiya: In this delicacy from Gujarat, whole wheat is combined with methi leaves for steamed or fried dumplings—a healthy dish especially recommended for nursing mothers



NANI'S INDIAN COOKING



FLOWERYPROSE.COM

Amazing versatility: (opposite) Fenugreek seeds; (inset) roasted and powdered leaves; (clockwise from above) fresh methi plants flourishing in the garden; methi sprouts, packed with nutrition; chopped methi leaves added to Indian flat bread; the leaves and sprouts used in a gourmet salad

shown antifungal properties.

In vitro studies of essential oils from fenugreek have demonstrated antimicrobial activity against five bacteria—*Proteus*, *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, and one yeast—*Candida albicans*. A 2008 *Oxford Journals* article reported on in vitro studies showed fenugreek extracts to be effective against resistant strains of the malaria-causing parasite *Plasmodium*.

Health Enhancement

Fenugreek absorbs and eliminates toxins and aids excretion of fecal bile acid and cholesterol. Because of its anti-inflammatory properties, it is used to treat peptic ulcers and inflamed conditions of the stomach and bowel. The seed extract is rich in mucilage, acting as a lubricant and forming a protective, healing coating over inflamed areas. Fenugreek reduces the level of calcium oxalate, the causative agent for kidney stones. It lowers LDL (bad) and elevates HDL (good) cholesterol, lowers triglyceride levels and enhances overall health by cleaning the lymphatic system. The lymph carries nutrients and removes toxic wastes, dead cells and trapped proteins. A blocked lymphatic system can mean poor circulation, fluid retention, pain, loss of energy and disease.

Several research studies have demonstrated the therapeutic potential of fenugreek seed extracts in treating diabetes. Fenugreek helps maintain healthy blood sugar levels, and clinical studies have demonstrated its hypoglycemic effects on type I and II diabetics. In vitro studies have demonstrated its stimulation of pancreatic x-cells.

As an antioxidant, fenugreek is anti-carcinogenic. Several laboratories are investigating

its value in the prevention and control of cancer. Fenugreek seed extract demonstrated 70% inhibition of tumor-cell growth in mice, compared with controls. The phytochemicals in the seed extract have been shown to inhibit human leukemia HL-60 cells and cell proliferation in the human osteosarcoma. Fenugreek seed extract has been shown to decrease the incidence of breast cancer. In animal studies, fenugreek appeared to protect against colon cancer.

Everyday Use

"Food is medicine" is the slogan of the day. Replacing junk foods in your diet with healthful, high-nutrient foods can keep many diseases at bay. Drink fenugreek-seed tea to relieve symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, colitis and diverticulitis. A gargle made from the seeds does wonders for ordinary sore throat. Drink a glass of diluted buttermilk with a teaspoon of fenugreek powder to promote digestion. Sprout the seeds for salads and sandwiches, or roast them in a skillet on low heat for a minute or two, grind to a fine powder and store in an airtight container. Grow the herb and enjoy the fresh leaves. Or simply use Indian curry powder, which contains fenugreek in addition to many other healthful spices. Google "fenugreek recipe" for a wealth of delicious recipes.

Cautions

Fenugreek in its natural form is safe and beneficial for most people. Be cautious, however, if you are considering taking it in supplement form. Food supplements usually have high concentrations of phytochemicals



LISA'S VEGETARIAN KITCHEN



SHUTTERSTOCK

and should always be used with caution. If you have food allergies, be aware that fenugreek may cause allergic reactions, such as facial swelling, breathing difficulty and fainting. Individuals allergic to peanuts or garbanzo beans may need to avoid fenugreek altogether. Do not use it if you have bleeding problems or are using blood thinners, as it may increase the risk of bleeding.

Remembering that moderation is the key to success, enjoy the many beneficial effects of fenugreek by incorporating this delicious, time-tested and well-loved herb and spice into your diet.

