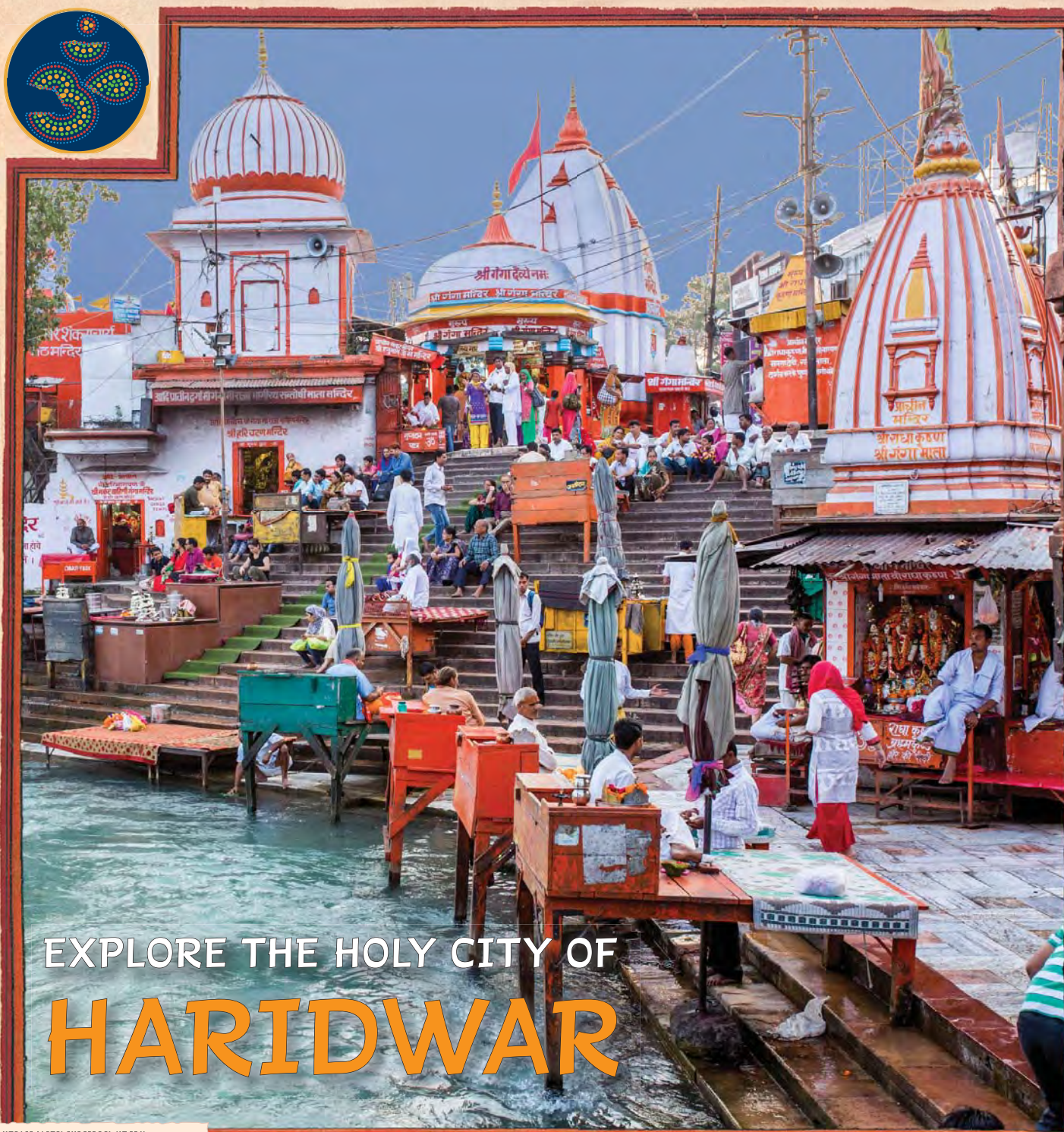


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HINDUISM TODAY

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



EXPLORE THE HOLY CITY OF
HARIDWAR

DEV RAJ AGARWAL



(cover) A morning at the Har Ki Pauri ghat in the holy city of Haridwar in Uttarakhand State where the panda priests on the red platforms serve devotees; (above) children dressed as Siva and Shakti pose for a photo at the 2015 Kumbha Mela in Nashik

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2016 • THE HINDU YEAR DURMUKHI, 5117

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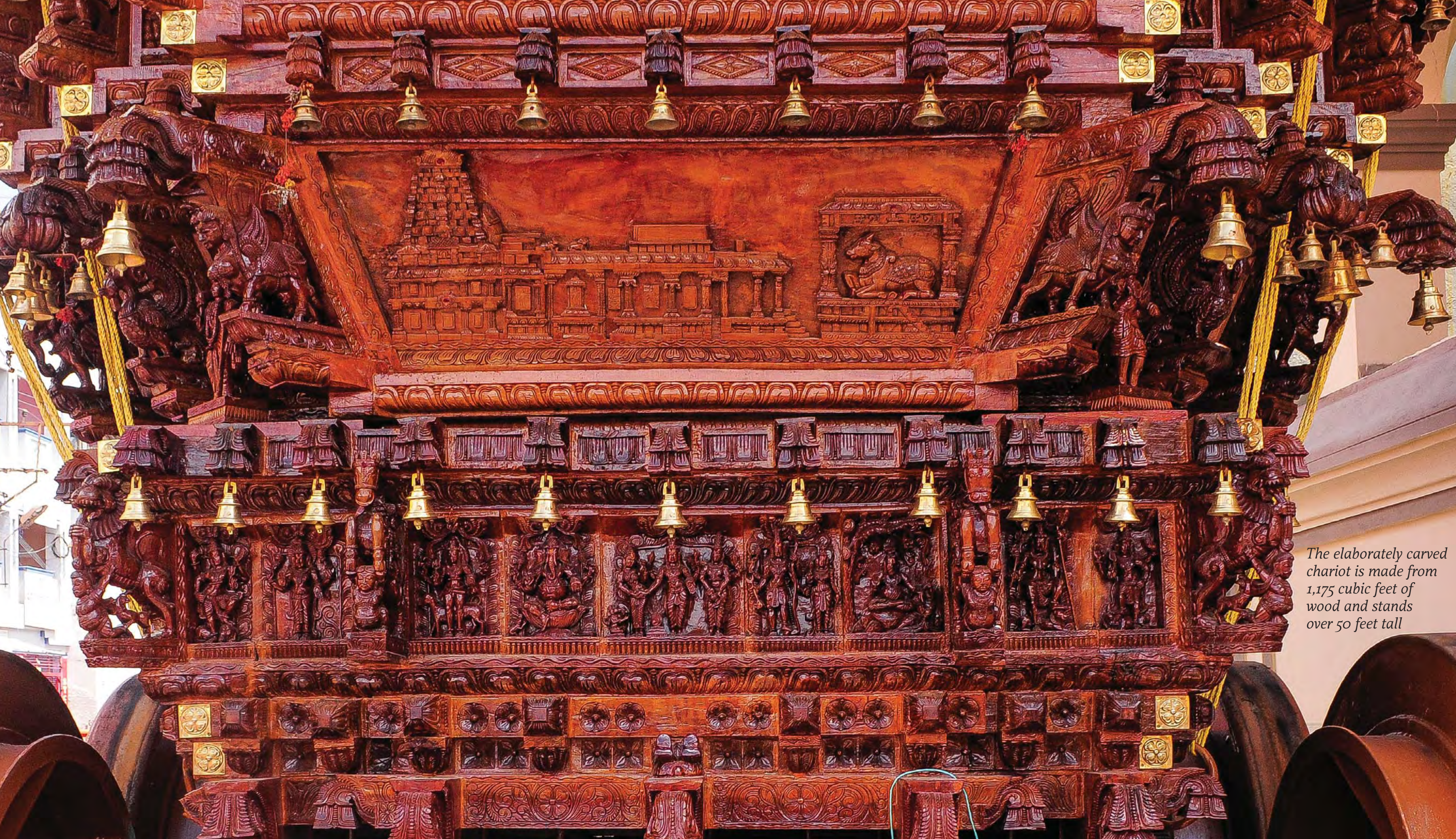

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Thanjavur's Temple Chariot



The elaborately carved chariot is made from 1,175 cubic feet of wood and stands over 50 feet tall



After a century without a functioning chariot, the ancient Brihadeeswarar Temple parades its processional Deities through the city streets once again ...Page 60

GLOBAL DHARMA

TEMPLE LIFE

Protocol in Hiring Priests

IN DECEMBER, 2015, INDIA'S Supreme Court ruled that the hiring of temple priests in Tamil Nadu may continue in accordance with the guidelines given in the age-old *Agamas*—but only so long as the specific guidelines used do not conflict with the Constitution. The fundamental right to freedom of religion, the court ruled, is not confined to doctrines and beliefs but extends to essential practices

done in pursuance of that faith.

The decision was based on Article 16(5) of the Constitution, which upholds the right of religious organizations to reserve their religious offices—including their priesthood—for members of their own religion or denomination.

The court noted that the criteria for such appointments should not include caste, birth or any other constitutionally

unacceptable factors. The court will determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether a particular appointment is constitutional.

A Tamil Nadu government order of May 23, 2006, had allowed any qualified and trained Hindu to be appointed as priest in Hindu temples. This government order had been challenged by the Adi Saiva Sivacharyagal Nala Sangam, leading to the present ruling by the Supreme Court.

.....
Long lineage: Temple priests have always followed *Agamic* custom



MEXICO

Calling All Yogis

IN DECEMBER, 2015, THE National Federation of Yoga Teachers in Mexico made an open call for expert yogis who want to be certified to teach yoga in Mexico's public schools. Grants will be available.

A pilot program is in the works for all public elementary schools in the state of Quintana Roo, in Yucatan, joining those already under way in the state of Jalisco and the Mexico City Federal District. Approval is expected for expansion of these programs in schools across the country.

Mariela Ruiz, representing the Federation, feels it is only a matter of time before yoga is taught in every public school in Mexico.



"The National Federation of Yoga has come up with the idea of supporting education in Mexico by promoting yoga as a sport to reduce both obesity and bullying, to change the direction of the children and have a better

society," Ruiz said. "This is not new. It is used in other countries; it reduces the children's stress and enables them to be more successful in their studies."

It is estimated that at least 2,000 teachers will be needed to meet the demand. "One would need to be certified by the Federation to be part of this project" Ruiz added. She also said that Tulum city is "a portal for yoga and there is the possibility of the Federation also certifying people who are not Mexicans."

.....
Taught by professionals: (left) Elementary children practicing simple yoga

POLAND

Hinduism for Everyone

A NEW CHAPTER OF THE Hindu Students Association has opened in Poland, spearheaded by a young woman who became a Hindu after years of soul searching. Born to a Catholic family, Joya Patrycja Krishnadasi became disillusioned with her faith and began a search for spirituality. After years of studying on Muslim websites and at the local Mosque, she felt ready to convert to Islam. But then she began studying Indian culture

at her university and became deeply interested in Hinduism. After Mother Kali sent Joya a dream, she realized she had finally found her spiritual home in Hinduism.

Wrongly told by a teacher that she could never be a Hindu, because she was not born to a Hindu family, she became severely depressed, but finally recovered. She now runs a blog called "Hindu From Poland" and a Facebook page called

"Hinduism For Everyone." After meeting HSAI President Nisha Ramracha while Nisha was on an archaeology tour in Europe, Joya gathered her Hindu friends in Poland and began an HSAI chapter there. Finding murtis and holy books in Poland remains difficult. [facebook.com/hindufrompoland](https://www.facebook.com/hindufrompoland)

.....
Polish Hindu: Joya has overcome many obstacles on her path to Hinduism



EDUCATION

Culture Class Rejected

ON OCTOBER 30, 2015, THE Academic Council of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India, rejected a proposal by the University Grants Commission and the Human Resource Development ministry for the introduction of three short-term courses in Indian culture and yoga.

After being circulated among various schools and departments for feedback, the draft was put before the council along with the responses. The council unanimously rejected the proposal, an Academic Council member told sources.

The draft states that the course

would be aimed at expounding the importance of the country's culture as well as exploring the etymological, social, spiritual, cultural and mythological aspects and establishing Indian values in the world. The course would have contained the texts, thoughts and traditions of India's different cultures and religious systems, deriving ways from these sources to make human life better. This includes reading from scriptures, such as the *Gita*, the *Vedas* and the *Ramayana*.

India's new BJP government supports the idea of educational campuses working to promote



No culture classes for now: JNU's Academic Council building

the nation's rich heritage and restore its cultural identity. This is a common objective in other countries. The rejection of the

proposal at JNU by the Marxist-oriented faculty is criticized of being ideologically motivated.

INDIA

Temple Dress Code Enforced

THE HINDU RELIGIOUS AND Charitable Endowments Department has directed temples under its control to enforce temple clothing rules based on the *Agamas* and traditions and customs of individual temples, starting January 1, 2016.

Entry into Tamil Nadu temples is governed by the Tamil Nadu Temple Entry Authorization Act, 1947. Rule 4 of the Act states: "No person shall enter into temple premises unless he has had a bath and wears clothes of such materials and in such manner as

is customary in such temple. No person shall enter a temple with any footwear."

The specific guidelines are for men to wear a "dhoti or pyjama with upper cloth or formal pants and shirts" and women should wear "a sari or a half sari or churidhar with upper cloth." Children could wear "any fully covered dress." However, since custom varies from one temple to another, temples where men are prohibited from wearing an upper cloth can continue that requirement.



Getting back to tradition: A banner explaining the dress code for devotees who wish to enter the Sri Parthasarathy Swamy temple at Triplicane in Chennai

MENTAL HEALTH

Mindfulness Is Here to Stay

MANY MAJOR COMPANIES, including Google, Target, General Mills, Intel and Aetna, offer mindfulness training to their employees, some since 2006. As these organizations can attest, bringing mindfulness to the workplace decreases stress levels while improving listening- and decision-making skills, focus, clarity and overall well-being. Perhaps most importantly from

a management perspective, mindfulness gives employees permission to think, to prioritize and to focus fully on the task at hand instead of diluting attention through constant multitasking.

Mindfulness is the essence of engagement. Being fully present—and allowing your team to be fully in the moment—reaps rewards on a personal, professional and corporate level.



Clearing the mind: Employees at Google participating in a MindBody Awareness class at their offices in Kirkland

First Hindu Cemetery Inaugurated

IN OCTOBER, 2015, WITH FLOWERS, incense, bells and music from traditional Indian instruments, priests ceremoniously blessed Germany's first Hindu burial ground, a 2,000-square-meter space bordering the municipal cemetery in the city of Hamm. The ceremony was attended by the mayor, who was gifted a beautiful shawl in appreciation of the city's support for its Hindu population.

In traditional Hindu practice, the body is burned in the open air at cremation ghats and the ashes are then scattered in the



Ganga or other sacred river. As Hindus settle around the globe, rituals must be adapted to the laws of the host country or region. Scattering cremation ashes on a body of water

is prohibited in Germany, so instead the cremation is followed by burial of the ash-filled urn. This is not the case throughout all of Europe; in Lucerne, Switzerland, for instance, the ashes

The wheel of dharma:

Germany's first Hindu cemetery consists of eight individual fields, created by the Hindu symbol of the wheel of Dharma. The wheel represents Hindu ethics, morality and justice.

may be scattered in a river.

Arumugan Paskaran, the priest of Hamm's largest Hindu temple, believes the new burial plot will be well accepted by his parishioners.

With 25,000 of Germany's 100,000 Hindus, Hamm ranks second only to London as a European home for Hindus. Germany's Hindus include those of Indian, Sri Lankan, Balinese, European and Afghan origin.

Krishna on Display

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO hosted a spectacular Krishna art exhibit from September 13, 2015, to January 3, 2016. Comprising over 100 pieces of art from public and private collections in India and the United States, the exhibition took visitors through a year in the life of Nathdwara, a town in Rajasthan,



India, where the daily worship of Shrinathji (the form of Krishna as a seven-year-old boy) is characterized by the changing seasons and a bustling festival calendar.

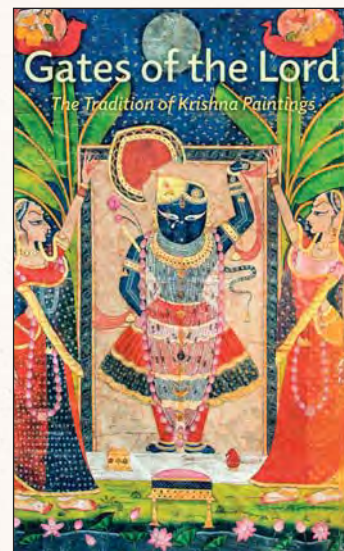
Visitors saw gallery after gallery of *pichvais*, the large textile paintings displayed on the wall behind the sacred image in a shrine—each one uniquely suited to a particular festival, season or time of day. The accompanying miniature paintings offered further insight into the Vaishnava sect known as Pushtimarg: its mode of worship, history and important priests and patron families.

Enhancing the experience of the sect's rich culture were festival and devotional music, a shrine reconstruction,



touch-screen kiosks that allowed visitors to page through religious manuscripts, an artist's sketchbook and a historic photo album. The exhibition concluded with an exploration of the works, sketches and observations of prominent 20th- and 21st-century Nathdwara artists who have kept the painting tradition flourishing.

Works of art were borrowed from the Amit Ambalal Collection and the TAPI Collection of Praful and Shilpa Shah.



Holy gathering: (left to right) Art curator Madhuvanti Ghose, who conceived the exhibit; *Pichvai* for Morakuti (rainy season), late 19th century; *Pichvai* for the Sharad Purnima festival, late 19th century.

first instance of authorities listening to the concerns and needs of the Hindu community.

THE FIRST YOGA LOUNGE WAS

introduced to London's Gatwick airport in October, 2015. The yoga lounge shows a short video they are calling "floga" or pre-flight yoga, to help reduce the negative effects that flying has on the body.

Global Dharma
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HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

India's Gifts to the World

A Protestant minister explains how India's export of spirituality has benefited the West

BY VICTOR M. PARACHIN

FOR NEARLY ONE THOUSAND years, India was under the oppressive rule of invaders. The first to seek domination of this gentle subcontinent were Muslim warriors who invaded from the 800s to the 1600s. Next came the British who arrived in the 1700s and officially left in 1947. Attempts to convert Indian Hindus, first to Islam and then to Christianity, were a colossal failure. This was because India had a long established and culturally influential spiritual tradition. It was one which Islam and Christianity—supported by massive armies—could not destroy. Despite tremendous hardships, Indian Hindus continued to follow their Vedic religion, with its varied traditions, philosophies and approaches to spirituality.

Not only did India continue to follow her own path, but she also freely shared her rich traditions with the world. Those who live in the West have been greatly benefited by India's export of spirituality. Here are just six of its amazing gifts to our world:

1. Religious tolerance: Swami Vivekananda famously expressed the Hindu approach to religious inclusion saying: "I accept all religions that were in the past and worship with them all. I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form. I'll go to the mosque of the Muslim. I'll enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix. I'll enter the Buddhist temple, where I take refuge in Buddha and in his law. I'll go into the forest and sit in meditation with the Hindu who's trying to see the light which enlightens the heart of everyone. Not only shall I do this, but I'll keep my heart open for all that may come." This open, inclusive spiritual approach is something the Abrahamic religions still fail to grasp.

2. Nonviolence: There would be no Martin Luther King, Jr., without there first having been a Gandhi, who took the Vedic concept of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, and used it as a tool for peaceful, political transforma-



tion. It is India that has offered the world an alternative to the violence and destruction of war.

3. Meditation: While Buddhists have recently been at the forefront of teaching meditation to the West, it should not be forgotten that the Buddha was not a Buddhist, but a Hindu; that he learned to meditate from Hindu teachers.

4. Yoga: This gentle practice has empowered women and men all over the planet to heal body, mind and spirit. In addition, yoga has offered many Westerners a spiritual pathway without heavy, harsh dogmas and doctrines. This movement has been highly instrumental in creating a new religious genre in the West—that of being spiritual but not religious.

5. Ayurveda: While this gift from India is just beginning to evolve in the West, it too is growing rapidly as people recognize *ayurveda* as the original alternative medicine. Subhra Krishna, author of *Ayurveda: What It Is And What It Can Do For You*, succinctly states: "The great thing about ayurveda is that its treatments always yield side benefits, not side effects."

6. Vegetarianism: Vamsee Juluri, an Indian scholar and professor at the University of San Francisco, notes that vegetarianism has been given great importance in Indian philosophy and life "for the simple reason that our ancestors knew we could live without taking an animal life." Professor Juluri says that this view was "an enormous leap in human civilization that the modern West has had a tough time coming around to accept," adding that the Abrahamic religions—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—have been slow to outgrow "the limitations of their own religious and secular mythologies about humans and animals."

VICTOR M. PARACHIN, M. DIV., is a Protestant minister and director of the Tulsa Yoga Meditation Center. He authored Swami Vivekananda: Essential Writings. vmvnamaste@gmail.com

BRIEFLY...

SINGAPORE HAS LIFTED THE BAN

on live music at Tai Pusan, implemented back in 1973 due to group rivalries. The Singapore government has decided to relax the rules based on ten feedback sessions with 116 members of the Hindu community. Over

the course of two months, the community participants shared that music is important to the festival, with 65 percent wanting traditional Indian instruments to be part of the religious event. The release of the ban is considered by some to be an historical

Growing Up Without Prejudice

Conflict and violence have their roots in hatred learned during youth. By teaching children tolerance, we create a more peaceful future.

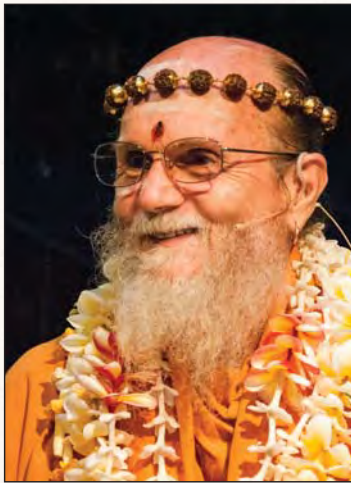
BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD today are deeply troubling—wars between countries, profound social conflicts within countries, and almost daily incidents of terrorist acts. The shocking series of coordinated assaults in Paris on November 13, 2015—France's deadliest attack since World War II—has Western nations on high alert. Attacks in Africa and Asia, while less publicized, are even more common, and equally devastating. The vicious hatred expressed by extremists toward those they seek to destroy dominates the news. Watching reports of these tragic events, we are reminded of how prejudice—and its big brother, malice—can change the world for the worse.

Attitudes of prejudice toward those of a different race, nation or religion can start simply as distrust, then deepen into dislike and fester into hatred, which can turn into an instinctive impulse to inflict injury. Are we born with such attitudes? Certainly not. As children, we are taught them at home, at school and, especially sadly, even in some religious institutions. Many people are raised to hate those of different ethnic groups, faiths or countries. Parents and radical teachers instill that hatred in the young innocents, often perpetuating centuries-old antagonisms.

The way in which our children shape the future will depend upon the qualities of character we cultivate in them. Therefore, in the long run, our most effective personal solution to violence in our modern world is to dutifully nurture what our children are learning as they grow up. My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, spelled this out in a message he gave to 700 religious and political leaders in 1990 at the Global Forum for Human Survival, Development and Environment in Moscow. "We need, in the century ahead, to teach all children tolerance, openness to different ways of life, different beliefs, different customs of dress and language. We need to stop teaching them to fear those who are different from themselves, stop teaching them hatred for peoples of other colors and other religions, stop teaching them to see the world as a field of conflict, and instead instill in them an informed appreciation and a joyous reverence for the grand diversity we find around us."

For too many nations, cultures and faiths this is easier said than done. Animosities built up over the decades between opposing groups are so entrenched that even peaceful coexistence seems impossible. Then there are factions who, believing their way is the only way and their enemies are disposable, justify and glorify their



hatred and intolerance. Gurudeva explained, "When the fundamentalists of any religion teach an unrelenting duality based on good and evil, man and nature or God and Devil, this creates friends and enemies."

Hinduism, with its long history of tolerance, can take steps to strengthen its exemplary commitment to nonviolence, and to set examples for others. Above all, we must not fall prey to the instinctive, reactionary fears and violent urges that are tearing apart so many nations, communities and families today.

Instead of teaching our children to be intolerant—to dislike and distrust, hate and inflict injury on those who are different—we must teach them to be tolerant, to

like and trust, befriend and help. The quality we urge parents to develop in children is a prejudice-free consciousness, an open-mindedness that readily embraces differences in ethnicity, religion and nationality.

The central place to cultivate this virtue is in the home. Every father and mother is, in fact, a child's first guru, teaching by example and explanation, giving advice and direction. Secondly, this important attitude should be discussed and strengthened in classes at the temple and in school, and encouraged through community activities that expose children to diverse cultures.

Tolerance is nurtured through teaching children to appreciate the positive qualities of others, and by completely avoiding prejudiced remarks in the home against any race, religion or nationality. It is helpful to discuss with our children any bigoted comments they hear at school and elsewhere and be a gentle voice of wise correction. We must teach them to think of people as unique, divine individuals with an array of karmas and qualities that make them who they are.

Even positive stereotypes can embolden a sense of otherness and should be avoided. TV and movies can provide useful learning moments to discuss such matters with children, not leaving them to make their own youthful conclusions. Tolerance can be developed by having them meet, interact and learn to feel comfortable with children of other nationalities, ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Hindu organizations can be proactive by organizing culturally enriching activities and outings for the children of their members. Fortunately, fewer and fewer things are strange to the children of this Internet era. Their exposure to borderless knowledge gives them an innate sense of planetary citizenship. Sometimes we need only nudge them in that direction. One key lesson to pass on to the children is this: we need not feel threatened by our differences.



Leaders of the future: (left) Children born in the new millennium have a more profound global consciousness than earlier generations, a native sense of the oneness of the human family

the Supreme as Shakti. Smartas call the Supreme Being Brahman; and to Vaishnavas He is Vishnu. However, the important point is that each Hindu is worshipping the same Supreme Being. The name is different, the tradition is different, but the same Supreme Being is being worshiped by all Hindus.

This statement from the *Vedas* can be expanded beyond Hinduism to include all the world's religions. In fact, a Tamil verse often chanted in Siva temples states, *Tennadudaiya Sivane Pottri; Ennattavarkum Iraiva Pottri*. This translates as: "He who is praised as Siva in the South of India is praised everywhere else as God." What this means is that people around the world worship the Supreme Being, and *Siva* is one of the many names of God. Gurudeva said it simply, "Saivites profoundly know that God Siva is the same Supreme Being in whom peoples of all faiths find solace, peace and liberation."

He wrote: "Hindus also believe that there is no exclusive path, no one way for all. Religious beliefs are manifold and different. Hindus, understanding the strength of this diversity, wholeheartedly respect and encourage all who believe in God and do not seek to interfere with anyone's faith or practice. Since the inner intent of all religions is to bind man back to God, Hindus honor the fact that 'Truth is one, paths are many.' Nonetheless, Hindus realize that all religions are not the same. Each has its unique beliefs, practices, goals and paths of attainment, and the doctrines of one often conflict with those of another. Even this should never be cause for religious tension or intolerance."

Another belief that gives rise to Hinduism's innate acceptance and open-mindedness is that all of mankind is essentially good, that we are all divine beings, souls created by God. Hindus do not accept the concept that some people are evil and others are good. The *Upanishads* tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, then begins a spiritual journey that ultimately leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey whether they realize it or not. Gurudeva noted, "This basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. Even *tolerance* is insufficient to describe the compassion and reverence the Hindu holds for the intrinsic sacredness within all things." So when a Hindu sees a person who is performing horrible deeds, whom others call bad or evil, he thinks to himself, "This is a young soul, acting in terrible ways, but one day, in the course of many lives, he will realize his errors, atone and adhere to dharma." By greeting one another with namaskara, palms held together to honor God within the other person, Hindus practice this truth on a daily basis. The *Upanishads* assure us, *Ayam atma Brahma*, "The soul is God."

There can be no denying that we live in tumultuous times, with millions of people being forced to leave their homelands as refugees from terror, victims of bigotry and hatred. But let not the vicissitudes of politics and regional turmoil shake us from the basic truths on which Hinduism stands. Instead, let us bravely persist in passing on to the next generations the all-too-rare virtue of prejudice-free consciousness so that they may, as leaders of the future, shape the world into a more peaceful place.

