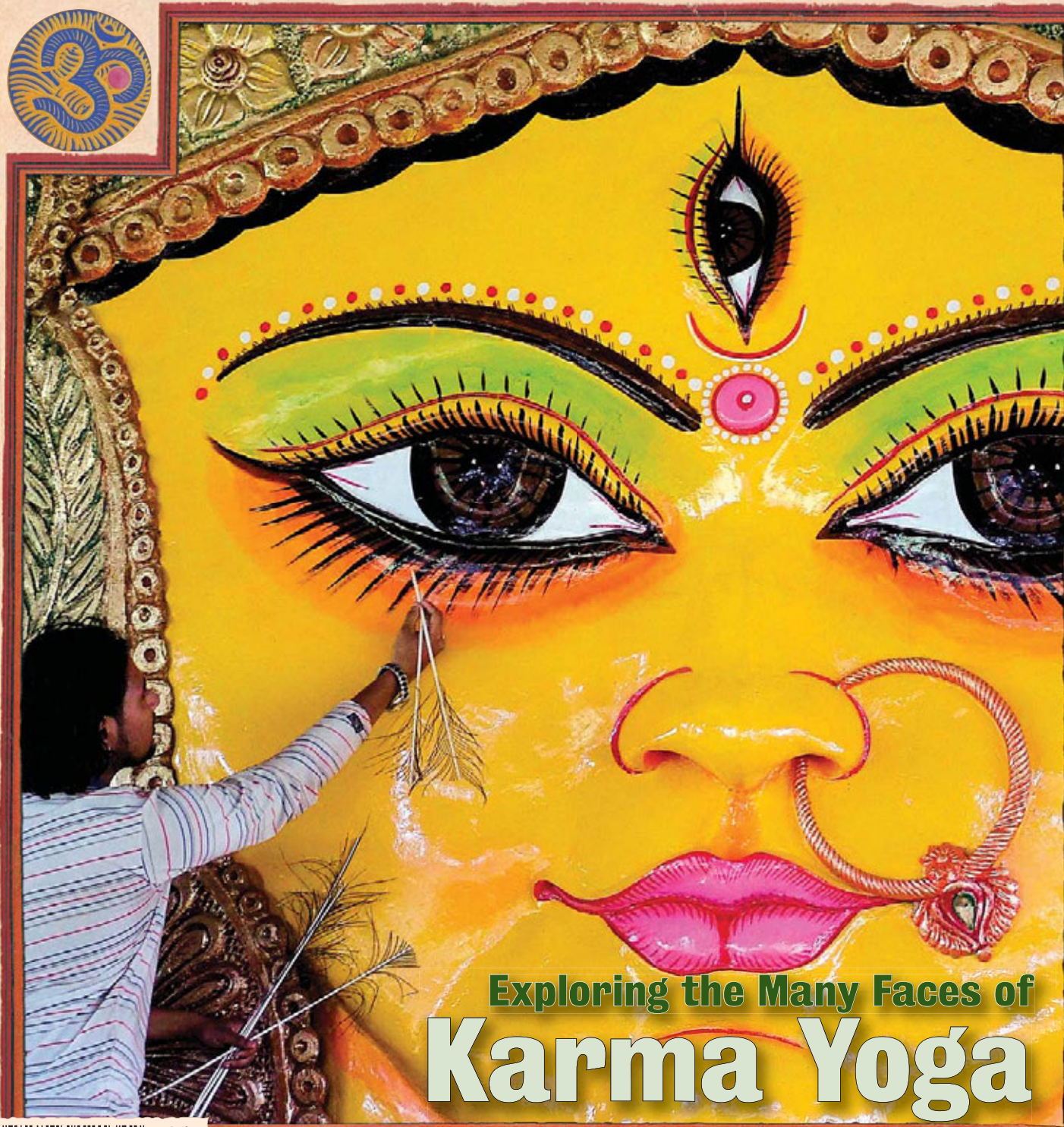


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HINDUISM TODAY

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



Exploring the Many Faces of Karma Yoga

S. N. NAVARATHNAM



THOMAS L KELLY

COVER: Working in the spirit of devotional karma yoga, an artist paints a massive image of Goddess Durga in Bhubaneswar, Orissa; (above) a priest passes the camphor lamp among devotees at the Shri Ankaala Parameshwari, Durga Temple, near Yangon in Myanmar