The Shadow Ganesha that Went Viral

A young artist who makes ordinary objects cast a divine shadow

SANA ANIL KUMAR IS A MULTI-TAL-
ented artist from a small village
near Karimnagar in Telangana, India.
He's skilled at pencil and pen draw-
ings, but his new claim to fame is shadow art.
During one of the village's frequent power
outages, Sana noticed that the shadow cast
on a nearby wall by his flashlight looked like
something. Instantly the idea came to him of
a new way to create art.

He starts by gathering all sorts of house-
hold objects—small bottles, toothbrushes,
Rubiks Cubes, paper, cups, books, shampoo
bottles, etc. He arranges these on a table and
illuminates them with the flashlight to cre-
ate a detailed work of art on the wall. He's
done Hindu Deities, celebrities, buildings,
bridges and more. A small piece can take up
to five hours, while a large Deity or person
can take eight hours. He's made over 40
such works which he photographs and posts
to Facebook—his one gateway to the Internet.
His Ganesha and Durga shadow pieces have
gone viral, and he hopes to one day put to-
gether a museum exhibit.

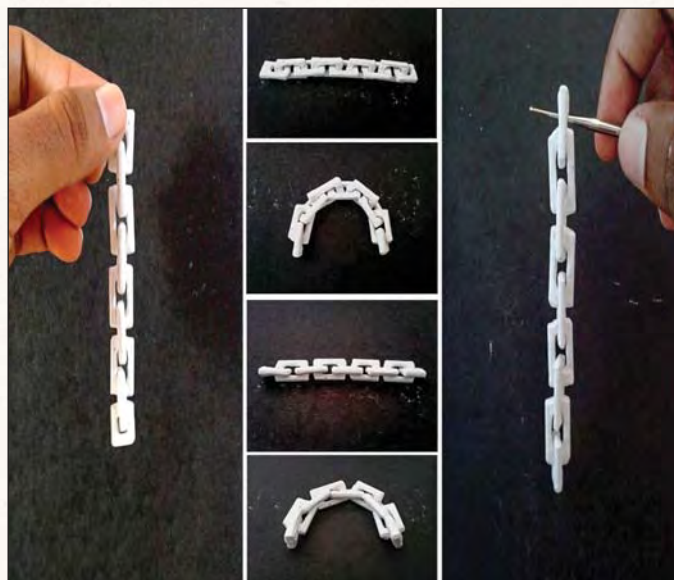
Go to his page, [facebook.com/Sanasinno-
vision](https://www.facebook.com/Sanasinno-vision), to find not only his shadow art, but
a tour de force of creativity. His art media
are ordinary and wildly diverse: sand, milk,
sugar, tea, coffee powder, salt, Eno, even dry
spaghetti. Sana has carved a scene into the
skin of an apple; and a dirty rear windshield
of a car became his canvas. He is also an ex-
cellent carver, sculpting a piece of chalk into



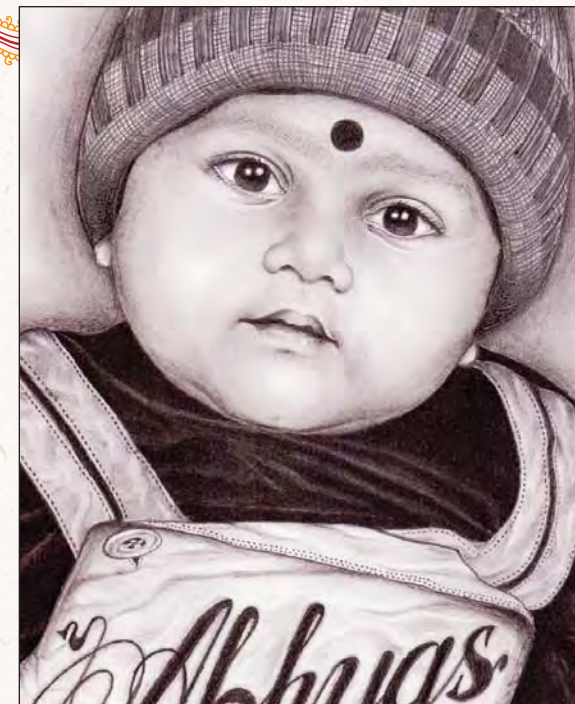
ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY SANA ANIL KUMAR