Shri Shri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Kanchi, expressed this beautifully in *Maithrim Bhajata*, an ode to universal brotherhood, which was performed by MS Subbulakshmi at the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1966. In English (translated by Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian, who sings it here: bit.ly/MaithrimBhajata) it reads:

"Cultivate friendship, which will conquer the hearts of all. Look upon others as thyself. Renounce war, renounce competition. Renounce aggression on others' properties. Mother Earth is abundant and ready to give us all that we desire. God, our Father, is very compassionate to all. So, restrain yourself, donate your wealth, be kind to everyone. May all people of this world be happy and prosperous."

A few key Hindu beliefs provide the basis for millennia of Hindu tolerance. The first is embodied in an ancient verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): *Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti*, "Truth is one; sages express it variously." Hinduism has a wide diversity of traditions, but followers of the different paths respect one another and worship side-by-side in many temples. We have four major denominations. To Saivites, the Supreme is Siva. Shaktas refer to



LETTERS

Latest Insight Section

The magazine HINDUISM TODAY is a treasure of information on Sanatana Dharma. My first browsing today of the magazine left indelible impressions in me. The article on karma yoga in the Jan/Feb/March, 2016, issue is thought provoking and full of inspiration.

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The Insight section in the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2016 HINDUISM TODAY, entitled Karma Yoga, opened my eyes wide. How you all must have felt while writing it! I had many different thoughts and surprises. I am glad that karma yoga is a part of my life, with all my heart. I read the entire article the day I received it. Amazing grace.

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I thoroughly enjoyed your special coverage of Karma Yoga—Jan/Feb/Mar, 2016. Having been thoroughly convinced of the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy for a long time, I especially liked Shankara's quote, "The conclusion of the *Gita* and all the *Upanishads* is this, that moksha can be attained by knowledge alone, unaided by action." Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga can be the means to Jnana Yoga but cannot be the ends by themselves.

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Family Ties

Greetings from San Antonio. I enjoyed reading the article chronicling Hinduism's evolution from Jaffna to UK in your Oct/Nov/Dec, 2015, issue of HINDUISM TODAY. It touched a personal chord in more ways than one. The late Mr. Ratnasingham and Mrs. Ratnasingham's (referenced many times) daughter Geetha is married to my mother's late sister's son, Dr. Maheshwaran. Geetha Ratnasingham's "voice" is referenced on the last page of the article. My first cousin Dr. Maheshwaran, along with his parents and siblings, left Colombo, Sri Lanka, for UK in the 1980s as a result of the ethnic unrest.

VIJI KUMAR
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Passed Around to All

It was a pleasant surprise to receive the courier delivering HINDUISM TODAY. The cover photo gives the impression that we are actually present at the *arati* for Ganga Mata in the evening; excellent photography. First the

magazine changed hands within my family members and everybody wanted to look at the article and the photos. Then came the turn of the pilgrims who are on short stay with us. By the time I could lay my hands on the magazine, three days had passed! Everyone appreciated it and wanted to have a copy. We all appreciate the sincerity, efforts and hard work everybody puts into bringing out the magazine with great detailed information.

Rajiv Malik ji, I thank you for remembering us and sending us the magazine. Your report is true to every aspect we discussed. I am glad to inform you that we look forward to your next visit with warm hearts.

SHIV KUMAR
VARANASI, INDIA

Cuban Hindus Need Resources

First, I sincerely hope you're receiving the Lord's blessing. Second, I want to thank you for all the work you're doing in favor of Hinduism. If I knew you before, I'd be a better Hindu than I am now. But here in Cuba we have a proverb, "better late than never," and I firmly believe that. Thank you so much for all your efforts and for giving us so much enlightenment. Let me know if you have any mission in Latin America I can write to and ask more questions. Your message is only known by English-speaking Cubans such as myself. I'm from Cuba and it's a difficult country to get information about the rest of the world, but it's also a country with many spiritual needs. Here there are different Hindu communities that go unknown. These institutions and communities are not officially recognized. I know many persons with interest in Hinduism and many of them are not practicing right now because they don't have the information required and no suitable spiritual guide.

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For materials in Spanish and other languages, see himalayanacademy.com/readlearn/other-languages

Hindu Association of Europe

In the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2015, issue, the article covering London's Hindu Temples was interesting. However, the first Hindu temple was established in 1920 in Earl's Court in west London. It was functional only for four years. In 1932 the Hindu Association of Europe was formed in London by a group of professionals including several medical doctors. Founding members included Dr Krishna Kumria who arrived in the UK in 1917, Dr. Dharam

Chowdhary who arrived in 1928 and Dr. Baldev Kaushal in 1931. The founding president of the Hindu Association of Europe was Dr. Kaushal, who was a family physician in practice in Bethnal Green, East London. In the 1950s, meetings took place in NW London in a hired hall, and in 1962 a new Hindu Centre (without the title Europe) was established in NW London to act as a social, cultural and religious body for the Hindus in the UK. In 1967 the Hindu Centre London acquired its own premises.

DR. RISHI AGARWAL
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Praise for PM Modi

We are a fourth-generation Indian South African family. We are immensely proud of Narendra Modi and the BJP party for the sterling work that they are doing. They have accomplished so much in the short space of time in office. PM Modi's hard work and absolute dedication to improving India has inspired millions of Indians living abroad. He has been able to instill a sense of pride in Indians all over the world.

DR. NISHANI RAMFOL
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Thank You

I, like my many Hindu brothers and sisters, am very grateful to you and your organization for this tremendous work you have undertaken. I am a student of Vedanta myself and am a reader of vast topics pertaining to ancient Indian history and philosophy. I was first introduced to your organization and efforts through the books of Shri Ram Swarupji. I strongly believe that India badly needs a Hindu renaissance, which will be good not only for this ancient nation but for the entire humanity. I would be keen to help in any small way in this great cause.

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Various Flavors?

I am a Hindu living in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. I want to ask why Hindus in Indonesia look different from Hindus in India? Both celebrate and use spiritual singing; both celebrate Diwali. I would think they would be the same, since we share the same cultural practices.

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To My Fellow Hindu Youth

Religion and spirituality aren't for everyone, and in fact, Hinduism acknowledges that. In the concept of the purusharthas (four goals of human life), half of them are non-religious; kama (pleasure) and artha (prosperity) are seen as valid goals of life. (Ancient India seemed to think so as well, producing texts like the *Kamasutra* and *Arthashastra*.)

I have nothing against Hindus who examine their religion, decide for whatever reason that it's not for them, and move on with their lives. What makes me sad is when second-generation Hindu youth in the diaspora leave their religion because they were never exposed to it in a way that allowed them to ask questions and receive substantive answers; because their parents made them come to temple but never explained what the rituals mean; because they never bothered to learn what their religion actually teaches. I see this happening with the majority of Hindu youth around my age. I think of this as the ultimate freedom. Our atma (divine soul) is within us, waiting for us to realize that it's there, but we have the freedom to figure it out through any path: knowledge, devotion, service, music, art or meditation.

I also believe that we have the tools within our religion to combat misogyny, casteism, homophobia and racism. When Shiva is depicted as half-male, half-female in the form of Ardhanarishwara, and when ours is the only major world religion to worship God

in female form, how can we justify sexism and misogyny? When we have countless stories about gods, goddesses and heroes spanning the gender and sexuality spectrums, how can we justify homophobia and trans-misogyny? I believe that Hinduism has much to offer each of us individually, and that it also has much to offer the world. I wish more Hindus my age felt that way too.

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Courageous Article

Thank you for the courage to examine the controversial topic of gay marriage ("Same-Sex Marriage and Hinduism," Jan/Feb/Mar, 2016). As the authors summed up the diversity of opinion within the Hindu community, "The situation remains complicated." I would add, change is not just complicated, but often dangerous.

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Ten-Day Journey

I visited Mauritius and South Africa from Nov. 21 to Nov. 30 on an educational sightseeing tour. The group of 45 were warmly welcomed by temples, cultural organizations and individuals who even took us to their homes. Though there seems to be a slight neglect of the use of Tamil, the religious aspect is very much intact in temples and cultural

organizations. I also noted that the 1.4 million Hindus in South Africa and the 95,000 Hindus of Tamil origin in Mauritius are all doing well economically and socially, with our Hindu faith very much intact. The success stories of present-day Hindus in these two countries, whose forefathers left India almost two centuries ago to work in the sugar cane fields (as in Malaysia, too) are the result of hard work against many odds. Though they had all left India to seek their fortune and return back to India, a large minority remained in their new homeland.

K. THURUVAN
RASAH, SEREMBAN, MALAYSIA

The Digital Dharma link to the HT App for android was incorrect. The link for both devices can be found at bit.ly/HT-APP

On page 33 of the January, 2016, issue, the bottom right photo is mistakenly identified as a group of shaven headed boys spending a few weeks as monks. Actually it is a group of girls who are spending a few weeks as bhikshunis, Buddhist nuns.

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.

For the Grandchildren and Beyond So that Hinduism Today may be there when needed most

FROM THE TIME THEY WERE FOUNDED BY Gurudeva (Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami), I have seen HINDUISM TODAY and the monastery that produces it grow by leaps and bounds," explains cardiologist Dr. Shun Sunder of Lancaster, California. "I have seen the old versions of HINDUISM TODAY and the new versions of HINDUISM TODAY, and the addition of modern technology. Under the leadership of Gurudeva's successors, it has grown to be a truly global, dharmic magazine."

Dr. and Thilaka Sunder have made the Hinduism Today Production Fund a beneficiary of their life insurance—quite generously so. And they have also made it a beneficiary of the life insurances of their two sons, Luxman and Anthan, who give support to the magazine in various ways.

"We have done this to follow Gurudeva, who taught that it is our sacred duty to transmit our religion and culture to future generations, and that among the best ways to accomplish this

is through supporting the Production Fund that sustains HINDUISM TODAY. Giving is also our way of thanking Gurudeva for sharing his vision with us and the world, and our way of keeping that vision alive.

"With my children's participation, we constitute two generations pulling in the same direction. I plan to one day donate in my grandchildren's names, too, so that we'll be three generations joining in this most noble work.

"I cannot imagine a more worthy cause. Let us all join in! All Hindus can be a part of this effort. We can together make sure that our magazine will always be there to bring light to those who need it most—and to future generations who, as I see it, will need it even more than we do."

Visit www.hheonline.org. Subscribe to our Hindu Heritage Endowment and Production Fund newsletters at www.gurudeva.org/email-news. Contact us at hhe@hindu.org or call 1-888-464-1008.



Three generations pulling together in the same direction: Above, Dr. and Thilaka Sunder. Below, their two sons with families, Sarmela, Anthan, Sayini, Luxman and third-generation Sahana and Sayan.

QUOTES & QUIPS

Without a guru, your progress will be very slow and uncertain.

Sri Chinmoy (1931–2007), renowned spiritual leader, author, poet, artist, musician and athlete

Utterly fearless and uninhibited, it is this consciousness that brings into manifestation and sustains the infinite variety of beings, from the creator to the blade of grass. It is ever dynamic and active, yet it is more inactive than a rock and is more unaffected by such activity than space. *Yoga Vashishta 5:23*

Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder. Help someone's soul heal. Walk out of your house like a shepherd. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

Cosmos is a Greek word for the order of

the universe. It is, in a way, the opposite of chaos. It implies the deep interconnectedness of all things. It conveys awe for the intricate and subtle way in which the universe is put together. **Carl Sagan** (1934–1996), *American astrophysicist*

People need to become aware that prophesizing eternal hell was a strategy to frighten followers into submission and to justify using force to either convert or wipe out those who “insult the Supreme Power and don't accept the only truth.” **Maria Wirth**, *German writer and blogger*

Life should be chiefly service. Without that ideal, the intelligence that God has given you is not reaching out toward its goal. When in service you forget the little self, you will feel the big Self of Spirit. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952)

To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself. If you crave acceptance and recognition and try to change yourself to fit what other people want you to be, you will suffer all your life. True happiness and true power lie in understanding yourself, accepting yourself, having confidence in

yourself. **Thích Nhat Hanh**, *Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet and peace activist*

Renouncing all, I inwardly entered and beheld the Light within. My heart trembled. I prostrated low, but Him I never forgot. And the Lord of Celestials, freeing me from the whirl of births immortal, made me, here. *Tirumantiram verse 2585*

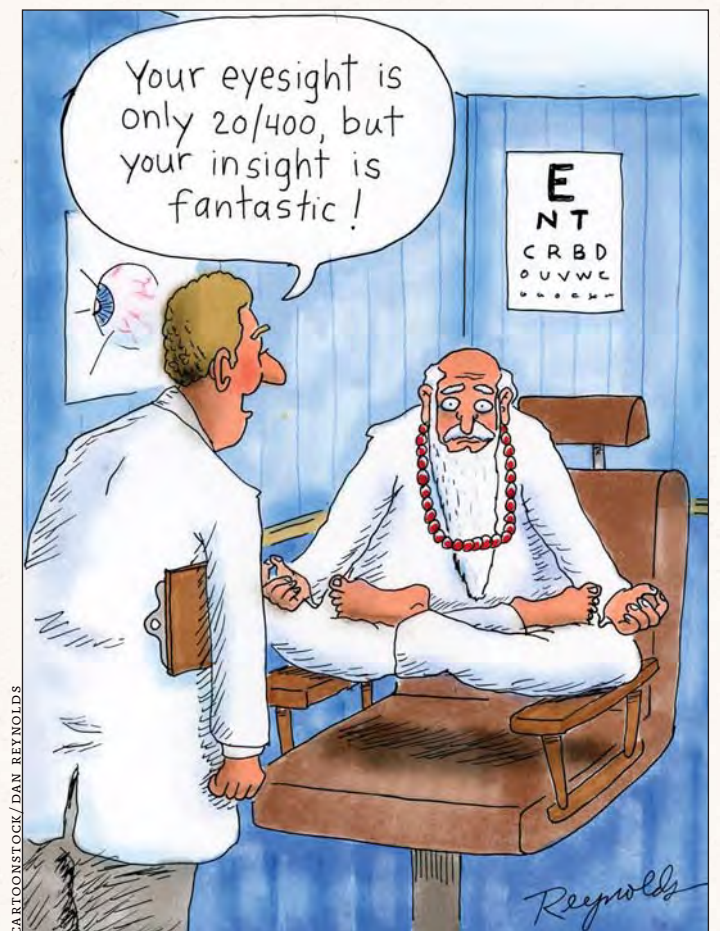
One man may read the *Bhagavad Gita* by the light of a lamp, and another may commit a forgery by that very light; but the lamp is unaffected. The sun sheds its light on the wicked as well as on the virtuous. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

The Hindu marriage may be described as the union of two families. In this union, there is no room for petty ambitions and personal ego-trips. What is involved is love for the entire

family that one is marrying into. **Dada J.P. Vaswani**, *spiritual head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

When we think a change might only take 6 months, it is unrealistic and will actually take 6 years. That's why one must be ready for 'years of unrewarding sadhana.' If we end up externalized or confused we can look to the group of spiritual people around us and they will stabilize us. You must maintain the overall perspective when going through those states. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

Generous, selfless giving is among dharma's central fulfillments. Hospitality, charity and support of God's work on Earth arises from the belief that the underlying purpose of life is spiritual, not material. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY



DID YOU KNOW?

Lonar Crater Lake



AROUND 570,000 YEARS AGO, A METEOR hurling through the atmosphere at 90,000 km/h crashed near what is now the small town of Lonar in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra, India.

The impact created a crater 1.8 kilometers in diameter and 137 meters deep, that bears a lake that is mentioned in the ancient

Skanda Purana.

Crater Lake is one of Earth's rare and scientifically puzzling “soda” lakes, containing alkaline water in some areas and saline water in other areas. This quality enables it to support micro-organisms rarely found anywhere else. It is also known for the unusual salts that form along the shore

when the water recedes during the dry season.

Ancient temples surround the lake, some in ruins, some active and one partially submerged—the Shankar Ganesha Temple, noteworthy for its rectangular Siva murti. The Ram Gaya Temple is named for Lord Rama's departure; the Kamalja Devi temple comes to life during Navaratri. Gomukh Temple, also known as Dhara or Sita Nahani (because Sita is said to have bathed here) is accessible only by an arduous climb. This temple houses a stepwell into which flows one of the perennial fresh-water spring that feed the lake below. The most significant temple is in the town. The Daitya Sudan temple is

dedicated to Lord Vishnu, known here as the slayer of the demon Lonasura, after whom the town is named.

Civic activities to protect the lake are ongoing. Threats include excessive tourism, use of fertilizers and pesticides on the surrounding agricultural land and illegal deforestation.

BASICS

Hindu Philosophies

FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, INDIA'S sages and philosophers have pondered the nature of reality. Out of their speculations have blossomed hundreds of schools of thought, all evolving from the rich soil of village Hinduism.

At one end of Hinduism's complex spectrum is monism, *advaita*, which perceives a unity of God, soul and world, as in Sankara's acosmic pantheism and Kashmir Saiva monism. At the other end is dualism, *dvaita*—exemplified by Madhva and the early Pasupatas—which teaches two or more separate realities.

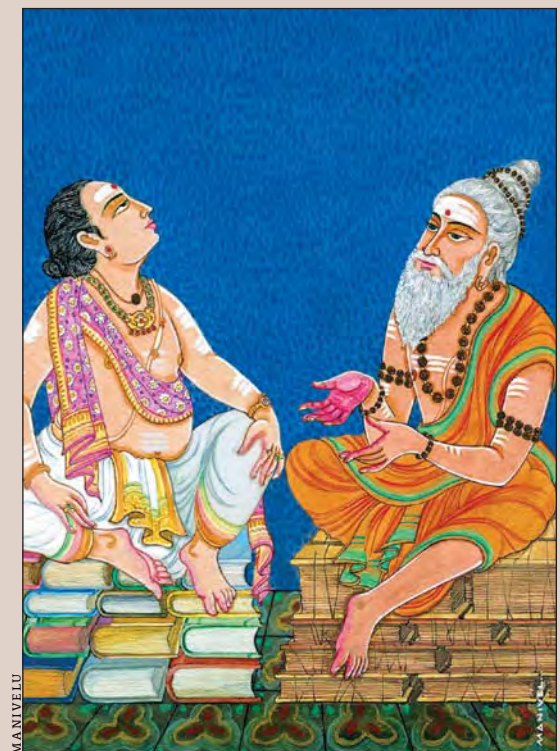
In between are views describing reality as one and yet not one, *dvaita-advaita*, such as Ramanuja's Vaishnava Vedanta and Srikantha's Saiva Visishtadvaita. Hindu philosophy consists of many

schools of Vedic and Agamic thought, including the six classical *darshanas*—Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta.

Each theology expresses the quest for God and is influenced by the myth, mystery and cultural syncretism of contemporary, tribal, shamanic Hinduism alive in every village in every age. India also produced views, called *nastika*, that reject the Vedas and are thus not part of Hinduism, such as Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism and *Charvaka*, materialistic atheism.

The *Vedas* state, “Theologians ask: What is the cause? Is it Brahma? Whence are we born? Whereby do we live? And on what are we established?”

From Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Dancing with Siva*, Lesson 141



Tools for Transformation

A Character Building Workbook

64 Character Qualities to Help Build, Transform and Improve Life

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

A Character Building Workbook

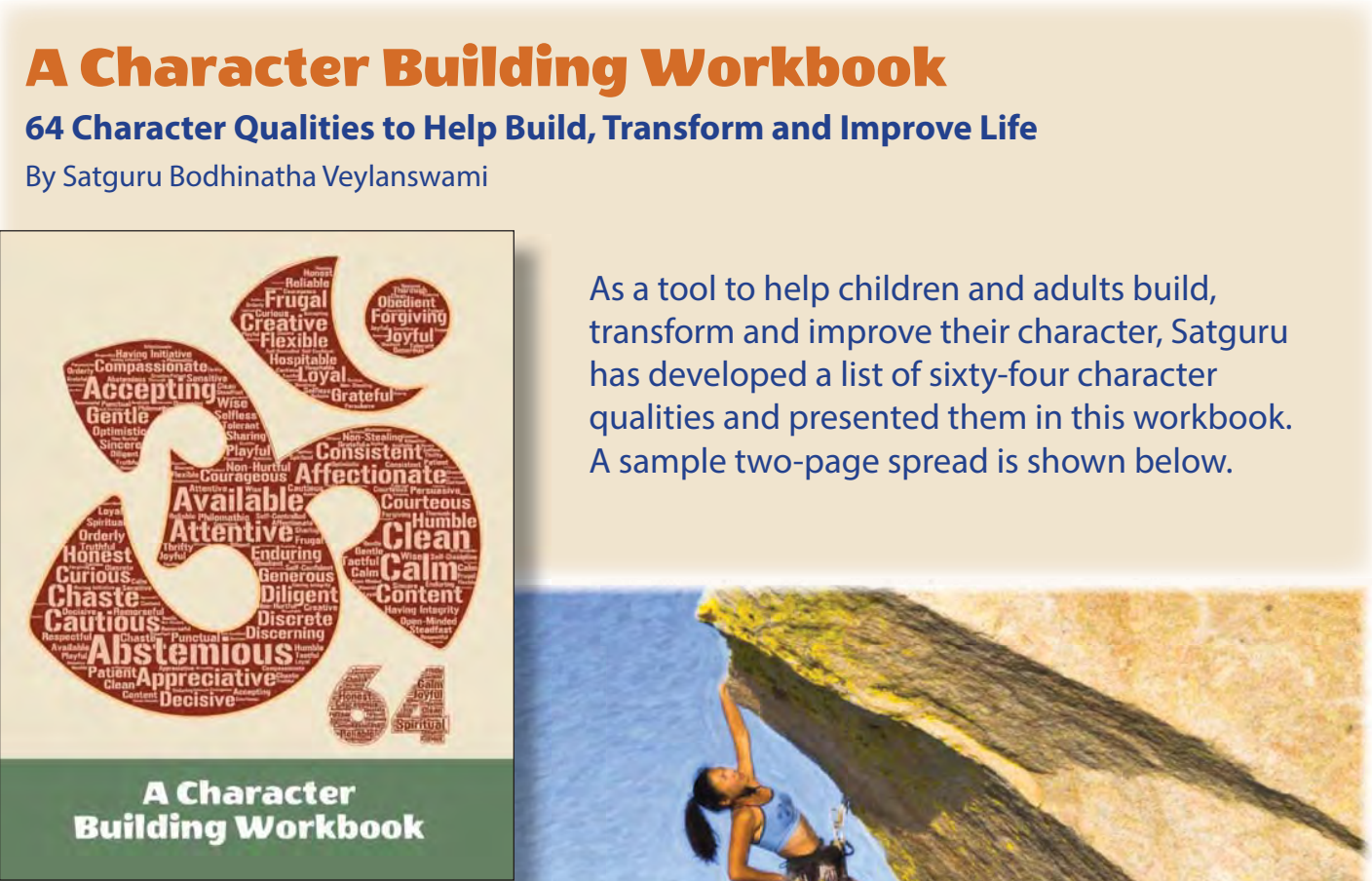
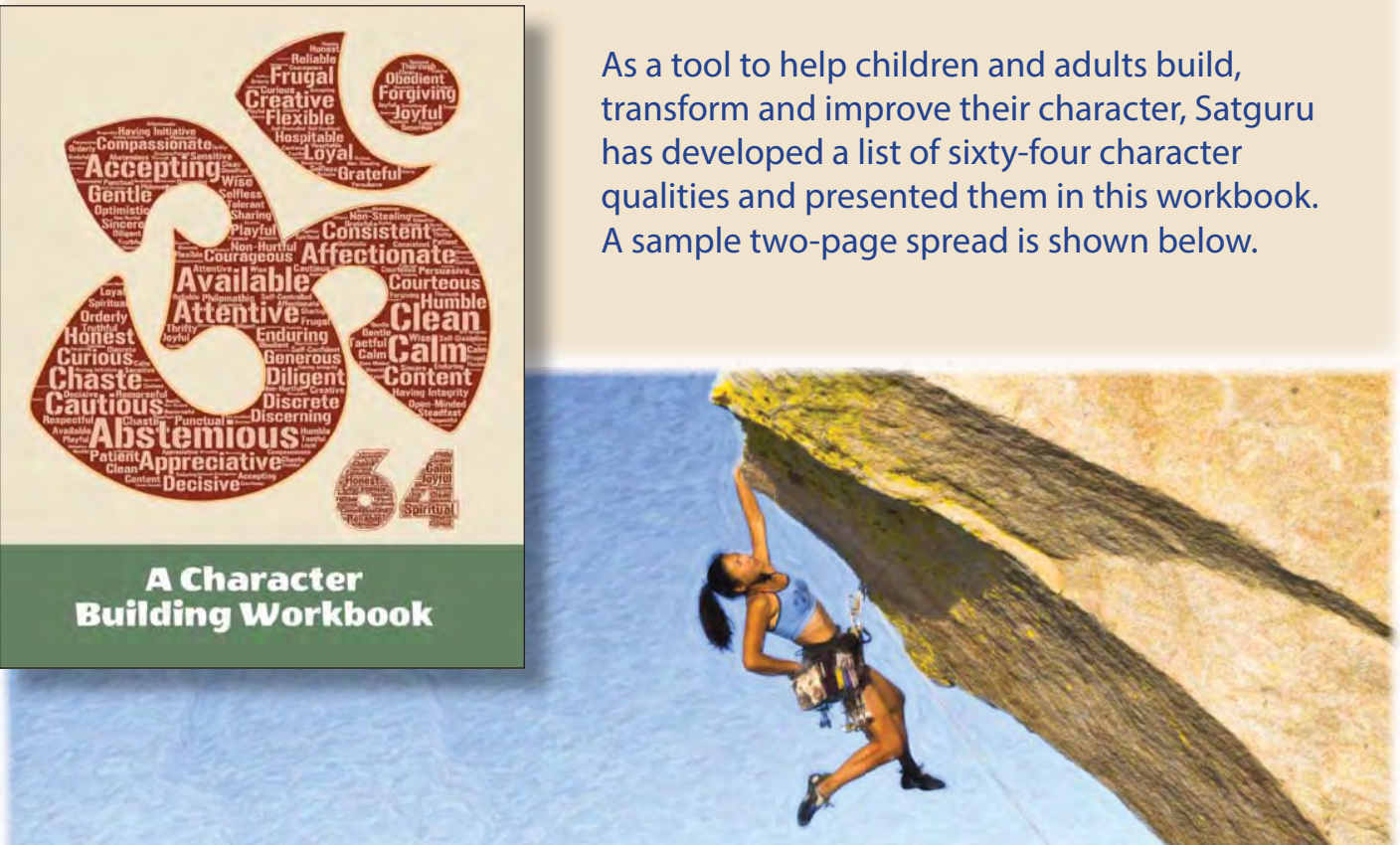
64 Character Qualities to Help Build, Transform and Improve Life

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A Character Building Workbook

64 Character Qualities to Help Build, Transform and Improve Life

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[illegible]

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.

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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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"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."

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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 _____

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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."

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.

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."

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FROM THE VEDAS

The Creation and Purpose of Soma

A poetic Vedic insight into the God's ancient and mysterious elixir

The following is a translation from the Yajurveda, chapter 20, sections 59, 63–69. These Vedic pages contain information about soma, the mysterious nectar once used for Hindu ceremonies. The Vedic poet Vidarbhi Rishi extols the creation and use of soma.

59 The scholars of science and medicine and women of knowledge and motherly love, with all their research and yajnic dedication, should create and bear for Indra pure nectars of vitality distilled from the juices extracted from all herbs for the cure of chronic and deadly diseases.

63 Three motherly spirits, Vedic vision, knowledge and wisdom, the motherland and two powers of health and medicine, may distill and create the intense and joyous nectar of soma extracted from all nature for Indra, the human soul, in three ways—for physical, mental and spiritual nourishment.

64 The soma juice of health having been prepared for us and Indra, the ruling powers, may the Ashvinis, cleansing powers of nature and the scholars, Sarasvati, generous motherly women of knowledge, and tvashta, refiners and creators of beautiful forms, bless us with honey-sweets of life, honor, wealth and prosperity and graceful forms of individual and social life appropriate for everyone.

65 Let Indra, the ruling power, the chief of the forests, the great growing trees, the generous cow and the enlightened mother, Sarasvati, with the advice and expertise of the Ashvinis, scholars of health care and medication, create and produce powerful honey-tonics from the flowing and fermenting juices according to the seasons.

66 Ashvinis, expert powers of health and nutrition, like milk produced and held by cows, create and hold for the man of power and glory soma, honey-sweet tonics, distilled from widely extracted juices mixed with curds and barley prepared by the generous mother Sarasvati with love and dedication.