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2016 • THE HINDU YEAR MANMATHA, 5116

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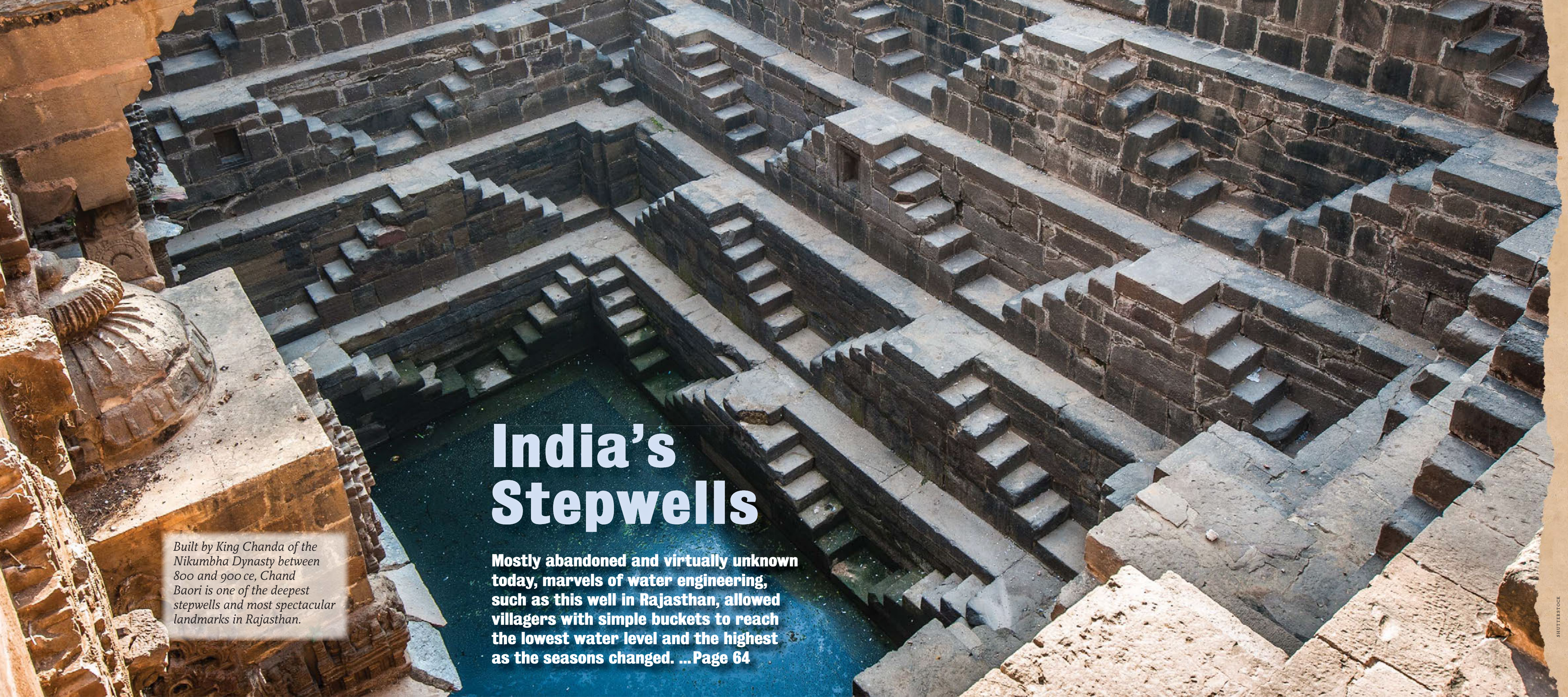


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India's Stepwells

Built by King Chanda of the Nikumbha Dynasty between 800 and 900 ce, Chand Baori is one of the deepest stepwells and most spectacular landmarks in Rajasthan.