a chain with interlocking links, and turning
a pencil lead into a miniature Eiffel Tower.
Art remains a hobby for Sana, something
he does "just for fun." He has made draw-
ings for friends, and has yet to ask for any
money in return. In 2016, he won India's
National Academy of Letters' Yuva Puras-
kar award as a promising young artist.

Multi-faceted talent: (counter-
clockwise from above) Sana with his
award-winning shadow art of Lord
Ganesha; pen art of a traditional
Hindu dancer, modeled from a photo;
a miniature chain carved out of a
stick of chalk; the Eiffel Tower carved
into the tip of his drawing pencil



Art in all forms: (above, left to right, top to bottom) The Statue of Liberty,
Krishna, a Bharatnatyam dancer, Charlie Chaplain, Mahatma Gandhi,
and a moon-walking Michael Jackson; (right, top to bottom) pencil sketch
of young boy, duplicating a photo exactly; salt art of Gandhi; milk art of
Shirdi Sai Baba; apple carving of couple on a bench under a tree; coffee-
powder portrait of Bruce Lee; (below) Siva meditating next to a Lingam



You Are What Your Ancestors Ate

A new gene study investigates how the biological evolution of humans in certain regions makes them more adapted to a plant-based diet

NEW YORK'S CORNELL UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS have found a fascinating genetic variation called the vegetarian allele, which appears to have evolved in populations that favored vegetarian diets over hundreds of generations. Their study, researching geographical diets in relation to vegetarians and meat eaters, was published in March, 2016, in the Journal of Molecular Biology and Evolution.

The scientists first analyzed the frequencies of the vegetarian allele in 234 primarily vegetarian Indians and 311 Americans living today. They found the vegetarian allele in 68 percent of the Indian group and in 18 percent of the Americans. They then analyzed information from the 1,000 Genomes Project—a database of global DNA—to estimate the frequency of the vegetarian allele in far-flung populations around the world.

The differences were striking: 70 percent of South Asians, 53 percent of Africans, 29 percent of East Asians and 17 percent of Europeans had the gene variation.

Research from the study shows how humans in some regions are genetically adapted to the consumption of plant-based foods more than others. Studies have suggested that humans evolved on a diet with a ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 essential fatty acids of 1:1, but that the Western diet has a ratio that is closer to 15:1 or even 16:1. The

Mediterranean diet, in contrast, is closer to having an equal balance of the two and is recommended by many doctors.

This new study, funded by the National Institutes of Health and the US Department of Agriculture, shows that different people may need radically different ratios of these substances in their diet, depending on their genes. It supports the growing evidence against a one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition and for highly personalized advice.

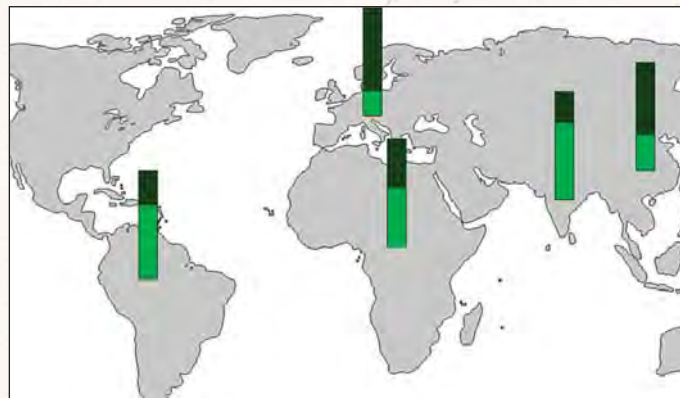
The existence of the vegetarian allele, or another form of the same gene, implies that, for people with this variation, straying from that diet—by eating a lot of red meat, for example—may make them more susceptible to

inflammation, because their bodies were optimized for a different nutritional mix.