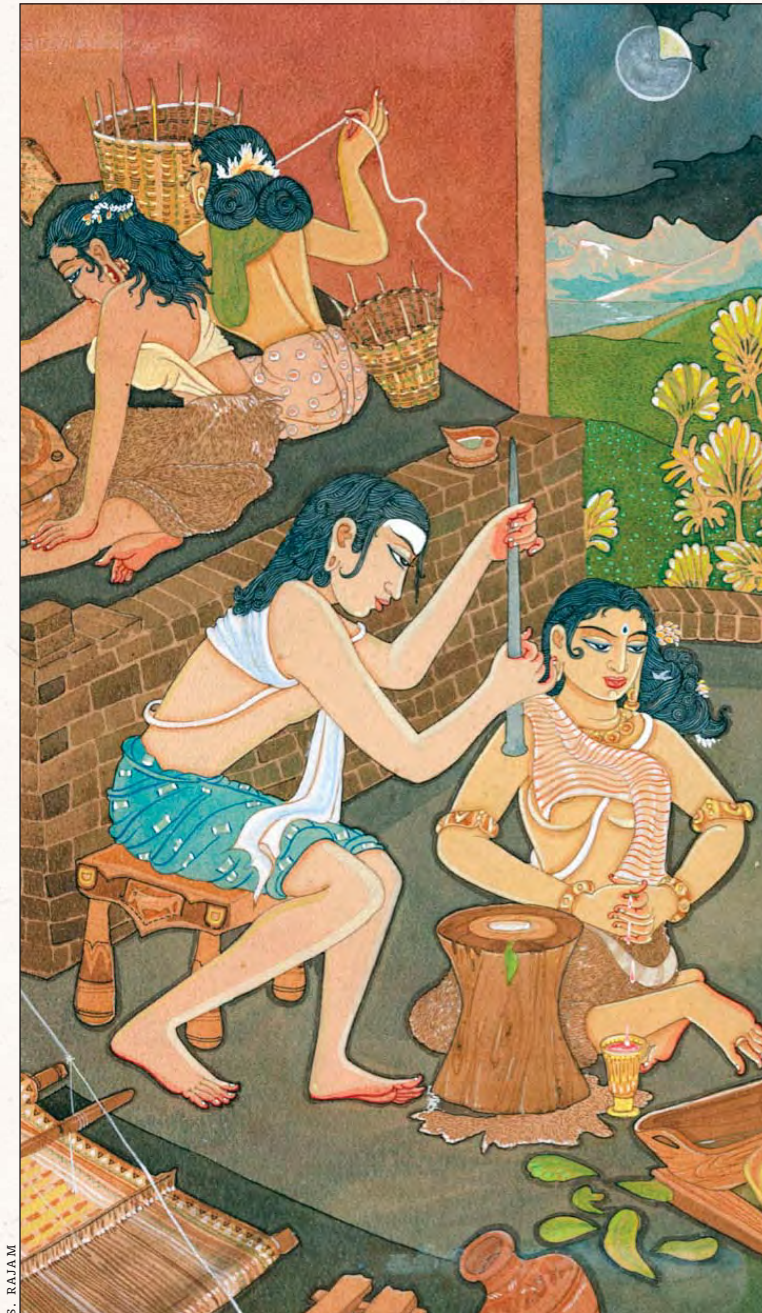
67 Let the Ashvins, scholars of health and nature, and Sarasvati, expert of science and the divine word, with their intelligence and vision, distill and create from the heavenly waters of space, modes of prakriti, pure vitality, exceptional drinks, wealth and prosperity, sacred materials for yajna, and noble mind and senses worthy of the man of honor and glory.

68 Indra, man of power and glory, whom the Ashvins, masters of health and vitality, and Sarasvati, lady of knowledge and divine speech, together, created and reared with holy foods and drinks, could surely break through the wondrous vitalities of nature hidden in the heavenly waters of space.

99 That wondrous vitality of soma which the animals, both the Ashvinis, scholars of life sciences, and Sarasvati, generous mother scholar of knowledge and divine vision share and bear in common, you all celebrate and intensify in yajna with powerful holy offerings and yourselves shine bright in consequence.

This excerpt is from the 2013 Veda translations in English done by Dr. Tulsi Ram, London, UK. All four Veda translations are available for purchase online at agniveer.com

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2016 HINDUISM TODAY 18



Divine creations: Women and men of ancient times pounding leaves of the soma plant to prepare the sacred drink

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APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2016 HINDUISM TODAY **18**



Hundreds gather for the evening worship of the Ganga River at Har Ki Pauri ghat in central Haridwar

DEV RAJ AGARWAL

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE SACRED CITY OF **Haridwar**

This ancient locale continues to fulfill its role as a place of sacred baths and last rites, a center of monastic orders and home to famous temples and traditional—as well as modern—educational institutions

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

HARIDWAR IS LAUDED IN THE ANCIENT *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* as one of India's most sacred cities, then called Mayapuri, Gangadwara or Kapilasthana. It is here that the mighty river personified as the Goddess Ganga emerges from the Himalayan foothills onto the plains of India on Her course to the Bay of Bengal 1,400 miles away. The Gangetic river system is the world's third largest, draining an area of 390,000 square miles, home to half a billion people.

Just 12 miles upstream from Haridwar is the popular spiritual destination of Rishikesh. Until recent times, Rishikesh was the site of just a few hermitages. Only around 1920, with the founding of the Divine Life Society there, did Rishikesh start to become popular as a spiritual center. Haridwar, however, is the place of historic importance. It is one of the seven sacred cities said to bestow moksha upon human beings, along with Ayodhya, Mathura, Varanasi, Kanchi, Ujjain and Dwarka. In addition, the Kumbha Mela is held here every 12th year, attracting millions of pilgrims. Huge crowds also attend Haridwar's Ardha Kumbha Mela (the "half" mela, on the sixth year in-between). In 2016 the festival extends from January to April.

Haridwar is also the departure point for the Chota Char Dham pilgrimage to the sacred Himalayan temples: Yamunotri, Gangotri,

Kedarnath and Badrinath, frequently reaching altitudes of 12,000 feet. Until 1950, this was an arduous trek on foot. Now it is possible, though still hazardous, to drive to these temples.

Haridwar literally means "Gateway of the Gods." When spelled *Hardwar*, it refers to Lord Siva and when *Haridwar* (the official spelling) to Lord Vishnu. Its central focus is the Har Ki Pauri ghat—a *ghat* being a flight of steps along a river bank area leading into the water to facilitate religious ceremonies, such as a sacred bath and making offerings, as well as mundane chores such as fetching water and washing clothes. *Har Ki Pauri* means "footsteps of the Lord," either those of Siva or of Vishnu, as one is inclined.

Locals here will correct you if you refer to the Ganga as containing mere water (*pani*) rather than nectar (*amrit*). Their belief derives from the story of how Ganga, which used to flow only in Swarga, the heaven world, came to flow on Earth. Various scriptures recount how Sage Bhagiratha, an ancestor of Lord Rama, had performed penance to bring the Goddess down so Her waters could liberate the souls of 60,000 of his ancestors trapped in the Narakaloka, the lower world. He succeeded by the grace of Lord Siva, who caught the torrential river in His hair, releasing Her gently onto the Himalayas. As Haridwar is the first city Ganga passes through, it became famed as a place for last rites, deposition of

ashes and the worship of one's ancestors, all to assure liberation of souls.

Photographer Dev Raj Agarwal and I have visited Haridwar during the Kumbha Melas, but now (October, 2015) it was the "off season"—and quite a different experience. Not only were far fewer outside pilgrims present, but many of the sadhus usually resident here in abundance had not yet returned from the Kumbha Mela at Nashik. This meant there were fewer saints to interview. On the other hand, we had unfettered access to the city's pundits, temple priests, educators and other residents at a time when they were not overwhelmed by the Mela, which swells this city of 300,000 to more than a million.

With its long history and deep religious significance, Haridwar is not something one can cover in a week. We were remonstrated by Mahant Raghmani Ji Maharaj of Sri Panchayati Akhara Bada Udasin that it was impossible to understand the significance of the city and the river in such a short time. Nevertheless, he blessed our visit and wished

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Haridwar: (counter-clockwise from below left) Pilgrims gather before the evening arati; offering the flame to Ganga; satellite photo shows location of Haridwar; Sage Bhagiratha leads the Goddess Ganga across India to the sea after Her descent from the heaven world



PIETER WELTEVERDE

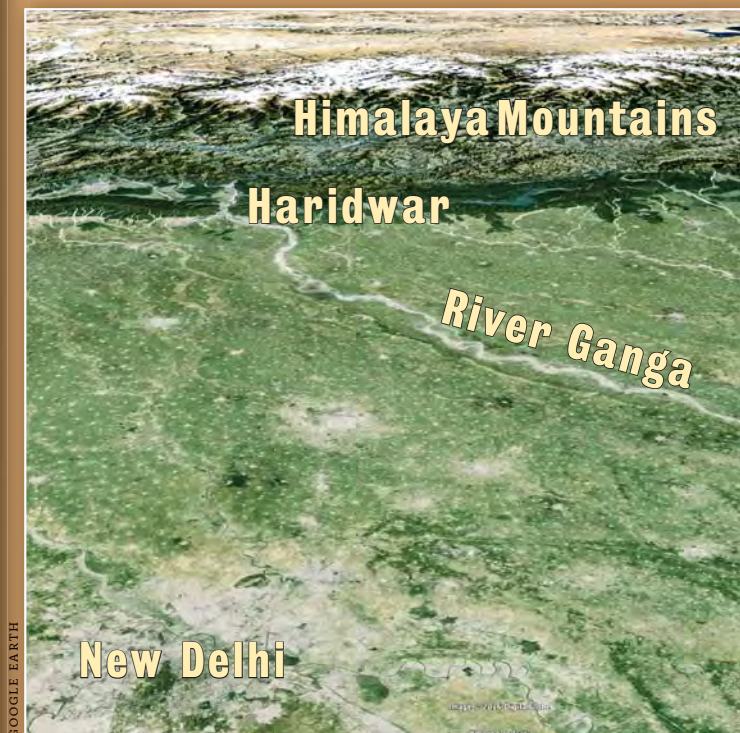
Haridwar, Where River Ganga Enters the Plains



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



GOOGLE EARTH

us every success with the grace of Mother Ganga. He was correct, and this report can only be considered an overview of the many sacred temples, monasteries, schools and sites dotting this ancient city.

At the River's Edge
Haridwar's three most prominent ghats are Har Ki Pauri in central Haridwar, Kushavarta Ghat, just downstream from Har Ki Pauri, and Kankhal Sati Ghat, about three miles south along a branch of the Ganga. Most devotees come to Har Ki Pauri to worship the Ganga or to perform last rites, while Kankhal Sati and Kushavarta are almost exclusively devoted to last rites, including the immersion of ashes. The priests who perform the rites, we learned, are known by different names depending on where their client comes from: those from Bihar and Purvanchal call them *pandas*; from Punjab, *purohits*; from Haryana, *dada*, and from Gujarat, *gaur*.
We were fortunate to stay at Ganga Lahari Hotel on Gau Ghat, just a six-minute walk from **Har Ki Pauri**. From the early hours of the morning, pilgrims and devotees came to pray, take their holy bath and worship the Goddess Ganga and the Sun God Surya with Vedic mantras and folded hands. The elite of Hindu society, often arriving by plane at nearby Dehradun airport, mingle here with the rural folk who arrive by bus from a distant village. On the steps of Har Ki

Pauri, turban-clad farmers in kurta shirt and dhoti beside women in saris and other Indian traditional dress worship alongside the jean-clad generation of India's information technology professionals. To me, the sight was confirmation that despite the different backgrounds and lifestyles, the traditions of Sanatana Dharma are the binding and unifying force of India, and reverence for our sacred places of pilgrimage has not abated in modern India.
Both groups returned to the river's edge in the evening to attend Ganga arati, visit the riverside temples and offer lighted diyas and beautifully packaged flowers to the Goddess while praying reverently for the welfare of their ancestors and families. Every evening the ghat steps and Malviya Dwipa, the small island opposite the ghat, were crowded with residents and pilgrims for the Ganga arati. All present are affected by this beautiful evening ceremony, as a dozen priests chant Sanskrit in unison and offer large lamps before the river while the nearby temple bells ring thunderously. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of cell phones are held aloft to record the evening worship.
The ceremony here is believed to be the original Ganga arati, begun in 1916 when the Ganga Sabha was founded by freedom fighter Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. It has since been duplicated in Rishikesh and Varanasi. The Sabha still manages the worship, and its members are responsible for crowd

control. They also man tables to collect donations once the worship is concluded. Earlier they used to solicit money during the worship, but complaints from the devotees resulted in this less intrusive system.
Kushavarta Ghat is much different. From morning to night a battery of priests perform the *pind daan* food offering ritual for those whose close relatives have passed away (see pind-daan.in). Hindus—and some non-Hindus as well, the priests told us—come here not just from India, but all over the world for this purpose. We saw the trays of mortal remains collected from the cremation grounds being offered into the water from the ghat and occasionally from the adjacent bridge.
On one visit to Kushavarta Ghat we were able to meet Pandit Virender Kirtipal, a senior priest, leader of the Teerth Purohit Society of Kushavarta Ghat and a prominent Vishva Hindu Parishad leader of the area. He was fully booked from early morning to late afternoon performing rituals for his *yajmans*, or clients, from all over India, so we could only meet him in the evening. Here the pandits, or *pandas* as they are also

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Busy worship: (below, left to right) A woman makes an offering of water while behind her another woman fills a jug to take home; urgent family meeting to map out the day; head shaving is one of several rites of passage carried out along the ghats

known, perform three types of ceremonies: 1) worship of the Gods and devas, including Ganesha and the nine planets, 2) the *pitr karmas* to honor ancestors and 3) the *pret karmas*, rituals performed when a recently departed soul is felt to be disturbed and not moving on to higher inner worlds but lingering around the family. These are performed for the thousands who come to this ghat daily, without regard for the jati or varna of the person concerned, as Kirtipal explained. "There are days when 5,000 come and other days just a few hundred come. At times it is so crowded one cannot find a place to stand." Other rites of passage may be performed on the ghats as well, including head shaving and bestowal of the sacred thread. Many legends and stories are associated with Kushavarta Ghat. Lord Datatreya is said to have performed penance in this area for thousands of years.
There is no school for the purohits to learn their profession; this knowledge is only passed on from father to son. Virender Kirtipal estimates there are 2,500 purohit families in Haridwar. Today some youth are entering other professions for the income, but still retain the right to perform the rituals.
Kankhal Sati Ghat lies along a natural channel of the river and is reached through narrow lanes lined with beggars. This is the



Riverside store: Everything needed for worship: fresh flowers in a ready-to-launch leaf boat, lamps, coconuts and bottles for taking Ganga water home

main site for the immersion of ashes, while Kushavarta is mostly for the pind daan ceremony, which takes place weeks and months after the death of a loved one. We saw dozens of families there with priests attending their needs.
Of the several small temples here, the most prominent is Ganga Mata Temple—Sati Ghat, dedicated to the river Goddess. According to the temple priest, Jitendra Shastri, three to four hundred families of priests work here, following the rituals prescribed in the *Garuda Purana*.
In some cases, according to their carefully maintained records, these priests have

been serving the same family for 500 years. The genealogy records kept by the *pandas* are famous in their own right, sometimes serving as evidence in court over inheritance disputes, according to Vishal Joshi, a priest at Har Ki Pauri. The voluminous documents are kept at home, Vishal said, and only when a client wants to see the complete details of their forefathers are they brought to the ghats. At such times, the records are updated with new information about the family, including whoever has come to Haridwar. These days, when there are fewer extended-family households, the *pandas* request their clients to kindly check up on their relatives so the records can be updated accordingly. Starting around 1977, these records have been microfilmed by the Mormons, who have used them in an attempt to "convert" the souls of those who have passed on—a practice denounced even by other Christians.
Two kinds of priests perform the last rites, according to Jitendra Shastri. The mahabrahmins conduct the rituals at the cremation ground itself. Jitendra's own community of brahmins perform not only last rites but all of the 16 *samskaras* (rites of passage), from birth to death. Certain *pandas* handle designated districts of India, some of which are now in Pakistan.

Worship Along the Ghats



Shastri said about 80 percent of those who come enlist the services of the priests, while 20 percent immerse the ashes themselves without any assistance. He does not endorse this practice: "When the due rituals are performed by the relatives of the deceased, then everyone is a recipient of peace—the departed soul, the relatives and the priest."

We did not interact with many families here, especially wishing to respect those coping with a young or untimely death. We did speak with Sunil Khanna, who with his family was distributing the clothes of the deceased to assembled beggars—such items are not normally kept at home. Sunil expressed indignation with what he considered the money-minded approach of his priest compared to the last time he had rituals done here.

Jitendra Shastri explained that there are no fixed rates for the priests' services; they are paid anywhere from US\$150 to \$1,500. "We are not here to demand; it is not a tax fixed by anyone. The money is given out of the sweet will of those who have the rituals performed."

Yes, he acknowledged, there are claims that the purohits exploit their clients—but "the fact is that our yajmans come here to offer us money and get their rituals performed. This is clear to us. There can be no fixed fee or charges, as people here come from different income backgrounds. If someone has money and does not pay the taxes due to him, then he will be a defaulter in the eyes of the government. Similarly, if someone has the money or the capacity to pay the money and does not spend it on the rituals related to the

ancestors, then ultimately such a person will be considered a defaulter in the eyes of the ancestors. It is the duty of us all to pay our obeisance and reverence to our ancestors, as they have provided us this human body."

We parted company with these words of assurance from him: "God Himself takes care of the Sanatana Dharma, Hinduism, which has no beginning and no end. We should not have any doubts about this."

Area Temples

There are hundreds of temples in the Haridwar area, ranging from miniature to medium size. Many are quite ancient. **Maya Devi** is the first temple a pilgrim is expected to visit, as Goddess Maya is the presiding Deity of Haridwar. The present temple, considered by locals as one of the 51 Shakti Peeths of India, dates back at least to the 11th century.

Maya Devi is located in the large compound of the Juna Akhara (monastic order). When we visited, young sadhus of the order could be seen distributing prashadam to the many devotees who had come to worship the Goddess during the October Navaratri festival. The chief priest, Mahant Sewagiri Ji, is himself a sadhu in the akhara since age ten. In addition to Maya Devi Herself, the temple has murtis of the Goddesses Kamakhya Devi, Mahakali, Chamunda and Tara. Sewagiri explains, "We all need the shakti (power or energy) of the Goddess to run our lives and bodies in an efficient manner."

One devotee, Radhika, tells me her college

is quite close by and many of her classmates visit this temple to get the blessings of the Goddess. Another, Keshav Chandra Sharma, told us the temple is popular with the business community, who believe that "if one can somehow please Mother Maya, then one can have control over the worldly maya."

Another famous temple, **Prachin Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple**, also has a sannyasin as priest—Swami Bimal Van of the Niranjani Akhara. Outside of temples under their direct control, it would be unusual for a sannyasin to fulfill the roll of priest. In the case of the Hanuman temple, there is also a second priest, Shiv Narayan Shastri, a householder, who conducts much of the worship. Shastri was emphatic that anyone who learned Sanskrit properly, as he had, would never lack for suitable employment—contrary to the general impression that such scholars can't make a decent living.

The traditional Panch Tirth (five holy places) in Haridwar are Har Ki Pauri, Kushavarta Ghat, Mansa Devi, Chandni Devi and **Kankhal**. The latter is a sacred area with

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Pandas at work: (counter-clockwise from below left) Pandas sitting on the small platforms at right perform ceremonies for devotees; hundreds of shila shrines, miniature temples for one's ancestors, pack the courtyard of the Naryana Shila temple; blessing the ashes prior to immersion; a panda updates the hand-bound record book of a client family



The Rituals and Records of Dying



many temples, including for Sheetla Mata, Lakshmi Narayan, Mahakaleshwar, Hanuman, Siva and Kali, as well as the famed Shri Daksheshwar Prajapati Temple—all within a few meters of each other. Our late-evening visit to the Kankhal area was a magical experience. It felt more like one big temple compound than individual places.

Mansa Devi and Chandi Devi are hill-top temples. Both take planning and time to reach. As with Maya Devi, they are considered Shakti Peethas, though not on the standard list of 51. Earlier, the only way to reach the Mansa Devi temple was a three-kilometer trek via trail and stairs. Many still do hike, but now pilgrims can get there in an effortless few minutes by cable car, at the same time enjoying a breathtaking view of Haridwar.

Mansa means wish, and the Goddess is believed to fulfill the wishes of all who worship her sincerely. A form of Shakti, Mansa is said to have come out of the mind of Lord Siva. The temple seems to have a fairly spacious compound. We visited the main shrine, which was beautifully decorated with flowers and costumes. The inner shrine contains two murtis, one with eight arms and the other with five arms and three heads. The place had strong positive vibrations.

There was a big rush of devotees when we visited, linked to the fall season Navratri festival which was under way. Many were crowded around a special tree in the temple, tying threads to its branches while making a wish. Once the wish is fulfilled, people return to untie their thread from the tree.

We next visited the **Chandi Devi** Temple atop the Neel Mountain a few kilometers

away, again reached via ropeway. It is said that the two Goddesses, Mansa and Chandi are different forms of Goddess Parvati and therefore they reside close to each other. The present temple was built in 1929 by Maharaja Suchat Singh of Kashmir. It, too, was packed with worshipers when we arrived.

The popular **Bharat Mata Mandir** is actually an exhibition hall dedicated to Mother India. This prominent eight-story building, opened in 1983, was built by Swami Satyami-trananda Giri Maharaj. Each floor depicts an era in Indian history, from the days of *Ramayana* up to India's independence day. One floor is dedicated to India's revered women, including Radha, Mira, Savitri, Draupadi, Ahilya, Anusuya, Maitri and Gargi; another commemorates the great saints of Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism; another displays the forms of the Goddess Shakti; and the top floor is devoted to Lord Siva. We met several rural youth there who were excited not about the exhibits but to take the elevator, for two rupees, to the top floor—their first experience of that modern marvel.

Pawan Dham temple is famed for its exquisite glass and mirror work. Even the Deities are so made. This temple is presently managed by Swami Sahaj Prakash, a Mahamandaleshwar of the Panchayati Mahanirvani Akhara.

Many tiny temples dot the ghat area, and one evening at Ganga arati we spoke with the owner and priest of one, Vasant Budhkar, age 72, at his **Prachin Sri Ganga Temple**. He tells me the temple was established in the 16th century by a king, Amir Naresh, during the reign of Akbar. It has been

in his family for 14 generations, but now his sons have taken to different work and he is not sure how the temple will be managed after him. The owners of other temples, he explained, have hired outside priests. Some have even sublet their temple to someone else for a lump-sum annual payment.

Bilkeshwar Mahadev Temple, owned by the Niranjani Akhara, is located in a hilly area surrounded by huge trees. The temple is renowned as the place where Goddess Parvati did penance for thousands of years until Lord Siva accepted Her as His wife. It houses a powerful and ancient Sivalingam. The devotees here said that whatever they asked of Lord Siva as Bilkeshwar (Lord of the Bilva Tree) Mahadev at this temple was granted, just as was the wish of Parvati. They make their wish by whispering into the ear of the beautiful metal statue of Nandi, the bull, just outside the temple. Two girls, Indu Sharma and Sonia, were doing exactly that

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Town Temples: (clockwise from right) Indu Sharma confides her prayers to Nandi at the Bilkeshwar Mahadev temple; the hilltop Mansa Devi Temple; Swami Bimal Van, priest, Prachin Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple; Mahant Sewagiri, chief priest, in the inner sanctum of the Maya Devi temple; Gurukulam boys at Anandamayi Ma Ashram



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

An Attentive Bull and Helpful Hanuman



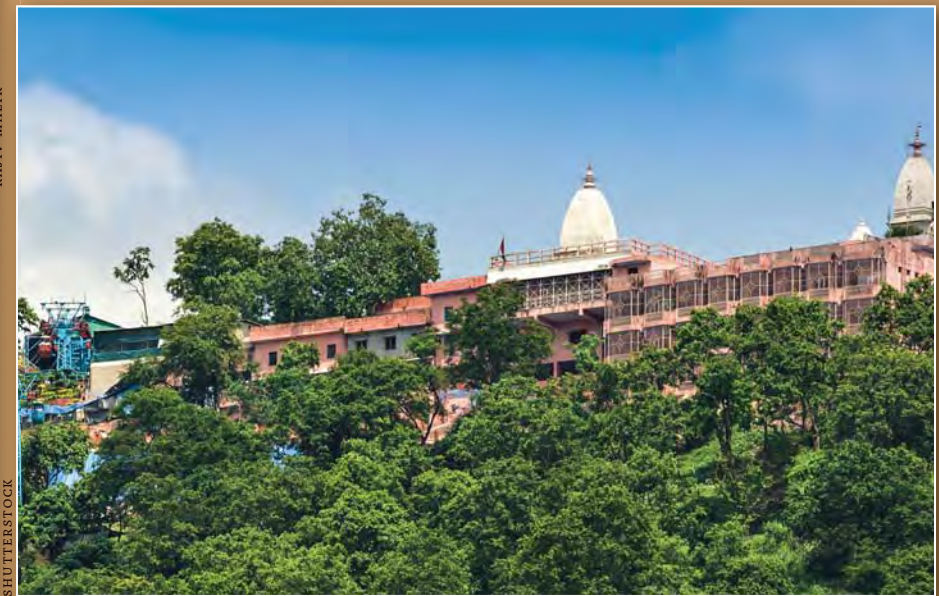
DEV RAJ AGARWAL



RAJIV MALIK



RAJIV MALIK



SHUTTERSTOCK

when I visited. They told me every one of their past wishes had been granted. We also met an elderly businessman, Shri Bhagwan Maheshwari, who was worshipping Lord Siva with great reverence and dedication. He gives credit for everything good that has happened in his life to Bilkeshwar Temple. He has been associated with it for many decades and every year sponsors Rudrabhishekam here.

I was moved by the great bond between this temple's devotees and Lord Siva. True devotion to Lord Siva can be life transforming for even the most ordinary and commonplace souls who worship and serve Him with complete and unflinching commitment at such a powerful temple as this.

The **Narayana Shila Temple** was abuzz with activity when I visited. At least a dozen priests of this Vishnu temple were performing elaborate pind daan rituals by which Hindus honor their ancestors. Prominent here are thousands of small structures, *shila*, built by people who felt their relatives were unsettled in the next world, especially by an untimely or accidental death.

One of the priests, Acharya Pandit Manoj Kumar Shastri, lamented that people today are in too great a rush to be finished with the death rituals. The young priest feels too much importance is being given to rituals

connected with happy events, such as birth and marriage, and not enough to the sad event of death. Wedding celebrations, he pointed out, commonly go on for a week, while people come here asking for the death rituals to be cut short. "According to our scriptures," Manoj Kumar said, "if the proper rites and rituals are not performed after the death, the deceased attracts 64 types of faults, which become an impediment to liberation." The reason mourning takes a year, he explained, is because the nine pranas (forms of energy) leave as soon as the ashes of the deceased are immersed in the Ganga, but the tenth prana, which is in the ashes themselves, takes one year to dissolve, and during that year the departed soul is believed to be living with us.

We were disappointed by our visit to **Bhimgoda Tank**, a small reservoir said to have been created when the Pandava brothers passed through here on their way to the Himalayas. The area was completely ill maintained, and not a single devotee could be seen. This historic place is just a few kilometers from Har Ki Pauri and in the middle of a residential and commercial area, but no Hindu organization, ashram or the government is caring for it.

Bhimgoda aside, Haridwar has hundreds of wonderful temples. Visiting them all, even briefly, could take weeks; to do them justice, as we were told, would take lifetimes. The pilgrim here is never more than a few steps from a place of worship!

Ashrams and Akharas

All thirteen akharas (monastic orders) maintain facilities in Haridwar, and three akharas—Panchayati, Juna and Udasin are headquartered here. But the first ashram we visited was that of **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982) which houses her samadhi shrine and is located in Haridwar's Kankhal area. Devotees of the famed Bengali mystic were in deep meditation in the main hall when we arrived, and the entire place emanated a strong spiritual vibration. We stayed for the evening arati, which was accompanied by bhajans sung by children of the ashram school.