Mostly abandoned and virtually unknown today, marvels of water engineering, such as this well in Rajasthan, allowed villagers with simple buckets to reach the lowest water level and the highest as the seasons changed. ...Page 64

GLOBAL DHARMA

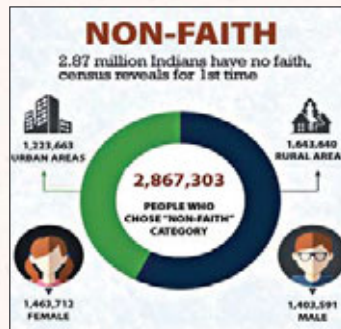
POLLS

God Wins India's 2011 Census

MOST REPORTS ON THE LONG-DELAYED RELEASE OF INDIA'S national census conducted in 2011 focused on the drop of Hindus to 79.8%. At independence, in 1947, Hindus were 84.1% of India's population. The Muslim community grew to 14.2% in 2011 from 13.4% in 2001, but their rate of growth slowed. Christians stayed at 2.3%, while Sikhs dropped to 1.7% from 1.9%. Overall, India will become the world's most populous country by 2022.

But all that isn't what caught our attention at HINDUISM TODAY. The 2011 census was the first to include a "non-faith" category, which numbered 2.87 million, 0.24% of the population. It includes atheists, rationalists and those not interested in religion but who believe in some "unknown force." Uttar Pradesh accounts for the most people registered as "non-faith" with 582,000. Bihar, Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu all have more than 100,000 people in the category. Worldwide, a series of Gallup International polls found that 11% of Earth's citizens are "convinced atheists." The US comes in at 3.1%, while in France 40% don't believe in "any sort of spirit, God or life force." At just 0.24% in its non-faith category, India may well be the world's most God-believing nation.

The numbers are in: India's first "non-faith" category on its census reveals that out of 1.21 billion people, only 2.87 million have no official faith. More females than males reported having no faith.



GATHERINGS

Global Dharma Conference

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2015, THE HINDU STUDENTS COUNCIL PUT ON A three-day conference for dharma and world harmony in Edison, New Jersey. Over 60 speakers addressed 1,000 attendees from 13 countries on topics including women's empowerment, interfaith relations and human rights. Speakers included Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar—both speaking by Skype from India—H.R. Nagendra, chairman of the Indian government's committee for the International Day of Yoga, scientists Subhash Kak and Alok Kumar, as well as Rajiv Malhotra, Swamini Svatmavidyananda, Shambhavi Chopra and Dr. Indrani Rampersad. An evening concert hosted by former Miss America Nina Davuluri featured Indian and Balinese dance, flutist Rakesh Chaurasia and ghatam player Giridhar Udupa.

Meeting of minds: (right) Sri Sri Ravi Shankar addresses the audience on Dharma's relevance towards a conflict-free society



Focus on India: search for images at bit.ly/HinduArt

CULTURE

Google's Global Art Project

THE GOOGLE CULTURAL INSTITUTE, in collaboration with India's National Museum and the National Gallery of Modern Art, announced in August, 2015, that it has added over 2,000 new images of Indian art and 70 virtual exhibits to the Google Art Project platform.

Over five thousand works of art are available just by searching the word "India." With eight filters located on the sidebar, one can see sculptures of Deities, ancient paintings, Indian architecture, jewelry and much more. There are also 130 slideshow exhibits under the same search. The date filter contains present-day art to artifacts as far back as 8750 bce.

Amit Sood, director of the

Google Cultural Institute, commented: "The mission of the Cultural Institute is to make the world's heritage accessible for global audiences and to preserve it digitally for generations to come. By bringing India's rich heritage online, we hope to introduce people across the globe to the fascinating world of Indian culture, history and art. The project presently has six million pieces on line."

The hi-res imagery is shown in stunning detail. You can zoom in on them, but the files can't be downloaded—a significant drawback. That aside, this is an excellent innovation that allows you to get up close and personal with some of the world's greatest art. Thanks, Google!



IRELAND

Ganesha's Green Garden

IRELAND IS NOW THE HOME OF nine Ganeshas and dozens of other statues, all beautifully carved in Mahabalipuram, India. They are in a garden called Victoria's Way, located in the small village of Roundwood

in Wicklow county. Victor Langheld, the owner-creator, intends the 20-year project to take visitors on an artistic—and occasionally bizarre—journey representing one's spiritual progression toward enlightenment.