Researcher Kaixiong Ye said the evolution of the vegetarian allele is less clear. It doesn't exist in our ape relatives, the chimpanzee or orangutan, but there is some evidence it may have been there in early hominids, Neanderthal and Denisovan. It seems likely, the researchers wrote, that it has to do with migration patterns and the pressures that came with the availability, or lack thereof, of different kinds of foods in certain environments.

In a world where we have ready access to a wide variety of foods at local groceries, these adaptations may be able to act as guidance in helping to choose the kinds of foods our bodies are most suited for.

Diets and geography: (right) The light green bars show the global frequency pattern of an allele adaptive to vegetarian diets. The allele has the highest frequency in Indians, who have traditionally relied heavily on a plant-based diet; (below) Eating a wide variety of vegetarian foods, especially those of bright colors, has been shown to enhance health in many ways



Hindu Heritage Endowment

What Do You Need to Know About Revocable Living Trusts?

Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE) encourages all families to have complete estate plans. It will make a world of difference for your family, and can also help you make a significant and lasting contribution to one or several worthy causes of your choice.

Nowadays, that means having a will, a revocable living trust, power of attorney for property management and an advance health care directive. "Dying intestate" is the legal phrase used to describe an adult passing away with no estate plan, a condition that sets up family and friends for confusion, dissension, delay and conflict at a time of great stress. Many adults die intestate. According to a recent survey by legal publishers LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell, 58% of American adults don't have a will, much less a complete estate plan.

At death, a will becomes a set of legally binding instructions that govern the distribution of your assets. Some people mistakenly think that a will avoids probate. On the contrary, a will is a ticket to probate court; but probate has the advantage of making sure your assets get distributed as your will directs. It has the disadvantage of being expensive, time-consuming and public. So, are you doing yourself and your heirs a disservice if all you have is a will?

A revocable living trust does avoid probate, but what exactly is it? Think of it as a mini-corporation that holds title to your most important possessions: your home, your investment portfolio and your cash reserves. Though you still have complete control over these possessions, you no longer hold them in your name. They are held by your revocable living trust. And just as a corporation does not go through probate when the CEO dies, your living trust avoids probate after your lifetime. Your successor trustee simply steps in and follows the rules and instructions of the trust.

Living trusts are useful during life as well. If, for example, you become unable to manage your real estate or finances through illness or accident, your successor trustee can take charge. There's no costly and embarrassing public conservatorship hearing. Revocable living trusts do have some disadvantages. They are more detailed than most wills, and so the cost of writing them is usually more than a will. Also, you must remember to transfer assets to your trust. If you do not, your living trust will remain an elaborate but empty shell, like a safe deposit box with nothing in it.

A living trust needs to be managed and its assets distributed according to its terms. Your successor trustee is supposed to take care of these important and sometimes complex tasks promptly, so choose your trustee with care. A well-managed living trust is a solace to your family and a boon to good causes. Naming one of the funds with Hindu Heritage Endowment as a beneficiary of a living trust for a percentage of your estate, a specific amount, or a specific property can usually result in a timely distribution at minimum cost. You can use your living trust to create a future endowment fund in your name or the name of a loved one. Like the gardens that surround a temple, your living trust will produce blossoms for a thousand years in the form of harvested income from your fund's principal.

For information on establishing a fund at the Hindu Heritage Endowment, contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012 x 6 or email hhe@hindu.org. New to planned giving and want to learn more? Visit <http://www.hheonline.org>.