The devotees we spoke to told us Ma's message was always simple and down to earth: "With earnestness, love and goodwill, carry out life's everyday duties and try to elevate yourself step by step. In all human activities let there be a live contact with the Divine and you will not have to leave off anything. Your work will then be done well and you will be on the right track to find the Master." She also said, "Just as there is a definite timetable for work at school, office or the shop, so should we set apart for divine contemplation a few minutes out of the 24 hours of every day, preferably in the morning and evening. Once this habit is established, the future course of your life will be made quite easy. You will feel the flow of the mysterious divine grace feeding all your thoughts and giving you new strength."

Sri Panchayati Akhara Bada Udasin is located in Kankhal not far from Sati Ghat. The Panchayati Akhara, so named for its

worship of five Gods and locally known as Bada Akhara, has many ashrams and Sanskrit schools, with its contingent of resident sadhus varying from 20 to 200. We spoke with Mahant Raghumani Ji Maharaj, who explained that Panchayati was founded about 300 years ago for the "security of the nation" (one meaning of *akhara* is "place of military practice"). In those days the sannyasins were prepared to fight; and even today they parade with weapons at the Kumbha Melas.

"Today," the Mahant explained, "we need not hold sticks in our hands to fight, as times have changed. Now we extend our help to the nation whenever there is a crisis or an emergency situation." In addition to its ashrams and free Sanskrit schools in the Kankhal area, Bada Akhara has 12,000 ashrams in India, including 20 in Delhi. They have 100 educational institutions in Dehradun alone, plus a medical college.

Stepping inside the huge fort-like compound of Bada Akhara is like being transported into ancient times. "This ashram is not made of just brick and mortar," the Mahant told us. "It stands on the energies of penance and sadhana done here by highly evolved rishis."

The Mahant believes the youth are being attracted to Hinduism, pointing out their interest in the Kumbha Mela. Young people have shown up in substantial numbers in Prayag, Nashik and Ujjain when the colleges and universities were all closed for the event. Not uncommonly, the youth had insisted their reluctant parents take them. "To benefit, they need to meet us face to face, not on Facebook," the Mahant insisted.

He had much to say about current issues,

especially the placement of the elderly in old-folks homes in India, which he called the "biggest sin," warning, "God will never forgive people who do not care for their parents." With regard to the Ganga, he feels it should be freed from all dams, thereby allowing the natural force of the river to flush out all the pollution. But, he acknowledged, cutting off the many canals now leading from the river is impractical, given the dependence of entire cities on the water. He also issued this advice: "My message to the Hindus all over the world is that all of us must have love and respect for all the other religions. We can never progress if we look down upon the other religions. Those people who do not have love and respect for other religions cannot even be true to their own religion." Finally, the Mahant chided us for attempting to cover Haridwar in a week's time and a single article, stating, "It would take many births to cover Haridwar and do justice to its akharas, saints and temples."

We paid a visit to the **Sapt Rishi Ashram**, located near Bharat Mata Mandir in a rather unkempt part of town. While there we encountered Swami Vijayananda Bharati, a Mahant of Juna Akhara. He lamented recent changes in the character of Haridwar, saying it is no longer easy for pilgrims to gain access to the genuine ashrams and the saints connected with them. He described a commercial trend which is off-putting to devotees: "Most of the good ashrams with highly educated saints and modern facilities are only affordable for the rich. To me this is both painful and worrisome." He also lamented the dearth of well-educated saints in the akharas able to offer the knowledge and

wisdom of the scriptures.

As soon as one enters the **Nath Sampradaya Ashram**, one is transported back thousands of years, such is the atmosphere prevailing there due to the ancient Brithari cave, the *dhuna* (ever-burning sacred fire) and the Gorakshnath Temple. The ashram building itself is huge and majestic, with a number of spacious courtyards which call to mind a royal palace of India's glorious past. The head of the institution is Yogi Aditya Nath, presently a member of India's parliament from Gorakhpur. The number of resident saints varies through the year from five to 150, mostly sadhus connected with the Nath Sampradaya, many of whom come for festivals in the months of July and August.

We met with Mahant Chetai Nath, a down-to-earth monk with a great sense of humor who joined the order at age 13 and took over as manager of this ashram in 1974. He pointed out that the infrastructure of Haridwar needs improvement, complaining that government funds allocated during the Kumbha Melas are not being used properly. He also bemoaned the fact that nonvegetarian food and the drinking of alcohol were becoming more commonplace, when in theory both are banned in the holy city. "The government is not doing much to maintain the purity in the holy city of Haridwar, keeping in view its spiritual background and the faith with which pilgrims come here."

Asked to share his message to the readers of HINDUISM TODAY, the Mahant offered, "Guru Gorakshnath Ji's message is that we must all abide by the yamas and the niyamas, which are applicable to everyone of us. God has given us this human body, and

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Temples and Ashrams: (below, left to right) devotees tie a red string to a tree at Mansa Devi Temple; Shilpa Madhukar and Radhika outside Maya Devi Temple; Mahant Raghumani Ji Maharaj of Bada Akhara; samadhi shrine of Sri Anandamayi Ma

The Wish Fulfilling Tree



DEV RAI AGARWAL



RAJIV MALIK



DEV RAI AGARWAL



DEV RAI AGARWAL

if we perform good karmas then we will be blessed by happiness and peace.”

Education

“Few cities in India have so many institutions teaching Hindu culture, ancient sciences and philosophy as you find in Haridwar.” So declared Prof. Surendra Kumar, vice chancellor of one of the largest such institutions, the world-famous **Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya**. GKV was founded in 1902 by Swami Shraddhananda Ji of the Arya Samaj to revive the ancient gurukul system and thus counter the British education policy of Lord Macaulay. Swami became famous for his reconversion work during India’s struggle for independence, which ultimately resulted in his assassination in 1926 by a Muslim fanatic. He is also known for bestowing the title of “Mahatma” on Mohandas K. Gandhi.

GKV is recognized by the Indian government’s University Grants Commission as “deemed to be a university,” more or less on the same level as the country’s 130 deemed universities. This is similar to being fully accredited in the US system.

GKV maintains two campuses in Haridwar, one for 4,500 boys and another for 3,000 girls—both several miles south of Har Ki Pauri—and a third for 3,000 girls in nearby Dehradun. It provides undergraduate and graduate courses in ancient Indian culture, Vedic philosophy, yoga and other disciplines as well as mainstream degree programs in engineering, business administration and life

sciences, including environmental science. The campus is a small city covering hundreds of acres, with residential housing for the faculty and a hostel for the students. Adjoining the main university campus is a gurukulam for young men pursuing a spiritual life. This is run independently by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, an affiliate of the Arya Samaj.

Though we came with no firm appointment, we were graciously received by the vice chancellor, Prof. Kumar, who organized a complete tour of the campus on the spot. We visited their large museum, which showcases Indian history and the life of the founder, and their campus library, which houses 260,000 books, including a substantial collection of ancient manuscripts. Dr. Shrawan Sharma, professor of English and in charge of the library, described to us their efforts to preserve the books and manuscripts. Near the library is a huge yagasala where students and faculty members perform homas, fire worship, in the Arya Samaj style.

Also located on the campus, but not a formal part of the university, is the manufacturing plant of the Gurukul Kangri Pharmacy, known all over India for its ayurvedic products. It has recently been placed in government receivership due to management problems, leaving it unable to contribute to the upkeep of the university.

Prof. Kumar is a well-known academician, and himself a graduate of the school where he has taught for 35 years. “Our students are deeply religious, and even at the postgraduate

level follow the guru-shishya traditions, such as touching the feet of their gurus. Modern subjects here are beautifully blended with our ancient philosophy,” he explained. “In other institutions of learning you will not find this kind of blending, or it will be only in a very small way.”

About 100 students here specialize in Sanskrit, yoga and jyotish (astrology) these days. As GKV is under the government’s University Grants Commission rules, they must charge some fees, while free Vedic schools run by the Haridwar ashrams have proliferated over the last few decades. Also competing for students are the Sanskrit University established by the Uttarakhand government and run by Shanti Kunj.

Prof. Kumar told us students with degrees in Sanskrit and related fields have no problem finding jobs. Nearly every school and university requires Sanskrit teachers, but the biggest area of employment is the priesthood, where knowledge of Sanskrit is a necessity. Also some of these students of Sanskrit may go on to become sannyasins.

Patanjali Yogpeeth and its related

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Religious and Secular Teaching: (counter-clockwise from below left) Main library at GKV; their management school; Patanjali Yogpeeth Vedic Gurukul for women; and for men led by Acharya Pradumn (in orange); girls at Acharyakulam Shikshan Sansthanam chant Sanskrit



Haridwar’s Premier Educational Institutions



institutions were founded in 2006 by Baba Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna, from the pair's simple inspiration to promote yoga and Ayurveda. Today the various projects are situated at five separate campuses between Haridwar and Roorkee and occupy a thousand acres of land. According to Siddharth Bhargava of Pantanjali Yogpeeth, their Acharya Gurukulam has about 800 students (two-thirds boys and one-third girls, on separate residential campuses) studying from 5th to 12th standard—nicely complementing GKV, which is university level. The study includes both general and Vedic education. They hope one day to establish 500 such schools, one in nearly every major district of India.

We were most fortunate in being able to meet Acharya Balkrishna himself, who directed his staff to give us a tour of the facility. We immediately noted the modernity of the buildings here, unlike the GKV's architecture, which is quintessential early 19th century.

The Acharya Gurukulam (acharyakulam.org) is housed in a multi-story building fronted by a sprawling lawn where the children perform yoga and other physical exercises early each morning. As we visited various classroom, the children rose to greet us with hands in namaskar, chanting Vedic mantras with complete devotion. They can converse in both Sanskrit and English, in addition to their native Hindi. The hostels were immaculate and the classroom facilities state-of-the-art for both the boys' and girls' sections.

Siddharth Bhargava, one of the key people here, told us that the idea is to give their students such a strong foundation that

wherever they go in the world they will not be influenced by the sensual materialism of the West. Students need to be prepared as completely awakened and conscious scholars so they will be able to change the course current social evolution. During my interaction with the faculty and students, it became obvious that there is a high level of emphasis on spirituality and high moral values here.

On a much larger scale than the school is the ayurvedic treatment and research hospital, Ayurveda college and the Patanjali Food & Herbal Park. The latter is now a multi-million-dollar company whose ultra-modern plant provides sharp contrast to the GKV's dated production methods. Its story is so remarkable we decided to cover it separately in the next issue of HINDUISM TODAY.

Another impressive facility here is the Yoga Bhawan, where 40,000 people at once can attend lectures and yoga classes with Baba Ramdev. These programs are a main focus of the Yogpeeth.

Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya (dsvv.ac.in) is a fully residential university established by the Uttarakhand government and run by Shri Vedamata Trust, Shantikunj, Haridwar. Shantikunj is popularly known as the Gayatri Parivar Family. Founded in 1971 by Pandit Shriram Sharma, it is located about five miles north of Haridwar on the road to Rishikesh. The campus infrastructure is excellent, and I was impressed by the traditional Indian dress worn by teachers and students alike and their dedication to the guru-shishya system.

We met Dr. Pranav Pandaya, son-in-law of Shriram Sharma, Chancellor of DSVV and head of All World Gayatri Parivar. He

proudly states that DSVV was the first private university in the state and is completely self-supporting. The university has 1,600 students, while the associated Gayatri Vidyapeeth (to 12th standard) on the same campus has 1,400 students. Four hundred students are taking a five-year course in yoga, which Pranav believes is unmatched anywhere else. In fact, he said, most of the schools in Haridwar teaching yoga have faculty members who graduated from DSVV. They also have departments in the sciences, including Ayurveda, rural management and the arts, including animation. There is no tuition or meal fee, and residential students pay just US\$35/month for housing. Aside from their majors, every student must take courses in life management, scientific spirituality, Sanskrit and English.

Shopping!

With its constant flow of outside visitors and occasional influx of hundreds of thousands, Haridwar is a shopper's—and therefore an entrepreneur's—paradise. A few businesses operate right on the ghats, selling flower, lamp and coconut offerings and providing head-shaving and, incongruously, full-body massages; but the main business

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The Entrepreneurs: (counter-clockwise from below left); malas, prayer beads, of all types are the specialty of this small shop; Ramendra Singh in his shop which sells religious books; Anil Gupta specializes in rudraksha beads and other religious items; a seller of sweets; the narrow lanes of Haridwar's shopping area

activity is from the top steps of the ghats onward. Parallel to Har Ki Pauri is a solid bank of restaurants and shops selling everything from bottled water to *gutkas*, the small areca nut and tobacco pouches popular with locals despite the substance being a known carcinogen.

It is common for pilgrims here to distribute food to the needy, and some restaurants are set up just for this purpose. Devotees come in and, according to their budget, buy food to be given out. The restaurant owner loudly announces to everyone in earshot that free food is now available, and anyone who comes is fed up to the budget, or a bit more.

Almost every road in the vicinity of the ghats is packed with stores offering textiles, rudraksha malas, souvenirs, ayurvedic medicines, books, and more. There are sundry restaurants, where visitors and townspeople line up to enjoy puri with chana or halwa, lassi, hot milk, sweets (like jalebi, gulab jamun, rabri, kalakand) and innumerable other Indian food items. The beautifully decorated and well-lit shops and restaurants remain open late into the night, creating a nearly 24-hour festive atmosphere.

One evening we walked from Har Ki Pauri to the shop of our long-time friend here, Anil Gupta. The area is one big market, colorful and charming in the night lighting, and full of customers. Gupta's store, Navratna Emporium, is located at Gau Ghat. It was discovered by HINDUISM TODAY's editors in 1995 when they noticed a number of sadhus shopping there and decided to investigate.



and his son Parminder, who told us Hindu priests and scholars are among their frequent customers. The business was founded in 1908 by Ramendra's grandfather, who had come from Amritsar. With the blessings of Mother Ganga, they are satisfied with the business, they told me, as did all the businessmen we met.

In Conclusion

The main purpose of coming to Haridwar, of course, is to bathe in the Ganga. I do so on our last day here, a chilly early winter morning. There are large groups of people at Har Ki Pauri when we arrive, many of them from rural areas and most too shy to speak

to a reporter. As I enter the river, I find the flow so strong that I have to hold on to one of the chains anchored to the ghat steps to avoid being swept away. With folded hands I pray to Mother Ganga and the Sun, whose golden rays are so soothing and comforting while I stand in the extremely cold Ganga water. Finally I come out, feeling spiritually refreshed and blessed. Teerth Priest Babu Lal Sharma helps me perform Ganga puja with the chanting of mantras and offering of flowers. It is a fitting finale to our sojourn.

During the flight back to Delhi, greetings of "Har Har Gange, Jai Ganga Maiya, Jai Ma Ganga" reverberate in me, stirring up my soul and consciousness. I had visited Haridwar many times before, but on this trip I was overwhelmed with blissfulness and joy. Ganga is a living Goddess who can be felt in one's life and can have a positive and profound impact every time one has Her divine darshan. 🍽️

Haridwar's Happy Businessmen



Origins of the Ganga Canal

Built in 1854 to prevent famines, it was at the time the largest irrigation project in human history

THE DISASTROUS FAILURE OF THE MONsoon rains in 1837–1838 resulted in 800,000 deaths by starvation—from an area population of six million, the loss of a far larger number of cattle and a cost to the British East India Company of ten million rupees in relief aid. A single English engineer, Proby T. Cautley, convinced the Company that an extensive canal system could avert future famines in the region, and the Ganga Canal was opened in 1854. It flowed 348 miles, irrigating 767,000 acres of land in 5,000 villages, then returned to both the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers.

As part of preparing this report on Haridwar, we asked those we interviewed about the construction of the canal. Surprisingly, no one knew anything about it. One otherwise well informed person ventured that it was built in 1924—off by 70 years.

Perhaps the problem is that today Haridwar and its ghats sit alongside the canal, not on the river bank itself—as evidenced each year when the canal locks are closed to allow cleaning and repair of the ghats. But that was not the case prior to 1854. To learn more, we located several reports and descriptions from that time period, including those of Cautley himself.

We found an 1837 steel engraving (top right) titled “Hurdwar” that carries this description on the back, “The town of Hurdwar, which is small but well built, is adorned with several commodious ghauts, constructed of cut freestone, descending by long flights of steps to the river. The Ganges River is a mile in width at Hurdwar. The resident population of Hurdwar being small, the accommodation for pilgrims and others, who repair in great numbers to the place at certain seasons, is of a temporary description only, the wealthy portion of the pilgrims being alone indulged with the shelter of a roof over them; the remainder of the vast multitude whom religion, pleasure, or business brings to the spot, being content to bivouac under canvas, or beneath the shadows of the trees. Hurdwar is also the place of celebrated fair, held in month of April and lasts nearly a month.”

In Cautley’s 1860 “Report on the Ganges Canal Works,” he describes the situation prior to construction: “The main stream of the Ganges, the discharge of which is estimated in the driest months of the year at 8,000 cubic feet per second, opens upon the plains of India by a well defined gorge in the Sewalik mountains. Immediately on the right, and close at the foot of these mountains, are

situated the town and temples of Hurdwar. The river may be said to occupy the whole of this gorge, the width of which at its narrowest point is about one mile.

“A branch passed directly under the town of Hurdwar, and, proceeding onwards in a tolerably even and unbroken section, rejoined the parent river at a point below Kunkhul, a large town situated about 1¼ mile below Hurdwar. From this branch the inhabitants of Hurdwar and Kunkhul had been in the habit of bringing a water course for the purpose of supplying the towns, the priests being interested in maintaining water at their ghats or bathing places; the community in general depending upon this supply for water both for drinking, for turning corn-mills, and to a moderate extent for the irrigation of the gardens. The head works of the Ganges Canal, therefore, were, *in limine* [“at the outset”], determined by the priests and the people; so far as supply was concerned, it was only a matter of degree” [i.e., the river water was already being diverted for various uses].

Cautley recounts how the priests and holy men of Haridwar agreed on the project under the conditions that it begin with a puja to Ganesha and that the barrage or dam across the Ganga, which diverted 84 percent of the river at low flow into the canal, allow at least

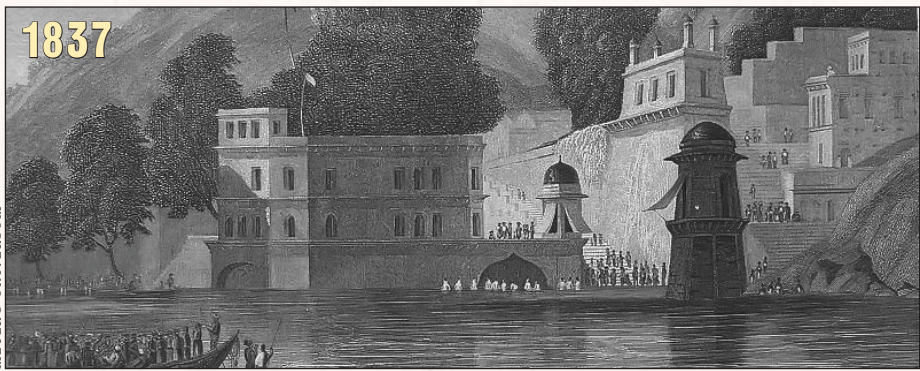
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Portraits of life: (clockwise from below left) cleaning the ghats while the canal gates are closed; then and now shots of Haridwar from across the canal; the ghats in the 1840s?; in the 1880s and in 1837, prior to the canal construction

a small portion of the river to always freely flow downstream. Cautley’s construction team also rebuilt the ghats to be safer for the pilgrims, with deep areas filled in and railings and chains installed along the sides, as we see today. This improvement to the ghats, Cautley wrote, “may be received by the Hindoo as some atonement for the liberties taken with the Ganges, as well as with the tutelary deity of the ghat upon the site of which these works were constructed.”

The canal cost 15 million pounds in 1850. While it is difficult to estimate the current value of money in the past, by one accepted method (based on GDP), this would be £4.85 billion, or us\$6.9 billion. That’s in the same general price range as the similar-sized California aqueduct project of the 1960s.

A description of the opening ceremonies appearing in the *Delhi Gazette*, April 12, 1854, reads in part, “The first letting on of the water [into the canal from the Ganga at Haridwar] was attended with no ceremony, but was marked by a remarkable incident. Hurdwar, as one of the holiest places in India, is peopled by devotees, priests and religious mendicants, many of whom had regarded the progress of the canal with mingled feelings and selfish dislike and superstitious abhorrence. They dreaded less it might interfere with their gains from the liberal piety of pilgrims by lessening the reputed sanctity of the town, and they looked upon it as an impious work offensive to the mighty Gunga herself. It had been feared that some of the more fanatical among them might undertake to interfere with violence at this last moment. But fortunately they chose a different course, and



on this occasion ten Fakeers led the working party of their own accord, and thus settled the religious question by accepting the canal as an undeniable fact.”

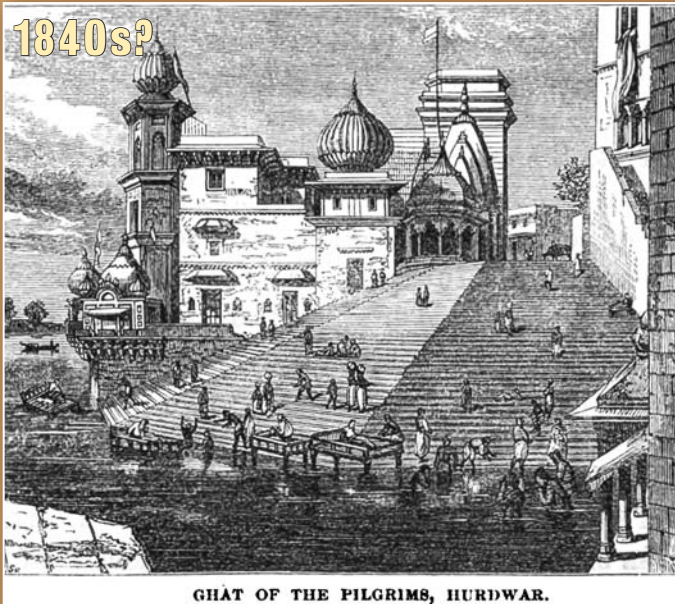
The official opening ceremonies were held at Rourkee, 35 miles down from Haridwar, as this was the headquarters of the project and site of some its most difficult construction. Half a million people attended the opening, including representatives from all over north India. “On foot, on horseback, drawn by cattle in all kinds of carriages, on elephants covered with showy trappings, in palanquins, on unwieldy camels, one by one, or in troops, Hindoo and Buddhist, Parsee and Mussulman, Jew and Christian have met together to welcome the birth of the new stream.”

The British-led ceremonies were, of course, Christian in tone and imperious: “It was difficult to conceive of a more impressive service than this. A few hundred Christians in the heart of a foreign country, surrounded by many thousand heathens, are dedicating to God the work of civilization which they had undertaken for the benefit of these unenlightened multitudes. In the light of that early morning, under the shadow of the eternal hills, they stand as the missionaries of the religion of peace and goodwill.”

With the actual opening of the locks at Rourkee, which allowed the canal’s water to move downstream in full force, “The Lieutenant-Governor led the way in three hearty cheers, and one cheer more for Cautley. The cry spread among the crowd, and half a million voices shouted welcome to Gunga-jee, and for half an hour the great mass of human beings swayed to and from under intense excitement.”

The writer then offers a self-serving yet somewhat conciliatory conclusion: “Miserable as have been the pretexts, and bloody as has been the course of many of the English wars in India, they have been in the end of greater advantage to the conquered than to the conquerors.” This statement is all the more remarkable, coming as it did at the beginning, not the end, of the colonial era. 🇮🇳

Haridwar Through the Centuries





EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Secrets of Indian Gastronomy

A Synopsis of the Ayurvedic Fundamentals of Food and its Preparation

ALL TEXT EXCERPTED FROM THE BOOK *SECRETS OF INDIAN GASTRONOMY*, BY RENOWNED CULINARY GURU, MANJIT GILL, CORPORATE CHEF, ITC-HOTELS



Large sacks of herbs, spices and masalas on sale at the Anjuna Market in Goa, India



“Our food is deeply grounded with five elements, five senses, three strands, three humors, six savors and nine feelings.”

The physical, as well as metaphysical, aspects of food cannot be ignored. Man is born of food, nourished by food and becomes food for other creations. Matter draws energy from food to become alive, gets nourished and then grows. *Rasa*, the juice of food, converts into *rakta*, the juice of life, to cajole the seed of tomorrow, to propagate life.

Our *Upanishads* have envisioned a cycle of life in the macro-system of the universe. Earth gives life to Vanaspati and other life forms. Water creates shores on the Earth. Fire evaporates moisture to bring clouds of rain. The winds crackle with lighting and fire. Space offers its expanse to sway the air. And the earth vibrates to give space to its three basic forms, or *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. It is these three basic *gunas* that have permeated all matter to form their basic nature. Human personality, too, is a blend of these three *gunas*; and the dominance of any of the three determines behavior patterns.

A right balance of the three *gunas* is the key ingredient of a wholesome and healthy diet, the emphasis being on raw and freshly cooked food. No wonder a great deal of thought is invested in our scriptures, particularly the *Upanishads*, on how food and life are interlinked with each other and with God. In the contemporary context, whether at home or at a commercial establishment, four essentials of culinary science can be culled from the scriptures: knowledge of food, preparation skills, the creator's state of mind, and hygiene. Food has the unique quality of absorbing from its surroundings. It is therefore necessary that the creator must be endowed with hygiene, health and freshness. Indian gastronomy is an ancient treasure trove of knowledge, and our cuisine has continuously evolved, based on the philosophy of wellness and longevity. My advice remains to understand and practice these learnings which, when integrated into our daily way of living and eating, reward us with brilliance of body, mind and soul.



The Pillar of Life

THOUGH AYURVEDA IS POPULARLY REGARDED AS A stream of traditional medicine, it is much more than that. It is the science of life. The word itself signifies that: *ayur* means life and *veda* connotes knowledge. And the goal of ayurveda is the pursuit of longevity and complete fulfillment.

Ayurveda is one of the branches of the *Vedas*. It is regarded as an Upaveda of the *Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda*; but, essentially speaking, it is a stream of the knowledge coming down generations since eternity, parallel to the Vedic literature. That is why its emergence has been said to be from the creator, Brahma himself, prior to “creation.”

Our scriptures mention the passage of this vital knowledge from conception to propagation. Brahma, the creator of the universe, imparted this knowledge to Prajapati, the lord of the human species. Prajapati instructed the Ashwins, or twin Deities, to bring ayurveda to Lord Indra, king of the Gods and the upholder of the heavenly order. Indra awarded this knowledge to the greater rishis and teachers—Atreya, Bharadwaja, Kashyapa and Dhanvantari.

Then Agnivesha, Rishi Atreya’s meticulous pupil, documented the science of ayurveda. And finally Charaka discovered the lost ends in the 5th century and recompiled the science in the form of *Charaka Samhita*. This book, which is full of Charaka’s medical conjectures, defines food, sleep and self control as the pillars that support life.

In a simple, rhythmic style, the book talks about complex phenomena, like ingestion, digestion, absorption, assimilation and metabolism of the five basic elements, namely earth (prithivi), water (aap), fire (agni), air (vayu) and ether (akasha). Both *Charaka Samhita* and Agnivesha clearly state that curable and incurable body disorders are the result of dietary indiscretions.

Further, food is classified into four categories according to the way it is consumed: solid food, which is eaten; liquids to be drunk; semi-fluids that are licked; and fibrous foods that are chewed.

The omnipresence of the five basic elements in complex proportions in food actually determines its taste and behavior.

Interestingly, unlike what is popularly believed, ayurveda lays a



CHEF GILL

lot of stress on the taste of food. Taste, which one can experience, is the common man’s key to uncovering the highly complex science of nutrition.

The experience of the palate triggers a chain of chemical reactions that have an effect on all organs of the body, particularly the digestive system. Food items of the *tejas prakriti* (hot nature) enhance the digestive functions, while the ingestion of food items on the *shita prakriti* (cool nature) slows down enzyme inundation. Tastes also have a subtle effect on the body and its metabolism.

Ayurveda categorizes tastes into six behavioral categories. The

Food science: (clockwise from above) Chef Manjit Gill, who compiled *The Secrets of Indian Gastronomy cookbook* in 2012 for Pusa Institute Hotel Management Alumni Association with over 50 recipes from the collections of India’s most celebrated professionals; nine aspects of ayurveda; a chart of ayurvedic body types; a well-prepared meal of stuffed potato bread and white chickpeas



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basic elements of sweet food are mainly earth and water. They tend to be heavy and moist, so they provide heaviness and moisture to the body. Sour tasting food has earth and fire as the basic elements. It stimulates the digestive system and provides warmth to the body. Salty food, primarily consisting of fire and water, promotes digestive

tronic science in the world. Such a fully developed science now requires the right translation with deep understanding and adaptation. Some of the greatest doctors and sages have contributed their finest insights and discoveries to its ancient and profound food wisdom.

Ten Food Rules for Health

ACCORDING TO RISHI CHARAKA, AYURVEDA CLEARLY STATES that curable and noncurable body disorders are the results of dietary disorders.

Here are ten ayurvedic guidelines on diet.

1. Eat foods that are freshly cooked.
2. Food should be tasty and easy to digest.
3. Food needs to be eaten in proper quantities, neither too much nor too little.
4. Food and its courses need to work together, not contradict one another.
5. Food should be eaten on an empty stomach, after the previous meal has been digested.
6. Food should be eaten in a congenial atmosphere and with appropriate equipment and implements.
7. Food should not be eaten hurriedly.
8. Food should not be eaten slowly, lest its flavor be lost.
9. Food should be eaten with concentrated attention.
10. Foods should be eaten that suit one’s constitution and temperament.



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Three Bodily Humors

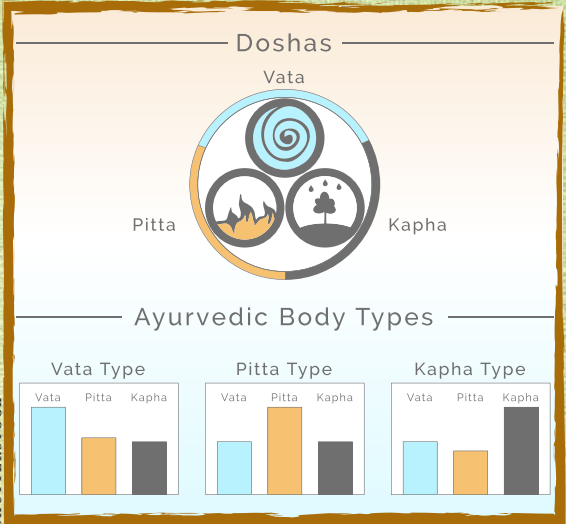
By Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley)

DOSHAS RELATE TO PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ENERGIES, MIND-BODY types, temperaments and characteristics. *Dosha* means “that which causes things to decay,” referring to the disease potential inherent in these biological humors. Doshas are three: vata, pitta and kapha.

Pitta, which relates to bile at a physiological level, or the “fire” humor, helps us in digestion on all levels, physical and mental—from proper digestion of food to the ability to perceive reality. It reflects the qualities of fire and the oily aspect of water. It is linked to warmth, courage, valor and assertion.

Vata, meaning air or wind, as a biological force, or the “air” humor, propels all bodily functions and movements, from the digestive system to the mind, connected to the background power of prana. It reflects the qualities of air and space. It manifests as energy, enthusiasm, desire for change and instability.

Kapha, relating to mucus at a physiological level, or the “water” humor, is responsible for cohesion, form and nutrition in body and mind. It reflects the qualities of water and earth, the dominant qualities found in most foods. It is linked with feeling, endurance, receptivity and inertia.



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Three Strands of Nature

Even the food each person prefers is of three kinds, according to the three modes of material nature. The same is true of sacrifices, austerities and charity. Here are the distinctions between them.

You eat what you are and you are what you eat.
Bhagavad Gita 27. 7-10

This verse points to the interrelationship between food, self, climate and the ultimate reality by true cultural formulation. First you eat what you are; and second you are what you eat. The first is well grounded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where foods are classified according to the strands (gunas). The second formulation bases itself on the Upanishadic instruction: pure nourishment leads to pure mind. A healthy body is considered to be a by-product of discriminating and controlled nourishments.

The Earth vibrates to provide ether (space) to its three strands, or gunas. They are defined as the quality of energy. As per Indian gastronomy, the balance of the trigunas—sattva, rajas and tamas—is the key ingredient of a wholesome diet for health. Moderation is the key.

SATTVIC: *Sattva* means pure. *Sattva* is a benevolent, unobstructive guna. It is associated with happiness and knowledge and forms the soul of man. A person, who has a command over his own thinking abilities, is *sattvik* in nature. In food, the *sattvik* *tattva* enhances longevity, mental power, health and the feeling of contentment. Consuming food in this category gives alertness, quick-thinking and is in harmony with nature. It is savory and nutritive. Therefore, a person who has dominant *sattvic* traits will be a thinker on a higher plane, will have more curiosity, strive hard for real knowledge, will be patient in nature and will try to win a competitive situation by adoption of fair means. The person is conducive to serenity and spirituality. He has strong reflexes, quick to grasp even at the slightest stimuli. *Sattvik* food is easily digestible, fresh and ripe and can be cooked by a simple and quick process. A *sattvic* person will eat in moderate

The Five Elements

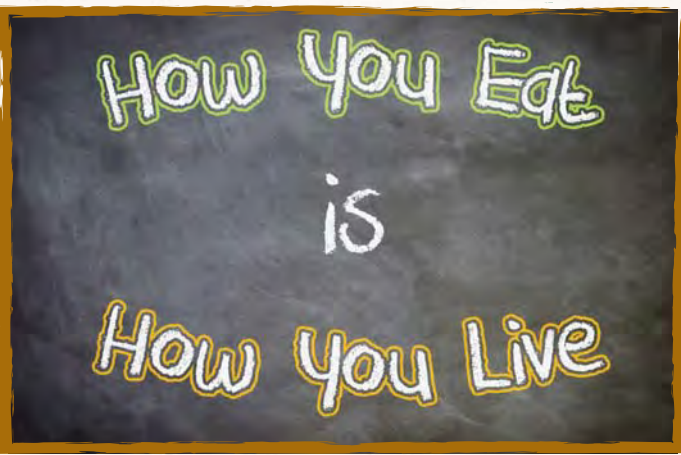
WHEN WE LOOK AT NATURE, WE SEE THAT THE FIVE elements create the base for the entire physical world. These five elements are space, air, fire, water and earth. Ayurveda, in Indian gastronomy, talks about the five elements within the human body. We nourish our body with foods from earth. Water is nectar for us; it makes up more than 70 percent of our total body mass. Fire provides heat, radiant energy and exists within metabolic action. Air flows freely in the body and provides oxygen to every cell. Space, in the background, allows the four elements to interact in a particular fashion.

In ayurveda, to explore the elements in the human body, we use the senses of hearing, taste, touch, sight and smell.

The human life cycle is governed by the three doshas: 1) childhood, where physical growth takes place (water and earth); 2) adulthood, where activity and change occur (fire and water); and 3) old age, where the body begins to weaken (space and air).

The elements, *mahabhutas*, have certain qualities, attributes and impacts on the body, mind and soul. All objects and substances are a mixture of the five elements, but each has one dominating element by which it is identified and classified. Food is used to illustrate the

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Eating wisely: (clockwise from above) Note to self: diet is important; a basket of ripe mangos (*sattvic* food); vegetarian samosas (*rajasic*); North Indian style beef korma (*tamasic*) with rice and salad; the five elements so central to ayurveda: space, air, water, fire and earth

quantities till he satiates his hunger half way. Examples of such foods are milk and its products, jaggery, honey, fruits, etc.

RAJASIC: *Rajas*, as the name suggests, is an expression of royalty. Its features are passion, valor, pride and possession. It is known to be the *manas* (mind) of the human cycle. A *rajasic* person is involved in physically oriented work. A person who is *rajasic* is basically a doer, is desirous and domineering and will use almost any means to succeed. The *rajasic* *tattva* in food triggers activity and the wish to conquer. As the food is spicy, rich in fats and salts, pungent and warm, it also gives rise to many ailments. Highly spiced food, food produced by suppressive means, or the meat of slaughtered animals and fish (for non-vegetarians) is *rajas* dominant. The person who consumes



such food loses capacity to distinguish the minimum stimuli and as time goes on requires stronger ones to reach a good level of deep understanding. A *rajasic* needs high-energy food, hence would consume till his hunger is three quarters fulfilled. These are foods that are bitter, sour, salty and pungent.

TAMASIC: *Tamas* inspires indolence, violence and a state of rest. It relates to decomposition and death. A person who is *tamasic* in nature will lack the desire to learn or put any effort in any activity. He lacks the intellectual capacity to act on the situation using common

comprehension. *Tamasics* prefer eating food as the only priority and hence fill their appetite completely with food. All heavy, fried and stale food would be included in this category, because it is basically prepared long before being eaten. The food is tasteless, putrid, foul and impure in characteristics. On the other hand, it might be too bitter, too salty, too sour, too pungent or too hot. While consumption of this kind of food can be hazardous to health, a small portion induces rest and sleep. A *tamasic* palate will fill the stomach with solids alone, leaving no place for liquids or air. Beef is *tamasic* as are preserved meats.



element group. Characteristics of the five elements are as follows:
Space, Akasha: It is soft, light and subtle. Anything that is profuse and ethereal; foods which are hollow and light, such as popcorn,

puffed rice, puffed lotus seeds. Foods which are prepared with air incorporation or created with raising agents fall into this category. Consuming ether elemental food increases lightness and softness in the body.

Air, Vayu: It is weightless, mobile, cold, dry, porous and subtle. Substances that create dryness and are airy or create gas fall into this category, foods like cabbage, cauliflower, beans and radish. Their intake increases coolness, dryness, movement and circulation. Excessive consumption of substances that are *vayu* in nature can cause dryness and gas.

Fire, Agni or Tejas: It is hot, sharp, dry, subtle and rough. It has the quality of radiation of heat and light. Anything combustible and pungent is of the nature of *agni*, foods like clove, cumin, ajwain, cinnamon and chillies. Intake of such items increases digestion, metabolism, glow and color of the skin.

Water, Jal or Aap: It is oily, moist, cool, soft and sticky. Its attributes are cohesion and lubrication. It facilitates fluidity and helps in identifying tastes through saliva. Foods like gourd in its different varieties, cucumber, melon, watermelon and zucchini are a few examples. They increase smoothness, coolness, softness and fluids.

Earth, Prithivi: It is heavy, rough, solid, stable and slow. It facilitates fragrance, flavors, odors and shapes. Foods which are solid and heavy, like cheese, banana, mango and chickoo, fall in this category. Its intake increases stability, obesity and solidity in the body.

One can consider and classify all substances with the basic understanding that everything is a mixture of different proportions of the five elements.

Composition of Our Body
We are one of the living organisms present on Earth. We are physically made up of exactly the same elements that form all other similar creatures. When we die, our body returns to earth, water, fire, air and ether. The combination of these elements sustains our body through breathing air, consuming food and taking in the elements found in the surrounding natural world.

In our body, *akasha*, or ether, is present wherever there is a cavity, like the nostrils, mouth, ears, throat, lungs and stomach; *vayu*, or air, in movements of the lungs, heart, stomach, intestine and joints. *Agni*, or fire, can be seen as intelligence, body temperature and metabolic activities, such as digestion. *Jal*, or water, is present as plasma, blood, mucus and saliva. *Prithivi*, earth, is any solid structure, like fat, muscles, skin, nails, hair, bones and teeth. The basic element is earth, and its compatibility with man clarifies why substances found in the natural world, like vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices, are harmonious with human systems. They can be easily absorbed and cause no adverse reaction or side effects. Consumption in appropriate quantity is the key. They are fundamentally the same in character and composition. This is why foods are able to heal our body.



The Six Tastes

AS PER INDIAN GASTRONOMY, NUTRITION IS ON THE TIP OF the tongue. The sense of taste is a natural guide to proper nutrition. For centuries we have depended largely upon taste to identify healthy food from nature. It's the work of the taste buds to identify tastes and, even more, to reveal the nutritive value of food and stimulate the agni digestive power.

Bland food may not be nourishing despite its vitamins or minerals, because without stimulating agni there is no real power of digestion. Ayurvedic gastronomy has therefore always included the science of cooking with the right spices. Tastes were discovered from ancient times in Indian gastronomy in ayurveda. When the receptors combine themselves with food molecules—for example sugar—an electrical impulse is transmitted to the brain for the final taste analysis.

According to science, the theory is similar. During the biological evolution of man, the development of different types of taste receptors was quite remarkable, especially that of bitter and astringent, whereas sweet was the only naturally acceptable taste. When a child is born, the first solid food given is always sweet in taste. Children initially are highly sensitive to bitterness, but that slowly decreases with age. This is particularly evident in women, who as adults or seniors consume more bitter foods than they would have consumed in their childhood.

When we eat, the aromas of food are released through chewing and digestion. The mouth and nose communicate while taste and smell work together to interpret characteristics of what we eat and drink.

Food speaks to us directly through taste. A juicy mango may call out to us with a gentle message of delight, while the flaming pepper cries out in warning. As we tune into the tastes naturally desired by the body, we tap into the body's innate wisdom regarding food and nutrition. According to ayurveda, the sense of taste is a natural guide map towards proper nutrition.

If we feel an unusual desire for a particular taste, then it is the corresponding emotional effect that we are after. In most cases, it is fine to give in to it, as long as these desires do not become addictions. The bitter taste is calming and detaching, the pungent taste motivating and alerting, the salty taste sedating and grounding, while the sweet taste is soothing.



Sweet

For ages, humans relied largely upon taste to discover healthy foods in nature and avoid toxicity. It was the search of the tasty food which helped man go through an evolution of Indian cuisine. It was also taste which determined if the food was safe or fit for consumption.

Rasa means appreciation, artistic delight and musical note. *Rasa* also means "sap," as the taste of an herb reflects the properties of the sap that invigorates it. *Rasa* means circulation, to feel, to dance, all of which is reflected in the energizing power of taste. According to ayurveda, there are six tastes. Every taste we feel on our tongue is in one way or another a combination of any of two of the five elements, with the help of which all foods can be categorized as sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent or astringent.

SWEET: *Madhura*, or sweet taste, is considered to be the first bite of the meal, which cools down the system and thus increases the fire for digestion. The sweet taste is the result of the combination of water and earth. It is moist and cooling by nature. It is heavy, cold and unctuous. It is nourishing, soothing and satisfying.



Sour

It provides calories, removes nervousness created by glucose deficiency, removes acidity and provides a healthy glow to the skin. Nutrient fluids of the body—i.e., blood, flesh, fat, bone, bone marrow and vital essence (also known as *ojas*)—are also improved by consuming sweet taste. Sweet taste builds tissues and calms nerves. It is excellent for the seven vital tissues. It increases bulk and adds weight. However, excess of sweet-tasting food is not good for the teeth. It increases the mucus, and, in excess, results in numbness, lethargy, heaviness, loss of appetite, indigestion, weak gastric fire, cough, constipation and vomiting.

Madhura relieves thirst and has beneficial effects on the skin, hair and voice. A few examples of sweet-tasting foods are: honey, raw sugar, milk, ghee, wheat, rice, apricots, ripe bananas, coconut, dates, figs, pineapple, ripe mango, papaya, peaches, plums, pomegranates, raisins, taro, red beets, carrots, cucumber, turnips, bay leaf, black cardamom, cinnamon, coriander leaves, fennel, onions, saffron, almonds, cashew nuts, pistachios and walnuts.

SOUR: *Amla*, the sour taste, results from the mixture of the earth



Salty

Three of the six tastes: (left to right) Six tastes define foods in Indian gastronomy. Sweet: rice, peaches, walnuts and onions. Sour: citrus, tomatoes, pineapple and garlic. Salty: six varieties of salt.

and fire elements. It has a hot effect and is light and moist by nature. It should be consumed at the second stage of the meal. It excites the mind, increases appetite and produces saliva. (That happens even when a sour food is just remembered; think about a lemon!) The sour taste stimulates the digestive fire, builds up and invigorates the body, stabilizes functions of the senses, lightens the mind, increases strength and regulates the movement of gases. It nourishes all vital tissues except the reproductive, or *shukra*. It also cleanses tissues and increases absorption of minerals. It strengthens the heart, helps the food move down the digestive tract, moistens the food, gives pleasure and increases the appetite. If consumed in excess, it provokes thirst. It increases pitta and kapha and subdues vata. In excess it can also cause acidity and a general sensation of burning in the

The Five Senses

THERE IS A COMPLEX UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN FOOD AND THE senses. It is amazing to validate the role of nature in the constitution of the senses, that the basic five elements actually permeate these and inspire them in varied proportion.

SIGHT: The sight of the food prepared is the first sense that comes alive. If the food is not appealing, one would not go further to taste it. Fire or light inspires the vision. Food that does not look good is not cooked with tender feelings and hence doesn't appeal to us. The appeal of the food being cooked at every step is also determined by its appearance. If the item has turned to a color that is not required, it helps to alter the method of cooking or to change the entire step. Therefore, stress should be laid on the aesthetic aspects of food. The right color coordination in any particular dish gives out a feeling that the dish is healthy and can satiate one's hunger.

TOUCH: Air vibrates touch. The texture of food determines its characteristics. It tells if the dish prepared is dry, gravy or a sauce.



Additional thought should be given to the textures and tactile sensations one feels in the mouth when eating a curd or the satisfaction one feels while biting into a crisp apple, which is attributed, in part, to hearing. While taste variations are clearly prevalent, texture and sensory attributes are emphasized as chewed or *charvya*, like roots and vegetables; sucked food like curd are *chusya*; *lehya* are foods to be licked, like mangos; *peya* are those that are drunk, like milk; and *bhojya*, like cooked rice, need no chewing and are swallowed.

SMELL: Earth stimulates the sense of smell. A flavorful, aromatic smell increases the appetite. Since biological evolution times, food has been perceived as safe on the basis of the odor it emits. A foul smell indicated that the food was stale, toxic and rendered unfit for consumption. As the sense of smell developed, with it came the maturity of recognizing ingredients and combining them with their right match. Aroma has always been a significant aspect of food. The feeling of cinnamon might be pungent, but the aroma and then the flavor are sweet. This makes it an excellent ingredient in sweet recipes.

SOUND: It is only in space that one can experience the sense of

hearing. The sound of the cracking nut, for instance, enhances the pleasure of eating, as does the sound of biting into anything that is crispy. The crackling of curry leaves and mustard in oil signifies that the oil is at optimum temperature for cooking. It is at this stage, with the help of the hearing sense, that it is determined when the next ingredient is to be added in the recipe. The sound emitted by any ingredient also tells the cook about the edibility of that item. What is supposed to be crisp, if it is not crisp, can be stale.

TASTE: It has a very significant role in our cuisine. Water titillates taste. Without it, no taste can be experienced. Water by itself is neutral, but it is the base medium for each taste. Indian gastronomy states that the taste of an herb is not incidental but is an indication of its properties. Different tastes possess different effects. Usually we do not correlate taste with the therapeutic property of foods. We consider taste only for the pleasure of the palate. In other theories, the taste of an herb is more a means of identification than a means of understanding its effects. There is a general belief that spicy, pungent food creates more heat or that bitter foods help reduce fever, but this is not the basis for classification of herbs by taste.



throat, chest and heart. A few examples of sour foods are lemon and other citrus fruits, yoghurt, grapes, unripe mango, pineapple, pomegranate, raisins, tomatoes, garlic, tamarind and gooseberry.

SALTY: *Lavana*, the salty taste, is heavy, hot and moist in nature. It is produced from the merging of the water and fire elements. It excites hunger, and should be consumed after the sour taste. Salt is a digestive; it diffuses food particles, liquefies food and subdues vata. It cures stiffness and obstruction of body fluids and prevents the accumulation of toxins. It increases the secretion of saliva; this decreases kapha, clarifies the digestive passage and softens all the limbs. It can easily dominate all other tastes if added in excess, which can lead to water retention and thus weight gain. If used excessively, it provokes dryness and thirst. It also causes fatigue and increases body heat, which can result in fainting. It increases swelling, loosens teeth and gums, creates impurities of the blood and decreases virility. Excess consumption can aggravate pitta and kapha, which can cause premature wrinkles, lead to gray hair and be harmful for eyes and skin. Some examples of natural occurring salts are rock salt, sea salt, lake salt, black salt, potatoes, spinach and garlic.

PUNGENT: *Tikta*, the pungent taste, is light, hot and dry in nature. The pungent taste is a combination of air and fire elements. It excites the sense organs. It has a hot effect and is dry and light. It is the sharpest/hottest of all tastes. When taken straight, one bite is enough to make the eyes water and the nose run. Pungent food increases circulation and makes one sweat. Such foods dry up wounds and kill worms in the upper and lower digestive tracts. The pungent taste purifies the mouth, stimulates the gastric fire, promotes desiccation of food and sharpens the sense organs. It gives relish to food, removes intestinal obstruction and helps elimination and subjugation of kapha, which in turn clears sinuses. It increases sweating and detoxification, improves metabolism and releases muscle pain. In excess, pungent foods cause a burning sensation and thirst in the throat, dryness in mouth and lips, intense body heat and gastritis. It is harmful for the eyes and seminal fluid because of its post-digestive effects. It can destroy virility. Excess can also create fluid and bile disorders.

When we are sick, we lose our sense of taste and our appetite. Taste, appetite and digestion are interrelated. Lack of taste indicates fever or other disease; low agni means high *amma* (toxin). To improve agni and eradicate diseases, it is necessary to improve our taste. This is why spices are such an important part of our food. Desire for tasty food indicates hunger, nothing unnatural.



A few examples of pungent foods are black peppercorn, ginger, chillies, taro, turnips, anise, asafetida, long pepper, black cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, coriander seeds, cumin seeds, black cumin, fennel, garlic, ajwain seeds, onion, saffron and turmeric.

BITTER: *Katu*, the bitter taste, is produced from a blend of air and ether elements. It is light, cooling and dry by nature. It excites the nervous system. As a blood purifier, it helps the body get rid of toxins and destroys intestinal worms. Bitter food cures diseases caused by excess pitta and kapha. Although it is not very pleasant, it is appetizing in its action. It is a strong detoxifying agent and has antibiotic and antiseptic qualities. It also helps in reducing water retention and skin rashes; it purifies blood and brings lightness in tissues. It is an antidote to poison and vermicide. It cures burning, itching and thirst. It gives firmness to the skin and flesh. It is a digestive stimulant and purifies blood and milk for the lactating mother. In excess, the bitter taste has a drying effect on the body; it induces weariness, fainting and giddiness, and it dries the mouth and creates wind, which results in nervousness and loss of strength.

A few examples of bitter foods are coffee, quinine, grapefruit, papaya (slightly), bitter gourd, neem, asafetida, bay leaf, cinnamon,



cumin seeds, fenugreek, garlic, taro, saffron and turmeric.

Indian gastronomy states that the taste of food is not incidental but is an indication of its properties. Different tastes possess different effects. For instance, there is a general belief that pungent foods create more heat, fire or agni, and that bitter foods help reduce fever.

ASTRINGENT: *Kashaya*, the astringent taste, is heavy, cold and dry in nature. It is produced by a mixture of air and earth elements. It excites the vascular system. It purifies the blood, helps in keeping skin healthy and aids digestion and the assimilation of fats and oils. It is a sedative for the blood, decreases pitta and kapha, and consumes fluids. If consumed in excess, the astringent taste affects the heart, distends the stomach, weakens virility, causes retardation of metabolic functions and raises various fluid disorders. It can cause dryness of mouth, palate and lips. It also can cause constipation and thirst, creating a change in body color. The skin of many vegetables and fruits has astringent qualities. Astringent taste absorbs water, tightens tissues and dries the fats. A few examples of astringent foods are lettuce, radish, alum, unripe banana or plantain, pomegranates, yoghurt, apricots, figs, grapes, papaya, peaches, plums, bitter gourd,



Three more of the six tastes: (left to right) *Pungent:* ginger, black pepper, cloves and asafetida. *Bitter:* coffee, bitter gourd, turmeric and fenugreek. *Astringent:* carrots, radishes, lettuce and potatoes.

carrots, cucumber, potatoes, spinach, coriander leaves, fenugreek, garlic, turmeric, honey and walnuts.

It is imperative to include a balanced ratio of all the six tastes while creating a meal. Consuming all the six tastes in a correct proportion in each meal ensures that all signals are judiciously met. This then prevents food craving and over-eating. If tastes are not balanced, there will be a feeling of dissatisfaction after the meal. This results in an emotional desire for a particular taste. Generally, the sweet taste is most needed; sour, pungent and astringent tastes are needed in moderation; salty and bitter tastes are needed in small amounts only. This also depends on climate and personal biochemistry. The effect of food during digestion is either hot or cold. Foods are also classified as dry or unctuous; which we generally describe as light or heavy.

India's Six Seasons, Ritu

RITUCHARA, THE CONCEPT OF SEASONS, IS DIVIDED INTO TWO kalas or solstices. Adan kala (uttarayana) or northern solstice and visarga kala (dakshinayana) or southern solstice. This division is done according to the position of the sun. Adan means taking away and visarga means giving. In adan kala, the sun and wind are powerful. The sun takes away the strength of the people and the cooling qualities of the earth. It is the depleting period and therefore strength is weakened. In visarga kala, the sun releases the strength to the people. The moon is more powerful, the earth becomes cool due to the clouds, rain and cold wind. Winters, summers and monsoons are the prime seasons for the ripening of fruits and blooming of vegetables, hence we get the best farm produce during these three seasons. The other seasons are transition periods between these three, which help us to accustom ourselves to the nature of Mother Earth. Major adaptation of weather happens



during these seasons. An Indian year consists of six ritus or seasons. Each ritu is of two masas or months. Three ritus (one semester) form a kala.

COLD & DEWY, SHISHIRA: It extends from mid-January to mid-March, Magha and Phalguna on the Indian calendar. As the



atmosphere is cool, high-energy foods are recommended during this season. Tastes recommended are pungent, sour and sweet. Consuming these foods increases digestive activity. For example, foods such as whole grains, wheat, gram flour, corn, jaggery and tamarind should be included in the meal.



SPRING, VASANTA: Mid-March to mid-May is the spring season, the months called Chitra and Vaisakha. The fire element in our body is very active during this time, hence foods that are cooling in nature should be consumed. Astringent, sour and salty tastes should be included, which are easily digestible—for instance, radish, cabbage,



Nine Feelings and Foods that Affect Them

PHILOSOPHY OF INDIAN GASTRONOMY AND SCIENCE OF ayurveda are continuously affected by the play of five elements and five senses, which further affects our food and vital energies. The Sanskrit word *rasa* also means the sense of feelings and emotions. Feelings are the important link between body, mind and soul, which further affects our thoughts and emotions. *Rasa* is also the essence of the feelings that excite both body and mind. We recognize nine feelings: love (*shringara*), joy (*hasya*), wonder (*adbhuta*), calmness (*shanta*), anger (*rudra*), courage (*virya*), sadness (*karuna*), fear (*bhaya*) and disgust (*vibhasta*). In studying the nine feelings/emotions, it is found that each has basic expressions in both ancient and modern times. Each feeling has clear relationships, allowing us to strengthen or weaken one feeling through another. Interestingly, the nine feelings are all interrelated.

Water is the primary element of love, courage, sadness and disgust. Fire element dominates joy, wonder and anger. Calmness and fear are affiliated with air. The three humors, or doshas, are kapha (constituting water and earth), pitta (constituting fire and air) and vata (air and ether). It is through the understanding of these humors, or doshas, that energies can be balanced through our diet. When all three are in balance, each produces certain energies which are important for the functioning of our bodies. When in imbalance, they create the feelings of sadness, disgust, anger and fear.

Together with the five elements and three gunas we get multifold energies. Sattva stands for clarity, understanding and healing. Rajas stands for inspiration, activity and pain. Tamas stands for draft, darkness and attachment. Each guna is related to certain feelings—sattva: calmness; rajas: love, joy, wonder, courage, sadness and anger; tamas: disgust and fear.

Food senses and savors are the primary channels that affect the body, mind and soul. The effect of food on the feelings depends on the action—taste, power of digestion and post digestive action.

SHRINGARA, LOVE: Here love and beauty also means the aesthetic sentiments, sense of looking good, and a feeling of romantic atmosphere enhanced by love and harmony. Ayurveda considers shringara as rajasic. While in love, we experience every emotion in a fine taste. During the spring season, the feelings of love and emotion are at their peak. While experiencing love, the body transforms



into a mode in which the small becomes beautiful, where dainty and mushy feelings overtake the larger canvas of life. Food should be moderate, diverse, in small portions and with bright color, like saffron and the pink of rhubarb. With moderate tasting, the fulfillment of a desire lasts longer and is more effective. Tasting rather than eating is the essence of romance.