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Anonymous	US\$213.59	Kadavul Nataraja Ardra		
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Gunasekaran Kandasamy	134.56	Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	9.00	
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	250.00	Devajyothi Kondapi	324.00	
Gayatri Rajan	75.00	Umasankaran Mohambourame	37.61	
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00	Gowri Nadason	126.67	
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Total	33,195.15			
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Other Donations	30,000.00	Thamby Kumaran	100.00	
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Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Sri Subramuniya Ashram		
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Sanjiva Thielamay	251.00	Hinduism Today Production Fund		
Maran Thondaya	111.30	Krishan Lal Saxena Family		
Jagan & Padma Vemulapalli	121.00	Charitable Fund	100.00	
Anuradha Venkatachalam	101.00	Anonymous	10.00	
Nagarjuna & Padma Yerra	175.00	Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00	
Total	1,686.66	Prabhakar C Ghosh	90.00	
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Hinduism Today Lifetime		Hiranya Gowda	62.00	
Subscription Fund		Rajiv Kaushal	72.00	
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Shridhar & Bijal Iyer	499.00	Aran Sambandar	72.00	
Anbu Kandasamy	366.00	Adi Srikantha	54.00	
Venkanna Kanna	499.00	Total	863.01	
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Jalajakshi Potluri	299.00	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	
V.J. Pratap	499.00	Matthew Wieczork	5.00	
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Sai Singh	120.00	Hindu Education Endowment		
Aneeta Rajah Sundararaj	499.00	Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	200.00	
Sanjiva Thielamay	499.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	
Total	7,179.00			

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Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		Total	2,148.60	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
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Total	210.00	India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Silvarajoo Muniandy	12.04
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Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Kulagan Moonesawmy	16.32	Rajendra Giri	108.00
Hiranya Gowda	102.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00	Gunasekaran Kandasamy	67.28
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	Total	242.32	Total	10,277.59
Total	122.00	Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Insurance Premiums	
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00	Mrunal Patel	2,002.00
Anonymous	150.00	Hindu American Foundation Endowment		Deva Rajan	12,129.38
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	Total 14,131.38	
Total	183.00	Mark Stevens	25.00	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Total	135.00	Other Donations	600.00
Benevity Donor	251.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment			
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Anonymous	23.40	Total Contributions	\$131,889.15
Anonymous	1,553.59	Dheeraj Handa	10.00	Funds at Market Value, Mar 31, 2016	
Marlene Carter	162.00	Natraj Narayanswami	33.00	Total Endowment Funds	\$13,294,184.18
Sasikumar Darmalingam	8.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00		
Rajendra Giri	110.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	Grand Total	US\$13,294,184.18
Thamby Kumaran	100.00	K. Vasanthakumari	50.00		
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Arunasalam Vathavooran	50.00		
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	Total	346.40		
Soma Sundaram	15.00				

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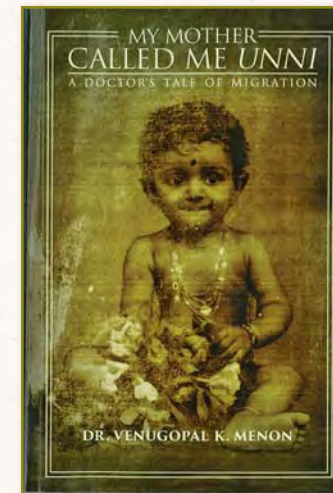
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tale of
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autobiographical
story of one among
the first wave of
Indian immigrants
to the USA.

Dr. Venugopal Menon, having been raised in pre-independence India, migrating to Scotland, then America, felt he held too much precious information, perspectives, experiences and wisdom acquired not to share with his descendants and the world. "What a loss," he thought. So, he set out to write his memoirs. The result, **My Mother Called Me Unni**, is a fascinating account of his life, adventures, and cultural and philosophical evolution. The experience of articulating it all proved so rich that he is now actively encouraging others to do the same.