HASYA, JOY: Joy is a divine feeling, and is dominated by the fire element. It is rajasic in nature. The feeling of joy is healthy and rejuvenating. It reduces anger, depression and tension and produces fluids which aid in digestion. The food that brings out good memories of the past is generally consumed when one is joyful and happy. It is also true that joy, when combined with love, takes every human

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Our complex nature: (above) Ayurveda was teaching about body, mind and spirit long before it became a Western fad; (right) the nine classical emotions discussed in ayurveda and acted out in Indian dance

to ecstasy, the feeling of ultimate elixir. You must feed yourself and others with love and joy.

ADBHUTA, WONDER: It is rajasic in nature and dominated by the bile humor. These are the foods that make one wonder about their origin and production. It is influenced by various other senses. A new taste, a different aroma, an unlikely feel, a distinctive sight, a novel sound or a crunch makes one wonder about the food that is being consumed. A new combination of varied ingredients that were probably not experienced earlier makes one wonder about the permutation and combination. Tasting such food provokes the feeling of wonder in oneself, and in that moment the complete knowledge of the ingredients is experienced.

SHANTI, CALMNESS: The element for the feeling of calmness is air. It is sattvic in nature. Sometimes calmness brings a lot of joy, and this combination of feelings is very pious. Through food, too, one can attain calmness. Calming foods include honey, tulsi leaves, curd and soaked almonds. For food's best effect on one's body, mind and soul, it should be consumed in a calm state of mind. This is so because, when we are calm, a particular chemical is released by the brain, and this chemical reaction between the food and mind further soothes our nerves.

RUDRA, ANGER: This is one of the emotions wherein ego becomes extremely dominant. Anger is rajasic and is of the fire element. The dominance of the fire element due to anger makes the body high with acidity. This causes sickness, such as cardiovascular diseases, and impairs eyesight. Drinking several glasses of water

Rasa

 Disgust	 Fear	 Love
 Joy	 Courage	 Calmness
 Wonder	 Sadness	 Anger

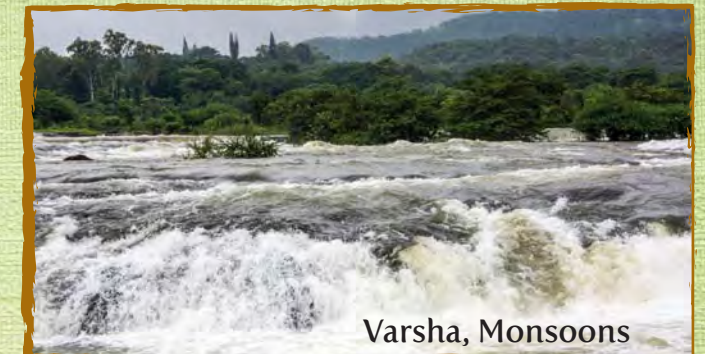
immediately cools down anger. Anger has a strong ability of self-destruction. Traditionally, drinking water kept in a silver glass overnight is known to best cool down anger. Hunger creates irritability, but a taste of sweet reduces the biles produced by the liver. Green cardamom will turn the bio-chemistry to alkaline, reducing acidity and thus anger. Yogurt and whole lime juice, extracted with skin and

barley, honey, sandalwood, etc.

SUMMER, GRISHMA: The summer months, falling in the period mid-May to mid-July, months known as Jyestha and Ashadha. Sweet, sour and bitter food should be consumed to make up for mineral and water loss. In summers, more fruits and vegetables should be taken, while reducing the quantities of whole grains. Light and liquidy food should be preferred; for example, gourds, mango, curd, boiled rice, honey, dates, cardamom, turmeric, etc.

MONSOON, VARSHA: The season extends from mid-July to mid-September, the months of Sravana and Bhadrapada. As this is the rainy season, foods that are salty, sour and sweet in nature should be preferred. During this season, the digestive activity starts decreasing, hence heavy food should not be consumed. Foods like pulses, grains, buttermilk, etc., should be included in the meal.

AUTUMN, SHARADA: Mid-September to mid-November are the autumn months of Ashvini and Kartika. The onset of winter exposes the body to a cool environment, which can be controlled by consuming sweet, salty and astringent foods. The atmosphere is dry and arid; hence foods like green gram, amala, honey, pomegranate



Varsha, Monsoons

and spinach should be included. One should avoid having curd-based foods.

WINTER, HEMANTA: The winter months, from mid-November to mid-January, are known as Margashirsa and Pausa, according to the Indian calendar. The fire element in the body is quite diminished because of the cold. Therefore, sweet, sour and pungent foods



Sharada, Autumn

should be preferred. During the winters, one should eat less fruit, because fruit makes one feel cooler. Foods like ginger, pepper, jaggery, carrots, etc., should be consumed.

Not only does this knowledge of seasons and their corresponding tastes give us an insight into availability of food items, but also educates us and exhorts us to do creative and just menu planning. The



Hemanta, Winter

correct food, if consumed in the respective season, maintains one's health and is savored, is relished, to the fullest.

With a menu that maximizes seasonal resources, a good chef will use creativity to produce dishes that are appealing, nutritious and healthy.



seeds, also have a cooling effect. Foods recommended for reducing anger are alkaline in nature.

VIRYA, COURAGE: This rasa relates to inner strength with perfect control of body and mind. The emotion is dominated by water and is rajasic in nature. Thus, it is kapha (mucous) people who are most likely to develop courage. This is an element found in warriors, who need the bodily energy to retain their power of determination. Foods in this category are spices and fats, and for nonvegetarians, meat. A very high protein diet is recommended to maintain the feeling of courage. A sound mind and balanced body are also prerequisites to having courage.

KARUNA, SADNESS: This emotion is rajasic in nature and dominated by the water element. When sad, one should eat food

that brings comfort to mind and body. Food should be consumed that would release the anxiety from the body and produce happy neurotransmitters such as endorphins and other opiates, which help reduce stress and lead to feelings of euphoria. Food with high sugar content should be consumed. That gives energy and pep up the mood; foods like potatoes, rice, butter, lemon, candy sugar, jaggery and honey. While in this state of mind, one should explore within oneself the real cause of karuna. Hence you shall be able to fight and be a winner.

BHAYA, FEAR: Fear is the natural protector from many harms. Fear is rajasic and dominated by the element air. Its speeds the heartbeat and the breathing rate. A metallic taste can be sensed in the mouth. This is taste of akasha, or ether. People falling under vata tend to become fearful more easily as compared to kapha or pitta people. Eating khamira, made from pure pearls, helps in relieving fear. As sugar or glucose is the main food for our brains, which accelerates its proper functioning, it is important to include sugar in one's daily diet. Low sugar causes nervousness and anxiety. Courage, joy, love and calmness remove fear. Pure ignorance leads to no fear at all.

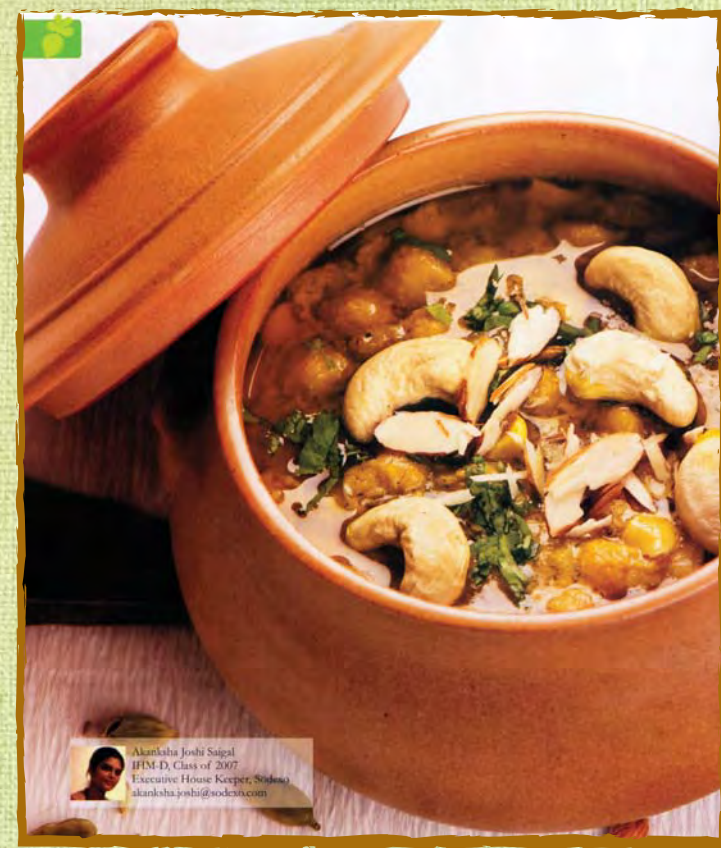
VIBHASTA, DISGUST: Prolonged sadness, anger, fear and disgust all are related to the tamasic nature. This emotion comes under the air element. Constipation is a major cause of this feeling. The continuous spreading of toxins produced by rotting food in the intestines makes it impossible to develop finer feelings. Spices that are pungent in taste and nature help in relieving such feelings. The body chemistry must become more alkaline to reduce the feeling of fear. To counteract fear, one can increase the intake of fresh fruits and juices. Astringent and bitter-tasting foods will help the liver in detoxification of the blood, as well as the production of digestive juices and protein synthesis.

Expressions: (above) Hindu dancers in Bali display three of the emotional facial expressions which are a vital part of their art; (below) a good chef is virtuous, fastidious and happy (below right) vegetarian biryani

Characteristics of a Chef

1. A chef should be vigilant, well-versed in science, clean and devoted (*kshema kutahala*).
2. A chef is calm, controlled, generous, fit to be honored and has a pure smile. He is devoted and with pure thoughts.
3. He is of measured words, kind, charitable and has knowledge of metals, seasons and the conditions of people according to their age.
4. Before cooking, he washes his feet and hands and performs the purifying rites.
5. Knowing the program of his diners, he arranges to offer the appropriate dishes. Likewise, he is aware of the unique diets of his diners and serves their special dishes in proper order.

Written by Nala, a famous legendary king who authored India's first known cookbook in the fifth century ce, *Nal's Pakshastra*



A SAMPLE RECIPE FROM *SECRETS OF INDIAN GASTRONOMY*

Chana Madra

A dish from Himachal Pradesh in which chickpeas are cooked in curd with aromatic spices. Recipe by Anksha Joshi Saigal.

To serve 4 to 5	salt to taste
1 cup chickpeas	2 tsp turmeric powder
2 tbsp desi ghee	3 cups curd, whisked
2 bay leaves	1 tsp sugar
2 black cardamoms	8-10 cashews
3 pods green cardamom	8-10 almonds
2 cinnamon sticks, 1" long	2 tbsp raisins
1 tsp fennel seeds	2 mint leaves, chopped

- Pick, wash and soak the chickpeas overnight in 6 cups of water.
- Place on high heat, add salt and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium low and let it cook until tender and soft.
- Take ghee in a wok and place on medium heat, add in the bay leaf, black and green cardamom, cinnamon and fennel, stir and add a little salt while sauteing.
- As soon as the spices start spluttering, add turmeric powder stir for a few seconds then quickly add in the whisked curd.
- Stir and cook masala till ghee starts surfacing; continuously stir. Now add the boiled chickpeas to the boiling liquid, along with the sugar, cashews, almonds, grated coconut and raisins. Check seasoning and let it cook for 10-12 minutes.
- Serve garnished with chopped mint.

Why Is Ayurveda not Wholly Vegetarian?

IN HIS AYURVEDIC COOKBOOK, *INDIAN Gastronomy* (from which this *Insight* is drawn), Chef Gill provides vegetarian recipes as well as meat dishes. Those familiar with ayurveda as part of spiritual practice might be puzzled by this, perhaps thinking that meat should not be included. HINDUISM TODAY, after all, promotes vegetarianism avidly. To shed light on this, Pandit Vamadeva provides the following explanation.

Ayurveda's rejuvenation therapy, *rasayana*, as discussed in the first chapter of the *Chikitsa Sthana* of *Charaka Samhita*, is purely herbal, vegetarian and dairy based. It is combined with *achara rasayana* i.e., or rejuvenating lifestyle, which consists of all the yamas and niyamas (restraints and observances) of yoga, including ahimsa, (non-hurtfulness), meaning vegetarianism. This rishi-style life is recommended for optimal health for all.

However, ayurveda is for all levels of people, including those not yet ready for



the spiritual life, who are still dominated by rajas and tamas. As such, ayurveda explains the qualities of meat and fish for those who are likely to consume them anyway, so that their intake is least harmful. However, for spiritual practices, ayurveda recommends vegetarianism.

The same is true of Hindu dharma overall. Hinduism recommends vegetarianism, and it is required for certain sadhanas and by certain sampradayas. But it does not exclude anyone for eating meat, or say that they cannot be a Hindu if they eat meat!

A number of Hindu communities eat meat, particularly those in the Himalayas and the East of India, and also somewhat in Kashmir and Kerala. Those living by the ocean, particularly in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Bengal, often eat fish. Historically, Hindu kshatriyas hunted and ate meat (though they practiced vegetarianism for sacred events).



ALL PHOTOS BY SCOTT RICE

PILGRIMAGE

My Moments with Siva in the Himalayas

Ascending to nearly 12,000 feet, an adventurous devotee discovers a small shrine where he and the local priest share a few blissful hours with God

BY SCOTT RICE, PORTLAND, OREGON

IN EARLY NOVEMBER, I TRAVELED TO Uttarakhand to photograph Flood Relief Projects of Mata Amritanandamayi. This is the land of Siva where the *Mahabharata* comes alive. While there, I hoped to trek high up in the Himalayas to visit Kedarnath at 3,600m, the famous Siva temple where thousands died in the floods of 2013.

Unfortunately, the temple had just closed for the winter. A friend suggested I go instead to Madhya Maheshwar, the middle (madhya) of the five Panch Kedar Siva Temples. As it was open for another couple of weeks, I jumped at the chance. I am a reasonably fit 65-year-old man with a pace-maker, and not a regular hiker.

Madhya Maheshwar is a 22 km trek to an altitude of 3,500 meters described in the guidebooks as “moderately difficult.” What I didn’t know is that for the first six km you go downhill, deep into the Mandakini River canyon before beginning the ascent. I rested there for the night in a primitive guest house, trying to forget the 6,000-foot elevation gain I would face in the morning.

I know my limits and capabilities. Seeing the steepness of the trail and the endless

switchbacks, I knew I was in over my head, but I had no thought of turning back. One step at a time, my mantra became “I can’t believe I am doing this, Om Namah Shivaya.” As I climbed, the pure mountain air thinned of oxygen, but seemed full of Siva Shakti. Somehow it sustained me. For over five hours I was drawn up the mountain by a force greater than myself.

These final weeks before winter closing see few pilgrims. A dozen of us entered the temple for morning puja. After prasad, everyone packed their bags and disappeared back down the mountain, leaving only me and the temple staff. The priest invited me back inside for another puja. I sat alone next to the statue of Nandi and for the next two hours witnessed the most amazing display of devotion.

As the priest began to wash the Lingam, he became animated, his motions like a ballet. Chanting turned to song. He sang as a mother to her newborn child or a man to his lover. Bands of bright yellow sandalwood were applied to every possible surface of the stone, then dots of red kumkum. He placed an ornate silver dome over the Lingam. Polishing a bronze mask of Siva, he again applied sandalwood and kumkum. Bright

red lips made the face come alive. Siva’s eyes flashed a piercing silver as the mask was hung on the dome. All of the other Deities were polished, anointed and arranged around Siva, each piece with equal care.

The dance of arati began. A single flame, then three, then five. The priest waved a mirror before Siva as if to say, “Look how radiant You are.” I sat in awe. Some major temples bar my entry as a foreigner. In others, the crushing crowds allow only a split second darshan with no chance for quiet contemplation.

So why was I, a Western novice to Hinduism, given this extraordinary opportunity to sit alone, face to face with Lord Siva, for more than two hours? I have no answer. I can only attempt to share the reverence and beauty of this experience through words since no photos were allowed inside. I did try to capture the amazing perch of the temple in the photos here.

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Scott Rice is a devotee of Mata Amritanandamayi and a frequent volunteer with her disaster relief, humanitarian and educational projects. A retired business owner, he lives in Portland, Oregon. Contact: donscott@gmail.com



Siva's solitary sanctuary : (Opposite) Overview of the compound that Scott Rice (inset) stumbled on; (counterclockwise from large image) roughly sculpted bust of Siva, His head adorned with fresh sandalwood paste; Scott stands before the central shrine; buildings surrounding the shrine; the snowy Himalayas rise above; minor shrines; view of main shrine from below; lion protector; the compound; Sivalingam outside where pilgrims make offerings; the priest grinds sandalwood paste for his puja; austere quarters offer refuge from the cold

Kumbha Mela 2015: Nashik

Photographer Arun Mishra takes us to the bathing festival

Captions: In the background, a broad view of the ghats in Nashik, India, as pilgrims take purifying dips in the Godavari River during the Kumbha Mela in August, 2015; (clockwise from bottom left) pilgrims collect water from an ornate fountain at the water's edge; sadhus enjoy a cool dip on one of

the main bathing days; devotees parade with sadhus on horseback through Nashik's streets; a statue of Hanuman near the water's edge; a boy with balloons sits beneath a sacred tree; a woman offers arati to the Goddess, embodied in the river



ALL PHOTOS: ARUN MISHRA



(Background) Devotees place offerings on a shrine after having bathed in the Godavari River (clockwise from bottom left); nighttime in one of the camp areas; worshipping at one of the ghats; a woman carries flowers on her head throughout the day; pilgrims have fun taking a dip in the cool waters; news crews and photographers are everywhere, documenting the event; three men (one of them blind) among the throngs of pilgrims



ALL PHOTOS: ARUN MISHRA

God Is No Longer Invited?

When her most cherished religious dance is secularized, one woman objects to its unfortunate Western dilution

BY SHIVALI BHAMMER

FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, THE HINDU festival of Navaratri has been my most treasured and beloved celebration. It has fit in seamlessly with my personality. Anything that has included dance and spiritual purpose has always led to a deep eruption of love from within me, which in the case of Navaratri would stretch across the full nine days of the festival. Before delving into the purpose of this article, let me start with a brief and simple explanation of Navaratri, *garba* and *dandya raas*, for my readers.

Navaratri means “nine nights” in Sanskrit. During this festival, Hindus worship the nine forms of Goddess Devi, the Mother of all consciousness—God not as a *He* but a *She*—and the power that the Goddess represents. Energy can be both masculine and feminine. In its feminine form it is called *shakti*, which is the ultimate and absolute creative force. Praying and engaging in spiritual practices during these nine days are means to further enlighten the soul, raise the energy through your chakras, and burn away your vices. It is a dynamic and beautiful time, when the Mother is truly honored for all that She is. In a world where sexual violence and abuses against women are rampant, this is a vital reminder of the celestial immortality that lies within every female on this Earth and beyond.

In Gujarat, Hindus celebrate Navaratri through *garba* and *dandya raas*—two vigorous, intricate and entertaining forms of dance performed by Gujaratis and others across the globe. *Garba*, literally “womb,” is a spiritual dancing involving circular movements around a statue of the Goddess, or around vessels of sacred water representing the Goddess. It celebrates the Goddess and Her role as the carrier of divine light. Our dancing expresses the cycle of life and death.

Dandya raas, again a folk dance from Gujarat, is performed after the *garba*, is a reenactment of the *leela* (divine play) of Radha and Krishna. In simple terms, Krishna represents God, and Radha is human; the two together are complete, the beloved and the lover. It is the union of the human soul finding its own divine Self. *Leela* refers to this world of relative illusion, a world in which we play through and experience God’s creative force. It is here, in this material existence, that we seemingly separate ourselves from Divinity so that we may dance with Him.

Every year the anticipation of *garba* has excited me. I always get ready in my Indian garments with a *bindi* on my forehead, my hair pinned back and my wrists jingling from the sound of bangles. In Chiswick, London, my cousins and I would battle our way through the pouring rain to the *garba* hall. Entering the hall, we would slip off our shoes to the side, as you would in a temple, and find a place to plant our belongings. As the sound of the *dhol* (an Indian drum) swept through my skin, I could feel every cell within me vibrating with excitement and a warm sense of familiarity. As we began



to dance, my cousins and I would fall into perfect synchronistic movements, our skirts swaying, hands clapping in unison. You could see the mystical thread sewing, binding each dancer to another. I vowed when I was younger that I would never leave a *garba* dance until the set had finished (as long as 40 minutes or so). This was my gift to the Mother Goddess. I was Hers, and She would have my complete, undivided attention. As I twirled round, I promised I would never be anywhere in my thoughts but present for Her. I wanted my dance to be spiritual; I wanted to

dance for Her. I wanted to be still, disciplined and focused whilst in the midst of fast and beautiful movement.

After the *garba* finished there was a quieting down. You could feel the buzz of energy in the room, electric but silent, and out of that silence came the time for prayer. As the vocalist sang in the slow, melodious fashion of Hindu prayers, my eyes would fill with tears, overflowing with simple joy and gratitude. That moment in a room full of people—whether they believed or not, whether they worshiped or not, whether they felt it or not—just soaking in what had been created through dance and joy was heavenly for me, and this was the culmination.

After I moved to New York, I discovered there was a *garba* happening in the city. I was elated not to miss the Hindu celebration and quickly roped my one Gujarati friend, Suraj, to attend with me. After all, he and I had met at *garba* some fourteen years ago. I got ready as I would have at home and skipped my way downstairs to the lobby.

Suraj turned me, “You’re really excited about this aren’t you?” “Yes, it’s *garba*! Come on let’s show them how we do it back home!”

We entered the hall, that same drum, that same rhythm, and I felt that if I closed my eyes I could be at home. We kicked off our shoes to the side. Suraj moved towards the edges of the circle to observe for a time, while I dove straight into the center. But I could not find Her. *Mataji*, Mother, was not in the center in any form. Instead there was just a colorful umbrella. I felt like someone had shoved my own parents to the side and put, well, an umbrella there instead! I still danced, though now I wasn’t sure what I was dancing around. Another friend of mine joined me, and as we both fell into step and our hands clapped together, I felt the charge of energy and creation, but when I turned my head to wink at the Goddess, She was not there.

As the *garba* ended I began to pray, but no worship followed. I ran towards the musicians and asked them, “Where is the *arati*?” They responded, “No *arati*.” “But why?” They just shrugged their shoulders. After the *dandya* finished, I asked Suraj to meet me at the entrance while I went to find the organizers. I had no intention of being argumentative, but everyone I spoke to was as baffled as I was and



someone had to pipe up. I wanted to know why I had spent a few hours eating a fruit without its nectar.

“Why is there an umbrella in the middle instead of *Mataji*, and why was there no *arati*?” The organizer answered, “It is not a religious event.” “Since when is Navaratri *Garba* not a religious event? Is it not the celebration and worship of the Goddess? Is it not for Her that we are dancing?” “It says on our website what Navaratri is and that it has religious meaning, but we are not expressing its religiousness here.” I responded, “Just because that’s explained on your website does not mean it is acceptable. You would not find Christians singing songs of Bethlehem and then say it is not about Jesus!” She was adamant, “This is not a religious event; it is a cultural event.” “Ok, where does that culture come from? Does it not stem from the religion? What is the event if you take out the heart of it?” I asked. “We want to welcome all faiths. I am sorry you were disappointed.”

Since when does welcoming other faiths mean excluding our own? I have walked into a church, a mosque, a gurdwara, a Buddhist temple, and celebrated everything with members of those faiths. Why did these Hindus feel the need to eradicate their ancient religion in order to welcome the faiths of others? *Garba* during Navaratri is religious—it has deep meaning. If we cannot preserve the sanctity of our own celebration, how can we hope to truly share it with others? I brought my Jewish best friend to *garba* in the UK; it never made her less Jewish or me less Hindu. True sharing does not come from denying one’s own religious customs, it comes from opening them up and making someone understand and be part of them.

Some Hindus complain that the West has polluted yoga and that their centers and events don’t even honor its purpose. This may be true; but if we do not preserve yoga and other Hindu practices

Worship through dance: (above) dancers in the Indian state of Gujarat celebrate the Mother Goddess (represented by the colorful pots of water) through traditional dance

..... ourselves, why should anyone else? Hindus have always been open and welcoming. This is part of our faith. We believe all paths lead to the same mountaintop, but that does not mean that we should turn holy days into unfaithful ones. One *garba* in San Francisco even introduced meat and alcohol, two things which go completely against the spiritual cleansing and prayer that is associated with the event. Why are we so desperate to be accepted by others that we cannot even honor our own belief system? Are we not capable of educating, inspiring and bringing in people of all different backgrounds whilst retaining our own? You do not have to knock down your own door to let others through, you simply need to open it. There is a clear and distinct difference!

The argument with the event organizer was not going anywhere, and I left it there, feeling empty. Coming home and I felt sorry for my beloved Krishna, my Goddess, my everything. Out of love for the Lord, this beautiful tradition, this spiritual party had been created; and now God was no longer invited.

SHIVALI BHAMMER, 28, is the devotional singer behind two bhajan albums *The Bhajan Project* and *Urban Temple*, released by Sony Music India and Eros International. She is a professional dancer with a diploma in *kathak* (classical Indian) and ballet grades awarded by the Royal Academy of Dance. Born and raised in London, UK, she currently resides in New York, where she is spreading the bhajan movement. www.shivali.co.uk

Sanskrit-Tamil Harmony

Tamil Nadu's ancient scriptural heritage has always included both Sanskrit and Tamil

Does the movement in Tamil Nadu that seeks to replace Sanskrit with Tamil for the temple liturgy have support in Tamil lore or in broader Indian history? Does the Tamil heritage contain any concept of imposition by a fictional "non-Dravidian" or "Aryan" people from the north? We bring you two views on these issues—one from a Tamil Saivite scholar and priest and another from an American Vedic scholar, translator and historian.

S.P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARIYAR

THE SAIVA AGAMAS, SAIVISM'S REVEALED SCRIPTURES and the foundation of Tamil culture, describe Tamil and Sanskrit as sister languages. The 14th chapter of the knowledge-section of the *Chandrajnana Agama* states that Lord Siva, manifesting as Dakshinamurti under a banyan tree, revealed the *Agamas* and *Vedas* to the sages on the summit of the Mahendra Mountains just as He revealed them on Mount Kailasa to Anantesvara in the previous kalpa (age).

The sages recorded this Sanskrit transmission using the Grantha alphabet, as instructed by the Lord. The great Tamil Saint Manikavasagar also sings, in Tamil, of this revelation by Lord Siva to the sages in the "Kirti Tiruvagaval" of his *Tiruvagasam*.

The Grantha script is akin to Tamil. One can see the similarity in letters, such as *u, o, ka, ta, tha, na, pa, va, ya* and *ra*, etc., in the two scripts. There are also hundreds of common words found in both Tamil and Sanskrit. Many words appear in their pure Tamil form in the Sanskrit *Agamas*, *Silpa Shastras* and related scriptures.

Grantha means "the scripture of systematic rules and directions" and also denotes "sentence/verse." It embodied and safeguarded the construction tenets for temples, palaces and forts and many other subjects using words which could not be written in Tamil. Subsequently, the silpis who carved images and constructed temples and other buildings documented their science in the *Silpa Shastras* using Grantha. Prominent among them were Manasara Rishi, Maya Rishi and Kasyapa. Even today, the oldest manuscripts of the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras* are only available in the Grantha script. The influence of Grantha can be seen in all South Indian languages.

In his *Tirumantiram*, Rishi Tirumular talks of an ancient time of cold climate in India, which some conclude points to an indigenous Indian civilization extant as far back as the last ice age, 11,000 years ago, in areas that may now be submerged. It was then, he writes, that Lord Siva revealed the essential scriptures in Sanskrit and Tamil simultaneously to the body of learned scholars (verse 109). The term used by Tirumular to denote Sanskrit is *ariyam* (arya). The ancient indigenous people who were using this *arya* language to communicate among themselves were called the *aryas*. They never migrated into India from outside, nor to the South from the northwest.

In the classical Tamil works of the Sangam period, such as *Purananuru*, *Paripadal*, *Patitruppattu*, *Tirumurugatruppadai*, *Mullaippattu* and *Malaipatukattam*, we can see hundreds of Grantha,

or Sanskrit, words. Panini, the son of sage Panana, wrote his inimitable grammatical work, *Vyakarana Shashtra*, based on 14 sutras (aphorisms) that emerged from the drum held held by the dancing Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu—not in North India, where Panini is usually placed. My diksha guru at Chidambaram told me many times that the native place of Panini was Thiruvotriyur, in Chennai.

These facts show that Tamil and Sanskrit (in Grantha script) are interrelated. To express certain details or concepts, Sanskrit depends on Tamil. Similarly, to express certain details and concepts, Tamil requires Sanskrit.

The recent attitude of the alienation of Sanskrit was absolutely absent in the literary works written in Tamil during the Sangam and medieval periods. The Tamil kings viewed Tamil and Sanskrit as equally important. Royal inscriptions certifying grants made by the kings to the temples in Tamil Nadu used both Sanskrit (in Grantha script) and Tamil words.

Our Tamil saints frequently sing of Lord Murugan and Lord Siva revealing the *Vedas* to Sage Agastya and other sages living in Tamil Nadu. Tirunjana Sambandar goes to the extent of saying that those who do not benefit from the study of both Sanskrit and Tamil are blind and that both Tamil and Sanskrit are capable of reaching the feet of the Lord. St. Tirunavukkarasar declares that Lord Siva manifests Himself as Sanskrit and Tamil. Saint Pamban Kumaragurudasa Swamikal, who received instruction on "Dahara Upasana" directly from Lord Murugan in a village near Ramesvaram, composed 6,666 Tamil verses on Lord Murugan. He categorically stated: "Both Sanskrit and Tamil are essential for any devotee if he wants the grace of the Lord. He who abhors Tamil or Sanskrit incurs the displeasure of Lord Murugan." And he further emphasized that for all the ritualistic activities of the temples, only Sanskrit should be used.

The Tamil-Sanskrit divide is clearly unwarranted and unfortunate. Aversion or enmity towards Sanskrit is harmful to the harmonious life of the people and understanding their true cultural and spiritual heritage. Those who hate Sanskrit should understand that they face the heavy loss of not benefiting from the knowledge of many rich and elegant dimensions of Tamil culture and civilization which can only be seen in Sanskrit works and not in Tamil works.

As late as the end of 19th century, Tamil scholars wrote without any spirit of antagonism between Tamil and Sanskrit. This unfortunate, alienated and antagonistic attitude only erupted in the 20th century, adopted by Dravidian political movements for their own agenda, which derived from new ideas of Western scholars, like the Aryan invasion theory.

Neglect of Grantha script in favor of the Devanagari script for writing Sanskrit has added fuel to this unwanted aversion towards Sanskrit. Sanskrit should not be identified exclusively with the Devanagari script, a modern script for North Indian languages. Sanskrit was connected to the old Grantha script of South India long before Devanagari came into use.

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The similarity of the Tamil, Grantha and Devanagari scripts are evident in these glyphs for the sound *ka*

ACHARYA VAMADEVA SHASTRI

TAMIL AND SANSKRIT ARE VERY DIFFERENT LANGUAGES IN TERMS of structure. Yet the two have been closely related and taught together in South India for as long as we know. Tamil contains numerous Sanskrit loan words at all levels and periods of its literature. Tamil and Sanskrit culture have historically been presented as one. Today Vedic/Sanskrit culture, including temple worship, remains common throughout South India, especially Tamil Nadu.

In the nineteenth century, under the influence of Western thought at both political and religious levels, a movement arose in Tamil Nadu promoting Dravidian identity apart from or even against Sanskrit and "Aryan." It embraced the Western idea of the Aryan invasion, that India was invaded and conquered by light-skinned groups from the northwest around 1500 bce. The new group of Dravidian nationalists identified themselves as the supposed pre-Vedic inhabitants of India, which they proposed spoke a Dravidian language and were driven south by the invading Aryans.

This "Dravidian identity" was based upon the commonality of Dravidian languages, to which was often added a Dravidian ethnicity and Dravidian culture. However, theories of both Aryan and Dravidian races have been disproved, and there is no traditional "Dravidian culture" in South India apart from the Sanskrit/Vedic culture. Traditional Dravidian culture is permeated with Vedic rituals, Sanskrit chants, temple worship and pilgrimage to holy sites throughout India, up to the Himalayas. Even today, the largest numbers of pilgrims to Mount Kailas in Tibet come from South India.

The Aryan invasion theory used to prove this Sanskrit/Tamil divide has been rejected by historians and scientists in India. Extensive work by the Geological Survey of India has mapped out the stages of the drying up of an ancient river, identical in location with the Vedic Sarasvati, on which most ancient urban ruins are located, known wrongly as the Indus Valley or Harappan civilization. The Archaeological Survey of India, notably through its former director Prof. B.B. Lal, has uncovered new evidence that this so-called Indus civilization centered on the Sarasvati River was connected to the civilization described in the *Vedas* in terms of culture, artifacts and symbols, though probably relating more to the late Vedic period.

The Aryan invasion/migration theory has no support from archaeology, which does not show any movements of people or culture from North to South India at the end of the Indus-Sarasvati culture after 1900 bce, when the Sarasvati River dried up. Nothing by way of skeletal remains, artifacts or transfer of cultural traits to South India has been proved. Nor is there any record of such a migration in ancient Sanskrit or Tamil literature.

Agastya, Skanda, Kumara, "Murugan" and the Vedic Tradition Tamil tradition and language is rooted in the teachings of Rishi Agastya. Tamils are fond of citing him as the Father of the Tamil language. But Agastya was also at the heart of the Vedic/Sanskrit tradition. In the *Rigveda* he is described as the elder brother or guru

of Rishi Vasishtha, who composed the largest number of mantras in the *Rigveda*. Mantra 733 declares, "This, Vasishtha, was your only birth when Agastya bore you forth from the people," which suggests that Agastya took Vasishtha on as a disciple. Agastya's hymns (seer of RV 1.165-191) and those of the Vasishthas (104 hymns of the seventh mandala and others elsewhere) comprise about 150 of the 1,000 hymns of the text. Agastya is a special devotee of Vak (RV 1.1673), the Vedic Goddess of speech. The Vedic Deity for speech is Agni, the fire God. Vedic rishis carry Agni in their mouths as the power of speech. From Agni arises the Angirasa and Bhṛigu rishis, the two main lines of Vedic seers. Agni is the first or ideal Vedic priest.

Agni as Kumara, Subrahmanya or Skanda is often regarded as the first of the Vedic rishis and gurus, much as the role of Murugan in Tamil literature, who is generally identified with Skanda. In Tamil literature Kumara/Murugan, the son of Lord Siva, teaches Tamil to Agastya, following a similar idea as Agni as the origin of Vedic speech and the Vedic rishis. So, the most beloved Deity of the Tamils may be at the root of Sanskrit. We must also remember that the Sanskrit alphabet is said to arise from the drum of Siva, Kumara's father.

Vedic Culture also Spanned South India

Agastya bridges Vedic and Tamil traditions and appears at the origin of both. That suggests a

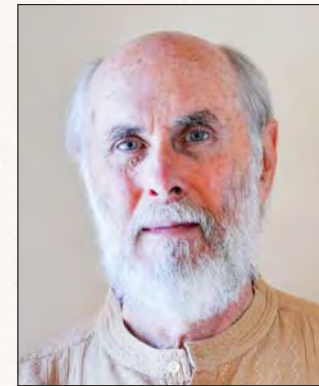
common origin or continuity from the most ancient times. His wife Lopamudra is said to have come from Vidarbha, now Maharashtra, in between North and South. Southern connections to other Vedic rishi families also occur. Manu is a flood figure (said in the *Matsya Purana* to come from Kerala) with whom were the Angirasas, the largest family of Vedic rishis. The Bhṛigu family, whose progenitor was Varuna, God of the Sea, gave their name to the coastal region of Gujarat called Bhṛigu Kachchh.

The South of India is an integral part of Vedic and Hindu culture, and the Tamils have long been among its most staunch advocates. The Sri Vijaya empire of medieval times was the largest Hindu empire, expanding from South India to Indonesia, taking Agastya and Sanskrit along with it. I have proposed that Vedic culture originally derived from the South, from an older maritime culture that may have developed during the Ice Age. I would place that earlier culture throughout southeast Asia, of which Tamil Nadu was a part. This corresponds to the Kanya Kumari continent story of Tamil thought.

Is it possible that both Sanskrit and Tamil, two very distinct languages, are products of the same greater people or culture? As rishis are seers of cosmic sound, this cannot be rejected as a possibility.

We cannot simply identify people or cultures with a single language. Many ancient people spoke more than one language, as do many people today. Hindus use Sanskrit as a spiritual/religious language, though they may speak any number of other dialects and have their local cultures as well. In any case, Tamil and Sanskrit have no real divide between them, and both are integral parts of a greater Hindu culture.

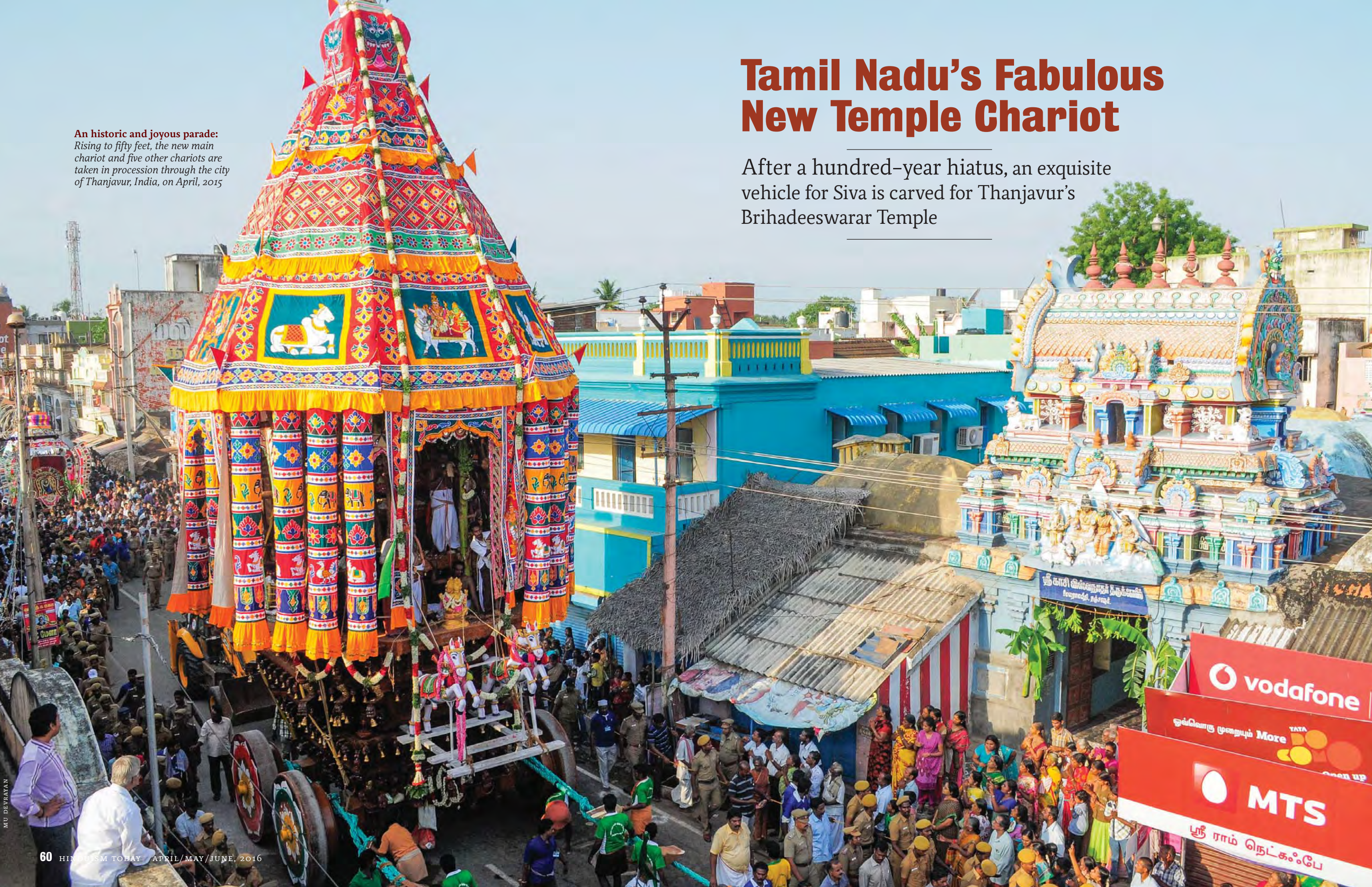
ACHARYA VAMADEVA SHASTRI, D. Litt, Acharya in Yoga, Ayurveda, Jyotish and Vedic Studies, 2015 Padma Bhushan award recipient



Tamil Nadu's Fabulous New Temple Chariot

After a hundred-year hiatus, an exquisite vehicle for Siva is carved for Thanjavur's Brihadeeswarar Temple

An historic and joyous parade:
Rising to fifty feet, the new main chariot and five other chariots are taken in procession through the city of Thanjavur, India, on April, 2015





APRIL 29, 2015, WAS AN HISTORIC DAY in Tamil Nadu. For the first time in a century, the 1,000-year-old Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur, popularly known as the “Big Temple,” held its chariot festival. Most large, active temples hold this important event annually. But the old chariot at the Big Temple—declared a world monument by UNESCO and treated as an archeological site—was damaged one hundred years ago, and the festival was abandoned. With the renewal of regular pujas in recent times, demand grew to reinstate the chariot festival and build a new chariot. In 2012 the government allocated US\$75,000 for the project. Thirty craftsmen worked for fifteen months to complete the masterpiece, using 1,175 cubic feet of wood from the Veppanthattai area and five tons of metal parts and ornaments. The base is over sixteen feet tall and weighs fifty tons,

It was a joyous day. Special pujas commenced early in the morning, after which the processional Deities were brought to the staging camp on West Main Street. Amid Vedic chanting, 100,000 devotees joined to help pull the chariot, which, with its upper tower, rises to nearly fifty feet. A total of six chariots with different Deities were in the parade. One government employee summed up the day's feelings, “I am thrilled and filled with pride today; the chariot festival has resumed in my lifetime.”

Insights from a Hindu Scholar

HINDUISM TODAY gained these observations from Sivachariyar Sabharathnam, a renowned scholar of the *Saiva Agamas*. He says, “The properly constructed chariot of a temple incorporates within its whole structure all the main parts and sub-parts of the temple. It includes all the temple's shrines and the vibrant presence of all its Deities. As such, it is called *chala-alaya*, the ‘moving temple.’ When it is ceremonially worshiped according to Agamic instructions, it becomes charged with the presence of all three worlds and their divine forces.

“The chariot festival is the most important event during the course of any *brahmotsava*

(grand festival). It is intended to re-establish and rejuvenate the solidarity of the people of all divisions, reactivate welfare and harmony among all living beings and invoke the unhindered flow of essential natural resources, such as timely rainfall, crops and more.

“So, naturally, devotees living not only in Thanjavur but also in all other parts of Tamil Nadu eagerly awaited the renewal of this grand and splendid event. Everyone was elated and filled with divine bliss when the perfectly redesigned chariot was sent on its rhythmic procession through main streets of Thanjavur, the city of the Periya Koyil, or ‘Big Temple.’ In 1010 CE, at the time of the great king Rajaraja Chola, who built this temple,

the festival was established as an *uttama-mahotsava*, a ‘superior celebration,’ lasting for 17 days.

“We should all offer deep appreciation and high praise for the work done by Sthapati Varadarajan of Arumbavur and his entire team. The new chariot was meticulously designed and is extraordinarily beautiful. On the sides and elevations he fixed only the images and icons of various Deities as recommended in our scriptures, the *Saiva Agamas*. The chariot is studded with 380 images, all exquisitely carved according to the system of proportionate measurements prescribed by the *Silpa Sastras*.”

The Chariot's Magnificent Temple Home

The monumental Brihadeeswarar Siva temple in Thanjavur celebrated its 1,000th birthday in 2010, having been built by Emperor Raja Raja Chola I in 1010! It is one of the three great Chola temples of Tamil Nadu designated by as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Its vimanam, or central tower, is 216 feet high, and its cap stone weighs 80 tons. The 15-foot-tall monolithic Sivalingam in the sanctum is among the largest in the world, so large that the vimanam had to be built around it. As a hub of worship, culture, music, dance and scholarship, it was a driving force behind a robust, wealthy, local economy. During the plunder of India's economy by the British, the temple declined to the point of being abandoned and was used as a barracks for British soldiers. A kumbh-abhishekam (reconsecration) was performed most recently in 1997, following extensive renovation. It has now become an international cultural attraction.

Ancient tradition renewed: (clockwise from upper left) The magnificent Big Temple at night; thousands of devotees converge to pull six chariots during the April, 2015 (new chariot is at the top of the photo); these giant colorful chariot wheels, created by a separate team of craftsmen; the chariot base, covered with carvings; the starting point for the festival a staging area at West Main Street



A Masterpiece of Carving Not Seen in a Century





ART

Masterful Carvers of Rajasthan

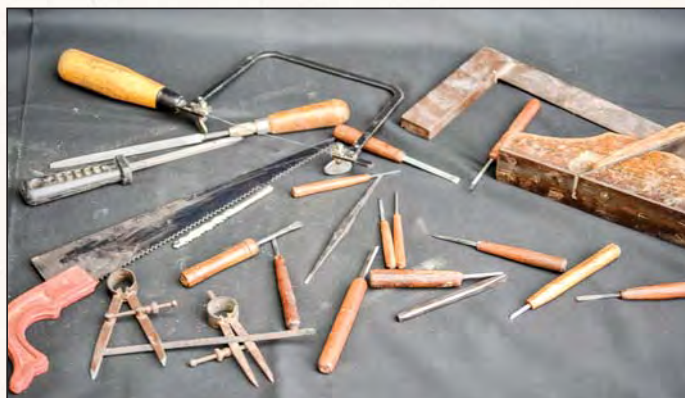
Working almost exclusively in rare sandalwoods, the Jangid family hand-sculpt elaborate art that has earned awards from Limca and the government of India

INDIA IS HOME TO A PLETHORA OF HANDICRAFTS, partly due to its long cultural past and rural majority but also to its still compelling urge for ancestral occupations, passing skills down to sons and daughters. Handicraft guilds, emporiums and on-line markets bring India's unique crafts to a world fatigued by stamped-out, extruded and now 3-D printed commodities. The rare charms of a hand-made product place it in high demand, whether in the world of fabrics, jewelry, toys, accessories or ceramics.

Exemplifying this point is the Jangid family of Jaipur, in Rajasthan, India, an area that for centuries has been known worldwide for quality, elegance, design, ethnic flavor and unmatched workmanship in both utilitarian and artistic wooden masterpieces. The five-member family trace their craft back four generations to Shri Malchand Ji Jangid, grandfather of Mahesh Jangid and guru to the family. Mahesh, 47, has inspired his two

sons, Mohit, 23, and Rohit, 21, to follow the family profession, even as their peers are leaving the field for more modern careers.

The three artists begin each carving day at 9am and work until 8pm, breaking only for lunch. Learning to sculpt with precision and exactness on a miniature scale that challenges even the most seasoned carvers, the family



looks upon their craft as a lifelong journey—not as work so much as a calling, a mission in life and a pathway to personal and family

fulfillment. As a result, they are at their tasks almost 365 days a year. Rohit notes, "This is our traditional work, and we are addicted and dedicated to it. This is a kind of worship for us. Also, it is the family's only way to gain money. No other money-making job is allowed to distract us."

The two brothers and their younger sister, a college student, are unmarried, so there is an unusually disciplined focus in the home. Rohit shares, "My mother, Prem Lata, is a gifted homemaker. She and my 19-year-old sister Pooja are our strength and motivation, doing so many things that allow us to sit for the needed hours of carving."

Using the simplest tools, these artisans faithfully adhere to their forefathers' style, a loyalty that keeps the tradition of miniature carving alive for at least one more generation. "We make most of our own tools, according to our needs," Rohit tells us—"small iron sticks, knives, chisels and tools for filing."

Finding fresh projects is part of the drill—



new items to carve, new designs and new clients. They use old books and the Internet to explore what others have produced and build their ideas creatively from the photos. They draw inspiration for their miniaturized carvings from history, mythology and day-to-day life in India. Their highly intricate designs are created by using a combination of carving methods, such as deep carving, shallow carving, latticework and fretwork on a nearly impossible miniature scale.

One of the unique aspects of the works that Mahesh and his sons produce are the pockets that pull out to reveal tiny figurines and vignettes inside. Mohit enjoys making the miniature scenes the best: "I think the addition of these miniature carvings is most important to our work, because it makes all of our items more interesting and attractive."

The Jangid family are also highly skilled in the art of *tarkashi*, inlay work on wood. In each cubic centimeter of inlaid work, up to 250 pieces of metal and wood are laid side by side. The art of inlay was highly developed in the Safavid era, during which artists created precious works including doors, windows, mirror frames, *Quran* boxes, inlaid boxes, pens and penholders, lanterns and inlaid ornamented shrines.

The family gets precious little assistance from outside; the private associations, councils and government departments are mostly

ineffective. So they do everything themselves, including marketing to art collectors. To promote his work, Mahesh participates in national art and crafts exhibitions and fairs, such as Delhi Haat, Suraj Kund Mela and Master Creations Delhi. He also participates in international art exhibitions and fairs in France, Germany, Egypt, Malaysia, Poland, Switzerland and more.

What are the family's modes of daily worship? Rohit shared, "We do worship when we get up, performing namaskaram and a puja of our great grandfather. He is the god of this work and our guru. We all visit the local temple at least once a week. No special mantras are used during the carving, but we always pray for good happiness, health and positivity around us, offering thanks to the Deities for giving this talent to us. Like all craftsmen, we worship our tools during Diwali puja. And each night we sing the Hanuman Chalisa together before dinner."

The Carvings

One of the family's most detailed works is a village scene called "The Ashram," based on the story of Dushyanta's marriage, separation and reunion with his queen Shakuntala. This completely hand-carved sandalwood miniature stands a little over 12 by 18 inches.

Another extremely impressive piece is the intricately carved Rajasthani hand fan, also

Artisans at work: (clockwise from left) Mahesh with his two sons, Mohit and Rohit; a large carving called "The Ashram" with banyan trees, peacocks, monkeys and deer; a collection of the simple tools used for the intricate carvings, all done by hand

made of sandalwood, with a peacock on the top that gives a pure Indian look. Concealed within the fan are several of the family's trademark hidden scenes in small fold-out sections, depicting events in Lord Krishna's life story: Shri Vashudeva crossing the river to save baby Krishna's life, Shri Krishna eating butter with his brother Balarama, and Shri Krishna dancing on Kaliya Nag. This miniature stands at 12 by 20 inches.

The Jangids' "Jharokha" piece is an ornate Ganesha wall shrine measuring 26 by 28 inches (see photo at bottom of next page). A jharokha is a type of overhanging enclosed balcony used in Indian architecture. This type of balcony is typically used in Rajputana, Mughal and Rajasthani architecture. Jharokhas jutting forward from the wall plane could be used both for adding to the design beauty of the building itself or for a specific purpose. One such function was to allow women in purdah to see the happenings outside the home without being seen themselves.



Precious Sandalwood

The woods typically used in India for ornamental and inlay work are walnut (*Juglans regia*), rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*), ebony (*Diospyros* spp.), teak (*Tectonia grandis*), sal (*Shorea robusta*) and sandalwood (*Santalum album*). The Jangid family works almost exclusively in sandalwood, due to its malleable characteristics and natural fragrance. Mahesh explains: "Sandalwood is the most conducive medium for our particular craft, because it is softer than most types of wood and easier for us to work with."

Rohit adds, "I use only the richest quality of sandalwood, which is so expensive these days. Sandalwood is easily available here in Jaipur. I only buy auctioned sandalwood sold by the government of India. We don't keep a stock, buying as required by each project."

Rohit's purchasing is limited by the strict laws of the land. In India every precious sandalwood tree is owned by the government. Even a tree on your own land does not

belong to you. In many areas every tree is boldly marked with a number, so agents can be sure no trees go missing in the night.

Mahesh

Mahesh Jangid was born and raised in Rajasthan's Churu District. He began woodcarving at the age of seven under the tutelage of his grandfather, Shri Malchand Ji, a nationally recognized woodcarver and National Award winner. After a basic education, Mahesh gave up studies to devote his life to carving sandalwood, and by the time he was twenty-four Mahesh had earned his own national carving award for extraordinary miniature work. In 1993 he won the National Award for his village scene carving, "The Ashram" (see page 65). He has passed on his passion and techniques to his sons, and they, too, have won multiple awards and recognition.

Mahesh broke a record when he carved the world's smallest jointless chain from a single piece of sandalwood—one of his spe-

Love of detail: (clockwise from above): Mahesh Jangid at work on a sitar; the award-winning 24-inch-tall Rajasthani doll with its many secret chambers; filmstrip left to right the Jangid family in front of their studio/home; fan; a sitar with hinged vault; a Ganesha wall shrine called "Jharokha"

cialties. The chain is just under 12.5 inches long and weighs barely over 55 ounces. More recently he bested himself by carving a larger jointless chain, this one measuring ten feet long with 496 links and weighing, incredibly, less than half an ounce. Mahesh has many records for making these jointless chains—two in the Limca Book of Records, one in the Indian Book of Records and one in the Global World Record.

"The greatest challenge of my occupation," Mahesh says, "is that people take my designs from the Internet and copy them in other ordinary wood, producing cheap-quality work. This affects the popularity of

my items. And there is no support from the government for us—quite the opposite. The Indian government has applied a 5 percent value-added tax on handicrafts this year, and they announced the age limit for the national award is 32. No older artist can apply for the national award this year."

Mohit

Mohit was born in Jaipur and was initiated into the craft at a young age. After graduating from school, he chose to dedicate his life to woodcarving, having already practiced the art for fifteen years. He feels strongly that the Jangid family possess a rare woodcarving talent, and he would rather spend his life learning and developing that skill than taking a job he "wouldn't have respect for." Mohit feels he and his brother can do much better in life with woodcarving than in a job with limits—"a limited salary, limited time and limited work. Woodcarving, on the other hand, is limitless," he explains.

"I do prefer miniature work, because I've seen this type of carving from my childhood. Miniature work is the most important aspect of our work, because it makes our items unique in all the world. We can make all kinds of carved products, but miniature carving is my favorite. I give my best to the tiniest projects, and I always enjoy it."

Like his father, Mohit is no stranger to awards and records. In 2008-09 he received the State Award from Rajasthan's Chief Minister Shri Ashok Gahlot for Excellence in Sandalwood Carving. He also holds a world record for the smallest playable violin, a remarkable four-stringed instrument measuring just over five inches tall and not quite 3/4 inch wide that is exactly to scale.

Mohit's knowledge of the epics and other religious texts helps him bring a rare blend of tradition, beauty and craftsmanship to his creations. "I enjoy all the carving we do," he says, "but carving the 'Rajasthani Doll' was my favorite project. This piece shows the beauty of the Rajasthani lady with our traditional jewelry and it tells the story of Rajasthani freedom fighters."

Rohit

Rohit also learned the family craft from his father from a young age. Still in school (though near graduation), he cannot dedicate to carving full-time just yet—but he already holds a record in the Indian Book of Records for his wooden house-fly, and some national and local records for the same piece. Rohit tells us: "I like miniature work in my art. Miniature carving involves engraving the wood on the contours of the design with the utmost care. We, the Jangids, are the only people who make these kind of carving products with scenes in flipped lids. All scenes have their own story." Rohit



COURTESY WOOD WORKERS INSTITUTE

loves to show people his work and see their surprise when he opens the lids to reveal intricate details they did not expect. The surprise is a big part of the discovery and the charm of the design.

We asked Rohit how he finishes his work: "After I complete my artwork, I don't oil it. I keep it original. I give a final touch with a dry brush." How long does it take to complete a major work by hand and what price might he expect to receive upon sale? Rohit responds, "The large Rajasthani doll took a full three months with all three of us working on it. This is one of our finest pieces. The price depends on size. Small pieces go for \$200 to \$2,000. For the larger works, around twenty-four inches and above, it is higher; and for a museum-quality piece we receive about 500,000 rupees (\$7500)." Rohit brings his work to national and local art and craft exhibitions. Readers wishing to see more or acquire these masterpieces can visit www.mrhandicrafts.in.