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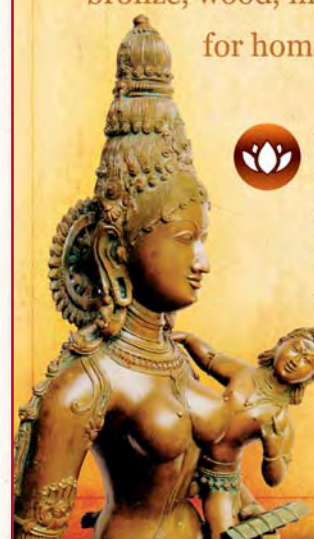
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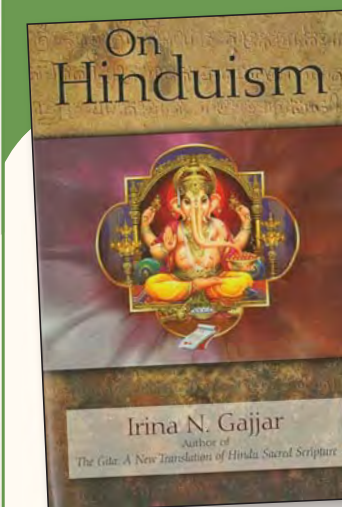


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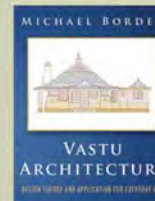
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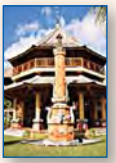
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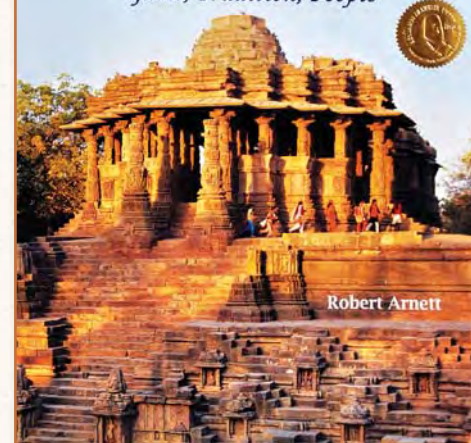
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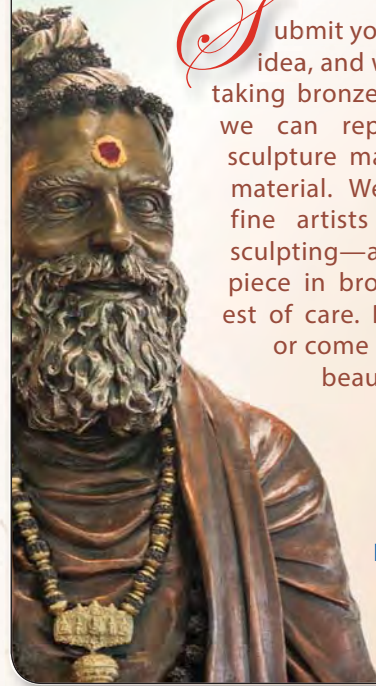
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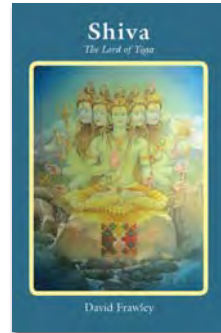
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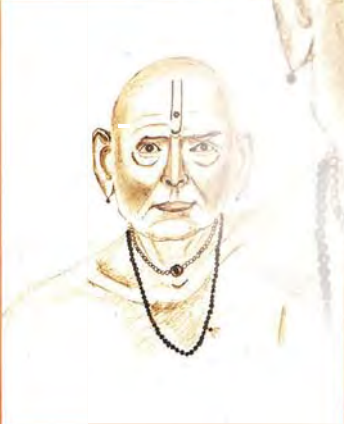
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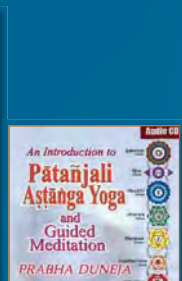
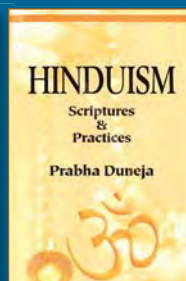
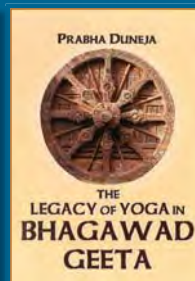
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The Ramayana Enters the Gaming World on Mobile Devices