The Future

Mahesh can rest assured that his sons will continue the family carving tradition. Both sons say they would not want to do anything else. Mohit, who recently completed

his formal education, says, "I will continue to do this work for the rest of my life, because carving has no limits. How much we do and how far we go is all up to us. I like that we always get to do new things, new designs, more miniature work, etc. I would not have this kind of freedom with any other job. I am absolutely addicted to my work and am so happy that I have the talent to do this." Rohit says, "We work at home, so I will definitely teach this work to my future children. But if they then want to go into some other profession, I will support them." Rohit tells us he also had the option to choose another profession, but he picked carving for his life's work. He feels nobody should be confined to a profession that doesn't call forth his highest abilities—that it's best to teach him a skill, and then he can continue the work if he wants.

Mahesh exults, "I feel so proud of both of my sons for following our traditional craft. They are so dedicated to this work and are very creative. They are always thinking about how to make their carvings more attractive and beautiful. So I think they both will do much better in their lives."

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Banking On Lord Rama

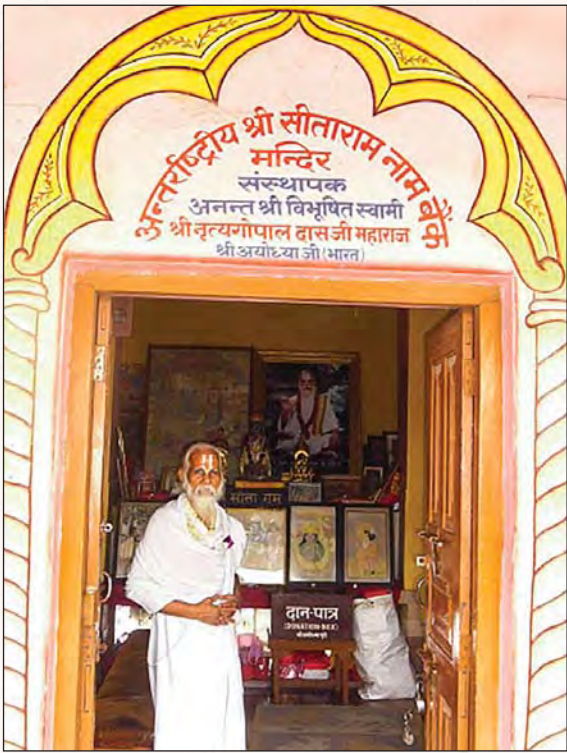
Why this unique “deposit-only” bank is cherished by thousands of devotees

By RAJESH SAHAY, NEW DELHI

IMAGINE A BANK THAT ACCEPTS DEPOSITS from its account holders, credits their accounts but never allows them to withdraw anything. That may sound like a bank that few would invest in. However, there is such a bank. It doesn't accept cash, but rather sheets and sheets of “Sitaram” mantras, penned again and again by devotees who expect their returns from Lord Rama Himself. It is the International Sri Sitaram Naam Bank, headquartered at the Maniram Ki Chhavni temple in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The bank was founded by Sri Nritygopal-dasji Maharaj in the 1970s, and over the years has spread throughout India and to a number of overseas countries, including Nepal, Italy, Germany, China, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Canada, England and the US. It presently has some 112 branches, with more than 35,000 account holders and a total capital reserve of 130 billion “Sitaram” in its vaults.

During my visit to Ayodhya in August, 2015, I met Sri Nritygopal-dasji. He said the bank's objective is to propagate the bhakti of Lord Rama all over the world by utilizing the leisure time of devotees for a religious purpose, instead of whiling it away in gossip. It strengthens faith and brings great happiness.

The main office of the bank is located on the first floor of the Valmiki Temple, opposite Maniram Ki Chhavni Temple. When I dropped in for a visit, I was surprised to find that the bank had a manager, Sri Punit Ram Dasji, and a cashier on its roll, just like any other bank. They scrupulously maintain led-



PHOTOS: RAJESH SAHAY

gers of account holders and a record of over-all deposits. Their office is not computerized; its ledgers are in thick hardbound registers, stacked on shelves behind the manager's desk. On this day a number of devotees were standing in queue to have new deposits recorded in their individual passbook, as well as the master ledger.

The initial minimum deposit to open an account, according to Punit Ram, is 500,000 “Sitaram.” Once an account is opened, subsequent deposits are accepted in multiples of 100,000. Joint accounts can also be opened

by two or more devotees. The bank will provide paper and pen free of cost, but devotees usually use their own stationery.

“At the beginning of the exercise, the devotee should write (once only) the mantra *Om Sri Sita Lakshman bharaata shatrughna hanumat sameta Sri Rama Chandra Parbrahmanamamah*, informed the manager. “As one writes, they should also utter ‘Sitaram’ in silence to help in concentration upon the Lord.”

Each devotee is expected to eventually deposit at least 8,400,000 repetitions, which is equal to the number of species of life on Earth, according to some Hindu scriptures. Devotees are expected to write at least one page every day. The cashier, Sri Keshav Dasji, informed me that deposits are accepted in all of India's languages and even in foreign languages. He showed me sheets in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Urdu, Hindi and English. Some devotees have written in calligraphy and some have even used grains of pulses and rice. I was amazed to see the devotion of people taking so much time to write the name of their beloved Lord.

The deposited writings are stored neatly tied in red cloth and kept in an inner room of the temple, the bank's equivalent of a vault. Here they are worshipped every day.

In talking to a number of account holders, I found that many had come from far-off places, like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. Braj Raj Kishore informed me that writing “Sitaram”

gives him immense satisfaction. Now retired as District Engineer from Biharshariff in Bihar, he finds it a pleasurable pastime, keeping him focused upon God. He reminded me of Mahatma Gandhi's statement that repeating Rama's name from the heart is capable of removing all pain.

.....
A bank like no other: (above) Manager Punit Ram Dasji stands in front the bank entrance; (below) pages of “Sitaram” writings scribed in Kannada, English and Tamil



Hindu Heritage Endowment

Default Estate Plans in Malaysia May Not Please Survivors

All adult Hindus in Malaysia have an estate plan. The problem is, it's often not the plan they want or their families would like.

“Many educated Malaysian Hindus are unaware of the Distribution Act,” Malaysian native and unit trust consultant Mr. Guhan Sivalingam, 64, said, referring to legislation that imposes automatic forms of distribution by the state when Malaysians die without a written plan.

Take the example of a childless married man who predeceases his wife and parents. If he has no written estate plan, the state distributes one-half of his property to his widow and one-half to his parents. For some, that might be fine; for others, a disaster.

Regardless, the lack of a written plan also raises the odds for disputes among loved ones, according to Mr. Guhan, who is studying estate, retirement and tax planning to become a certified financial planner. “The family must also endure the long delay involved in applying for a letter of administration that allows a final distribution. Until the letter arrives, all assets are frozen and the survivors cannot access desperately needed resources.

Decedent & Survivors	Spouse	Parents	Issue
Spouse only; no issue or parents	100%	---	---
Parent(s) only; no spouse or issue	---	100%	---
Issue only; no spouse or parents	---	---	100%
Spouse and Parent(s) only; no issue	50%	50%	---
Spouse and Issue Only; no parents	33.30%	---	66.60%
Parent(s) and Issue only; leaving no spouse	---	33.30%	66.60%
Spouse, parents and issue alive	25%	25%	50%

“With proper estate planning in place, life goes on as usual,” he said. Despite the advantages of estate plans, he added, only ten percent of Malaysians have one, and most who do are not Hindus. When asked why, Mr. Guhan answered, “They lack awareness of and education about estate planning. They're busy with day-to-day matters. Those who are aware procrastinate, and most do not see its importance or urgency.”

Mr. Guhan, whose interests include religion, yoga, meditation and social work, would like that to change. So would the Hindu Heritage Endowment, which is offering seminars on estate planning to educate its donors to the techniques and advantages of estate planning that can be tailored to one's family circumstances rather than follow the Distribution Act of 1958 (Amended 1997). The table above shows how estates are distributed in Malaysia.

None of us can say what our family situation will be at death, so if even one of the plans the state has for the intestate is not to your liking, you will want to write your will.

Even more pressing for some than estate planning is retirement planning. Malaysians depend primarily on the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) for retirement, Malaysia's equivalent to Social Security in the US. The reality, according to Mr. Guhan, is grim.

“This saving is crucial for all working class,” he explained. “Unfortunately, most of the time the savings are gone within two to three years of retirement due to poor financial planning.”

According to Mr. Guhan, retirement in Malaysia is set at age 55. An individual's EPF savings are divided into two accounts: account one is 70% of the total and can be withdrawn following a specific formula on a staggered basis and invested in unit trust instruments, a form of collective investment constituted under a trust deed. Account two, or 30%, may be withdrawn for medical bills, education of oneself or one's children, for the first home purchase payment and when the member reaches 50 years of age. Beneficiaries can be nominated and changed at any time before retirement. The account receives a yearly dividend.

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>.

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund		Suntheram Family Trust Fund	
Anonymous	581.19	Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Ramachandran Suntheram	1,000.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	16.57	Hindu Press International Endowment Fund	
Gayatri Rajan	75.00	Gowri Nadason	123.34	Michael R. Eisen	25.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00	Surendra & Patsy Rajpal	251.00
Aran Sambandar	72.00	Aran Sambandar	36.00	Total	276.00
Jai Weiske	250.00	Padmini Samuthiran	583.83	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	
Other Donations	54,136.27	Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Total	55,564.46	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Gassa Patten	900.00
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Anonymous	365.36	Mano Rajah	75.00
Benevity	601.00	Other Donations	4,800.00	Total	1,125.00
Frank Burkhardt	30.00	Total	6,172.10	Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment	
Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	77.00	Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund		Anil Kumar	27.00
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	200.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00	Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund	
Anonymous	609.00	Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
Dheeraj Handa	51.00	Anonymous	150.00	Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund	
Rama Pemmaraju Rao	108.00	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment		Anonymous	150.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	20.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
Other Donations	30,000.00	Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund		Rajadeva Alahan	102.00
Total	31,696.00	Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Rajendra Giri	110.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Anonymous	208.68	Anonymous	324.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	15.00
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	22.02	Total	484.00	Total	165.00
Amey Surendra Gangal	251.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Jagambrum Kamila	81.25	Anonymous	300.00	Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	8.28	Michael R. Eisen	10.00	Anonymous	1658.82
Anil Kumar	27.00	Andrew Schoenbaum	5.00	Darlene Bolesny	453.02
Ashwini Maureemootoo	8.34	Aran Sendan	75.00	Marlene Carter	200.00
Saroja Maureemootoo	5.56	Sherri Thoma-Bilodeau	25.00	Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	432.00
Krishna Misir	8.73	Total	415.00	Amey Surendra Gangal	51.00
Jogendra Moorooogen	5.50	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	5.50	Mano Rajah	75.00	Bapun Mohanty	10.00
Ganesan & Usha Narayanan	251.00	Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund		Kulagan Moonesawmy	27.78
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00	Anonymous	5,000.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	100.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Hinduism Today Production Fund		Mano Rajah	50.00
Ramai Santhirapala	251.00	A.K. & Bani Bhattacharyya	100.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	108.00
Hemavalli Sivalingam	4.23	Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00	Aran Sambandar	198.00
Senthil Velusamy	101.00	Subhash Kumar Choudhary	200.00	Guhan Sivalingam	29.87
Total	1,349.07	P.C. Ghosh	90.00	Ramesh Sivanathan	46.48
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Vinita Gupta	501.00	Sambandan Umamaheswaran	50.00
Srinivasu Cherupally	499.00	Rajiv Kaushal	72.00	Anba Dayananden Valayten	10.76
Amey Surendra Gangal	65.00	Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,000.00	Vayudeva Varadan	63.00
Appavoo Gunness	499.00	Arun J. Mehta	438.74	Michael Wasylkiw	648.00
Verinder K. Gupta	499.00	Anonymous	1,001.00	Total	4,469.73
Uday Jhunjhunwala	499.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Aruna Karunakaram	499.00	Gayatri Rajan	75.00	Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00
Chowdary & Radhikadevi Koripella	116.00	Total	3,677.75	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Christian Langers	499.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		Total	200.00
Matthew McDermott	80.00	Benevity	100.00	Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Bhaveshan Moorghen	8.28	Anonymous	1159.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	8.28	Dharam & Madhu Bahl	54.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Udeyadeva Moorghen	8.28	Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	Anonymous	226.45
Vasanthan Naidu	499.00	Charles Close	108.00	Bala Sivaceyon	40.00
Ganesan & Usha Narayanan	50.77	Kiran Davane	50.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00
Veena Nayak	499.00	Michael R. Eisen	35.00	Ananda Sivanesan	403.93
Bijamati Pareatumbee	80.00	Roshan Harilela	375.00	Total	700.38
Mayur & Sobhna Patel	499.00	Yegappan Lakshmanan	1,000.00	Tiptur Shiva Temple & Youth Hostel Fund	
Suresh Potti	499.00	Gregg Lien	115.89	Narasingrao Pampati	501.00
Sujatha Rao	499.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00	Kerala Temple Trust	
Sai Singh	120.00	Subramaniam Santosh	30.00	Susila Nair	300.00
Deepan Sivasarana	51.26	Shebabrata Shaha	50.00	Taos Hanuman Fund	
Samynaden Veerapen	137.56	Dharmalingam Siddhan	25.00	Anonymous	33.36
Total	6,214.43	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Hindu of the Year Fund		Matthew Wiczork	5.00	Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00
Rajendra Giri	110.00	Total	3,261.89	India Hindu Tribals Endowment	
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment		Hindu Education Endowment		Anonymous	251.00
Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	9.00	Ashu-Tosh Bhattacharyya	100.00	Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	50.00
Devajyothi Kondapi	317.00	The Kautilya Endowment		Pathmini Saravanapavan	54.00
Umasankaran Mohambourame	112.57	Anonymous	2,001.00	Vayudeva Varadan	104.00
Gowri Nadason	123.34	Insurance Premiums		Total	168.00
Parimala Selvaraj	62.00	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund	
Bala Sivaceyon	20.00	Other Donations	600.00	Danyse Crotti	50.00
Sheela Venkatakrishnan	100.00	Total Contributions		Manogaran Mardemootoo	27.78
Anonymous	108.36	Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2015		Kulagan Moonesawmy	16.57
Total	852.27	Total Endowment Funds		Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Grand Total		Grand Total		Danyse Crotti	100.00
				Total	254.35
				Anantha Ladies Home Endowment	
				Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00
				Anonymous	108.36
				Total	138.36
				Hindu American Foundation Endowment	
				Mihir Meghani	101.00
				Anonymous	250.00
				Total	351.00
				Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
				Anonymous	233.39
				Partha Ayalasomayajula	301.00
				Dheeraj Handa	42.00
				Natraj Narayanswami	33.00
				Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00
				Kartikatipan Ramachandran	21.00
				Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
				Total	735.39
				Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
				Anonymous	183.36
				Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
				Anil Kumar	27.00
				Digital Dharma Endowment	
				Anonymous	234.91

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Insurance Premiums	
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	Anonymous	251.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Anonymous	258.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00	Other Donations	600.00
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Total Contributions	
Total	318.00	Total	104.00	\$138,094.01	
Hindu Literature Fund		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2015	
Chellappa Deva	15.00	Danyse Crotti	50.00	Total Endowment Funds	\$13,048,656.15
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	27.78	Grand Total	
Total	168.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	16.57	\$13,048,656.15	
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00		
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00	Danyse Crotti	100.00		
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Total	254.35		
Anonymous	150.00	Anantha Ladies Home Endowment			
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00		
Total	183.00	Anonymous	108.36		
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Total	138.36		
Sivakumar Saravan	1,500.00	Hindu American Foundation Endowment			
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Mihir Meghani	101.00		
Anonymous	1249.60	Anonymous	250.00		
Marlene Carter	362.00	Total	351.00		
Sunil Chacko	530.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment			
Vinit Chauhan	20.00	Anonymous	233.39		
Natraj Narayanswami	11.00	Partha Ayalasomayajula	301.00		
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Dheeraj Handa	42.00		
Aran Sendan	75.00	Natraj Narayanswami	33.00		
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	350.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00		
Soma Sundaram	30.00	Kartikatipan Ramachandran	21.00		
Total	2,677.61	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00		
Siva Poomi School Trust		Total	735.39		
Anonymous	150.00	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment			
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Anonymous	183.36		
Chowdary & Radhikadevi Koripella	116.00	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund			
		Anil Kumar	27.00		
		Digital Dharma Endowment			
		Anonymous	234.91		

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HAF's Hinduism 101 Training was an amazing and succinct learning experience. Our school textbooks do a poor job of explaining Hinduism. HAF is fixing that by educating our teachers about Hinduism so that they can do a better job of teaching about it at school. Now that I have taken the training, I finally understand how to educate those who are interested in learning more about Hinduism!

Hindu American High School Student, 11th Grade, Texas



Human Rights

HAF came as the light at the end of the tunnel for the Bhutanese American Organization Philadelphia (BAOP) and all the Bhutanese in general. We were lost at the crossroads of language, culture and spirituality when the Hindu American Foundation came ready to help us walk down the difficult path of keeping our roots intact. HAF rekindled hope when we were hopeless.

Leela Kuikel, Executive Director, Bhutanese American Organization Philadelphia

Interfaith

Thanks to the Hindu American Foundation, communities throughout the US have not only come to a deeper understanding of Hinduism, but have benefited from their participation, which has led to stronger interfaith alliances, where the many paths have been honored on the journey toward one truth.

Steve Spreitzer, President and CEO, Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion

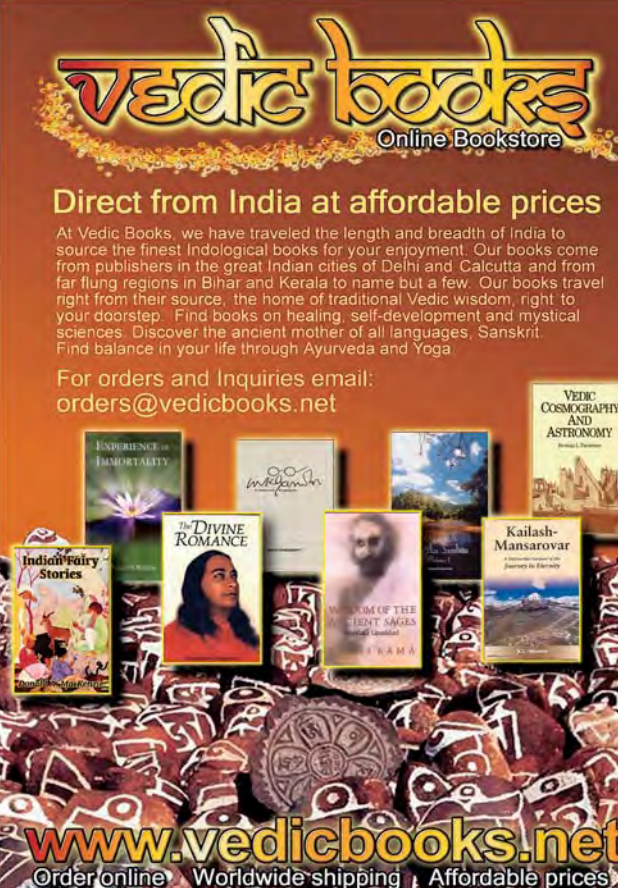


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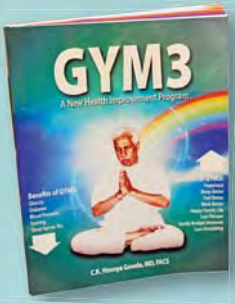
Roy Eugene Davis has been teaching in North and South America, Europe, and India* for almost 60 years. He was ordained by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1951.

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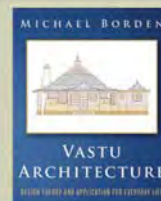
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Chakrapani Ullal, Vedic Astrology

World-renowned teacher and advisor, Chakrapani Ullal, consults internationally with people from all walks of life. As the founding honorary chairman of the ACVA (American Council of Vedic Astrology), he has played an active role in bringing together the Eastern Indian Vedic astrologers and Western astrologers. Considered a teacher of teachers, he travels widely as an author, lecturer and consultant.



Born into a traditional Hindu lineage of astrologers in South India, Chakrapani began his training at an early age and enjoyed associations with many of India's most revered and celebrated saints and sages. With over 45 years of experience, his depth of knowledge and unique understanding of how astrological principles apply to different cultures are sought out by people from all over the world. For more information and a schedule of his upcoming itinerary, please contact:

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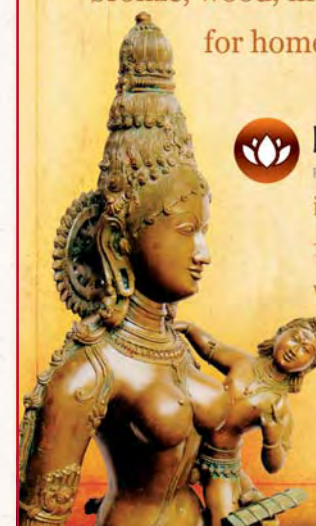
She has been honored with the *Jyotish Visharada* by CVA for her contributions to Vedic Astrology. She is co-director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies.

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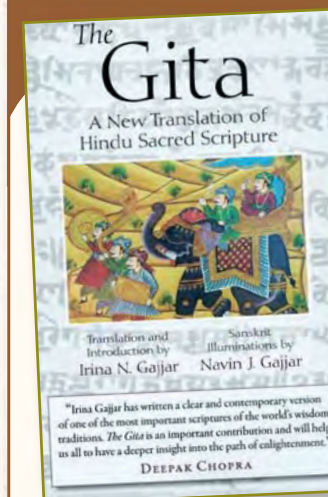
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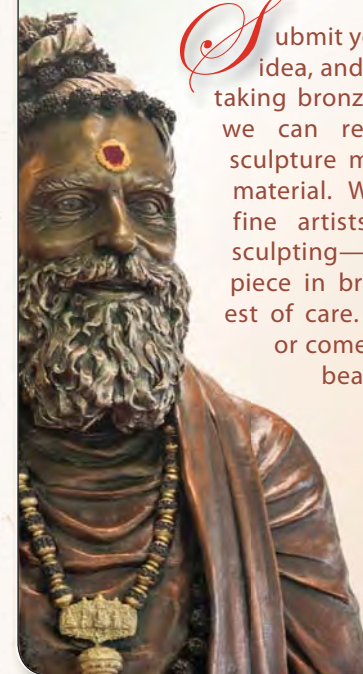
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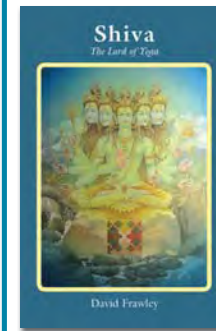
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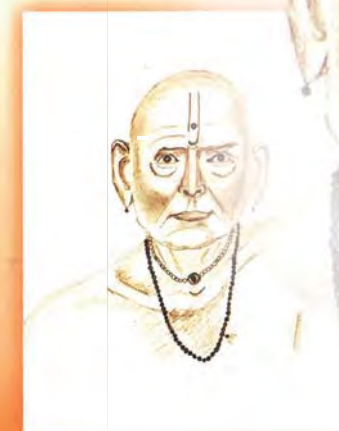
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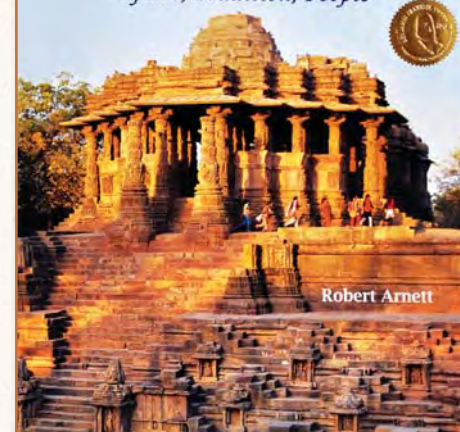


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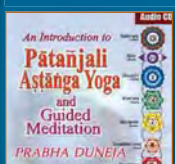
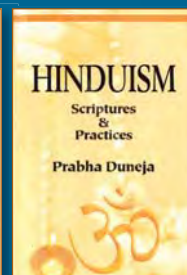
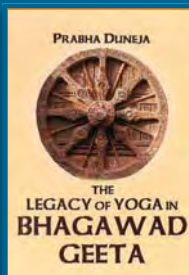
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Service: Hindu American Seva Communities (HASC) was founded in 2009 with the guidance of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Its goal is to empower the Hindu community, and especially youth, by making service and volunteering a defining part of Hindu American life and culture—and to liaise with government and interfaith groups to communicate Hindu needs, share Hindu points of strength and, especially, to build bridges of understanding.

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FILM

Pixar's Hindu Short

BY AARTI AND MAYURESH VISSWANATHAN

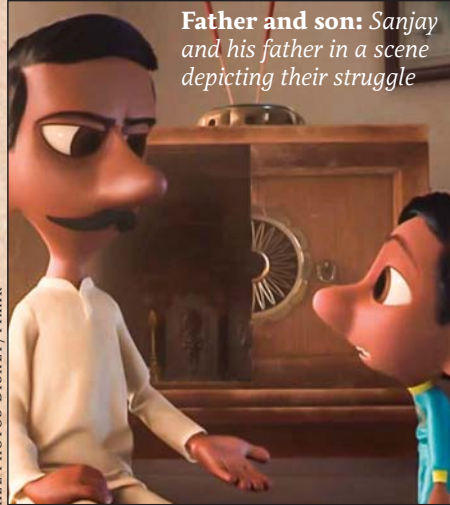
SANJAY'S SUPER TEAM, ONE OF PIXAR'S newest short films, is about a young Hindu boy named Sanjay who is conflicted between the enticing world of superhero action figures and his Hindu heritage.

Sanjay's struggle is a perfect depiction of the situation most Hindu Americans experience. As children growing up in a world where Hinduism is often misrepresented, they are generally faced with ridicule and become embarrassed to be identified as a Hindu outside of their family. As a result, they live a life of trying to fit in and thereby allow themselves to be constantly distracted by material objects. This is succinctly depicted by Sanjay's constantly engaging in watching television and playing with his superhero figurines, even while his dad is performing the daily puja.

Sanjay shows obvious discontentment when his father insists that he sit beside him for worship. However, Sanjay's vision allows him to discover that these two seemingly different worlds can be connected, allowing him to embrace his cultural roots while still engaging actively in the material world.

The director, Sanjay Patel, does an excellent job of depicting Hindu concepts and the significance of rituals in Hindu worship. For example, Sanjay's dad rings the bell and

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Father and son: *Sanjay and his father in a scene depicting their struggle*

lights the puja lamp before starting his puja. In Sanjay's vision, he sees the lighting of the puja lamp as a means of calling upon the Gods so that they can help defeat the demon. Unfortunately, this part of the film could also be misleading, by giving the impression that demons can come in and out of puja lamps.

The Hindu concept of *ahimsa*, nonviolence, is depicted when the demon is finally defeated: instead of dying, he is purified by transforming into a divine spirit with his hands folded in *anjali mudra*, or namaste.

This animation connects with us on a personal level, as our introduction to Hindu Gods, especially to Lord Hanuman, was based on the idea that He is a superman. His

physical strength, intellectual power and humility inspired and guided us throughout childhood. Even now, at the age of 16 and 14, we can still relate to Sanjay's Super Team, since Hinduism was portrayed so poorly in our southern California school that we were sometimes embarrassed to identify as Hindu.

As we grew older and learned how to respond to questions about Hinduism based on understanding it, we became more comfortable embracing Hindu culture.

This short film beautifully represents the conflict Hindu Americans face daily,

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Sanjay's Creator

AN INTERVIEW WITH SANJAY
PATEL BY THEVERGE.COM

Once you decided to do the film, did it become important to you as an opportunity for teaching American kids about other cultures?

Yeah, that was a big deciding factor. I had a conversation with my dad about what the studio was presenting. He gave me the insight that it was part of my duty, that it would possibly create this bad karma to ignore what the studio was asking. And for me, the major deciding factor was being able to better reflect a family that was closer to my own, and speak to that audience of immigrant kids.

What was your understanding of your father's religion when you were that age?

Growing up, there was just no dialogue between me and my father. I had this fear of approaching him with questions about why we were doing what we were doing. And to be honest, I had no interest. I just wanted [the daily worship].

So it was just ritual without meaning for you?

Totally! We wash the dishes, I take a shower, we vacuum, then we ring the bell and pick flowers and anoint the Deities. If you grow up like that, you can't describe how mundane it feels. But all my father was trying to do was get me to center myself and be still. It was a beautiful thing, he just never articulated it, never explained why it was important.

and provides inspiration to embrace our cultural heritage in the midst of a possible identity crisis by showing that we can merge our religion with our interests and loves. Sanjay's Super Team is a 2015 Oscar nominee for short animated films.

Super heroes: *Sanjay is amazed as he actually enters his own world*