THROUGHOUT HISTORY HINDUISM'S wealth of literature, including scriptures, poems and epics, has been passed from generation to generation. Originally transmitted by word of mouth through story, song and play, this cultural and religious wealth was eventually scribed in the written word. Over the centuries stories such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have taken many forms, in recent times on TV shows and in comic books. But can these forms of communication cut through the plethora of digital entertainment, education and distraction that fill the lives of today's youth? One company feels they have a 21st century option.

HINDUISM TODAY recently sat down with Naryanan Vaidyanathan, Director and CEO of Gamaya Inc. in San Jose, California. He and his team have developed (and are continuing to build on) *Gamaya Legends*, a game for mobile devices with the goal of presenting youth an engaging and visually rich presentation of the *Ramayana* and its characters. It also features physical toys which can interface with the game.

"As a kid, I used to enjoy visits to my grandma's house during summer vacations. She would tell us stories from Indian mythology and folklore in great detail and with powerful dictation, painting great images in my mind that have always stayed with me. When I had a daughter, I wanted her to have the same experiences and know all about these great stories and characters. So I first bought some *Amar Chitra Katha* comics that I had read as a kid. These comics were great for me, so I thought they would get her interested, but the language and artwork was from my time and didn't resonate with her. As I told her these stories every night, I thought about how kids these days need a more enriching experience. They are used to high-quality presentations like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*, and unless we can meet them at that level, these epics will fade away from their memories.

"So I set out to recreate these epics in a language kids today will understand. Our core audience is children from 7 to 14 years old, and for them we had to create something highly interactive and engaging. That's

how Gamaya got started. The word *gamaya* is from the phrase *asatoma sat gamaya*, meaning "from ignorance lead me to truth." It's also a nice combination of *game* and *maya* (illusion).

"By basing the product on the *Ramayana*, we hope to provide a window into this epic. We can't cover all aspects of it, of course—it's just too big. But the game lets kids play in the *Ramayana* universe. It gives them an introduction to the characters and their stories. We expect this to inspire dinner-time conversations where kids can learn more from their parents.

"Gamaya Legends is an action game. We are not hiding that. The *Ramayana* involves the classic hero's journey—overcoming impossible challenges, forming great alliances and fighting evil. Gamaya Legends is no different. We do avoid blood and gore and stick to fantasy/cartoon violence, and we don't go looking for reasons to add action elements.

"While playing the game, kids save legendary scrolls of the *Ramayana* from being destroyed. These scrolls have illustrations and voice-over of the original *Ramayana* story. This way they get an introduction to the story through the game. We have also created an animated cartoon series that focuses on the characters from the *Ramayana* (bit.ly/gamayalegends). This lets us go into greater detail with the characters and main story. At the end of it all, if the kids who engage with our products get inspired to know more about the epic, then our original goal is reached!

"Some of the customer feedback we've received has been very encouraging. To quote a few: 'This is a great game. I bought it for my 7-year-old son and he thoroughly enjoys it. This is a very nice way to introduce kids to such stories. Since the time my son has started playing this game, we have had several conversations about different stories at the dinner table and in the car.' Another parent said, 'My 6-year-old son knew the story of *Ramayana*, and now he is super excited to experience the characters coming to life. I cannot express my joy when he says that Rama and Hanuman are his superheroes.'"

To learn more visit: restorethelegend.com

www.hinduismtoday.com



ALL PHOTOS GAMAYA INC.

An engaging introduction: (from top) The opening screen of the Gamaya Legends mobile game; an in-game image of the gameplay as Rama battles asuras in an attempt to save the pages of the *Ramayana*; a collection of the game's physical toys, which when placed on the book-pedestal come to life in the game