Outside help: Zuckerberg credits his success to India

USA

Facebook Founder Finds India

MARK ZUCKERBERG AND Steve Jobs both visited a particular temple—possibly the Hanumanji temple in Kainchi Dham, Nainital—in India to gain inspiration for building their companies.

"India is personally very important to the history of Facebook. This is a story that I have not told publicly and few people know," stated Zuckerberg.

"Early on in our history, before things were really going well, we hit a tough patch. A lot of people wanted to buy Facebook and thought we should sell the company. So I went and saw one of my mentors, Steve Jobs. He told me that in order to reconnect with what I believed is the

mission of the company, I should visit this temple that he had gone to in India early in his evolution of thinking about what he wanted Apple and his vision of the future to be.

"So I went and I traveled for almost a month. Seeing the people and how they connected, having the opportunity to feel how much better the world could be if everyone had a stronger ability to connect, reinforced the importance of what we were doing. That is something I have always remembered over the last ten years as we built Facebook."

Zuckerberg recently bought 357 acres on Kauai, the Hawaiian island also home to the headquarters of HINDUISM TODAY.

RITUAL

Prayers as Temple Submerged

A 120-DAY VARUNA YAGAM CAME TO A CLOSE ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2015, at the Sangameswaram Temple in Andhra Pradesh. The temple, usually flooded by the impounded waters of Srisailem dam on the Krishna River, has been temporarily accessible during the last seven months. The priests conducted worship with prayers timed to end just before the temple was again submerged.

Two tales: (left) Ganesha dances on the 22-acre park called Victoria's Way. (right) Temple priest T. Raghurama Sarma performing purnahuti during Varuna Yagam as water floods the sanctum sanctorum of Sangameswaram Temple



INDIA

Sri Rangam Gets a Facelift

AT THE END OF OCTOBER, 2015, THE ANCIENT AND FAMOUS SRI Ranganathaswamy Temple, near Tiruchy, shined majestically with its grandeur fully restored, having its US\$2.7-million renovation completed. The massive renovation was taken up by the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department. Main improvements included: painting of the rajagopuram and smaller gopurams; a face-lift for the 18-foot-tall shrine doors; cleaning of the heavy camphor soot inside the main sanctums; and the replacement of flooring.

Major makeover: The six-million-square-foot Ranganathaswamy Temple is considered the world's largest functioning temple



Kumbha Mela Scores Better Than Last Two World Cups

ON APRIL 16, 2015, THE Harvard South Asia Institute launched *Kumbh Mela: Mapping the Ephemeral Megacity*. The 449-page book consolidates research from Harvard students who studied the religious festival in 2013—an event involving some 100 million people. The book focuses on its distinctive management and organization.

During the Kumbha Mela, the Harvard teams explored various aspects of the megacity,

from religious practices to public health to environmental impacts. Since then, they have been analyzing and publishing results.

The book states: “For a country notorious for its ‘lethargic’ bureaucracy, the success of the Kumbha Mela is truly noteworthy.”

In contrast, the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil and the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi had major problems. Both events were in the news



Holy gathering: Millions of devotees gather peacefully at the Mela

for scandals, along with poor management and preparations,

despite having sufficient funds and government involvement.



EDUCATION

Sanskrit Summer Course Proves Popular

THE SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE, University of Heidelberg, Germany, is struggling to meet demand as their Sanskrit summer course grows ever more popular. The institute’s department of Cultural and Religious

History of South Asia has inspired students from around the world with its creative programs. One is pictured above, a field trip to India for hands-on puja training.

The most popular program is

a yearly one-month immersive Sanskrit course taught using real life, day-to-day topics. Held in August, the course draws applicants from across the globe, mostly students already pursuing classical Indology and

Language and tradition:

SAI’s religious history students on a 2012 trip to the Center for Sanskrit in Goa. Sandhya and puja, performed by Dr. Patanjali Mishra of Banaras Hindu University, were studied.

Sanskrit who seek to deepen their studies and meet their peers. Professor Axel Michaels, head of the department and founder of the program, said, “When it started 15 years ago, we were almost ready to shut the program down after a couple of years. Now every year we have to reject many applications.”

Sanskrit studies began in the 18th century in Germany; today 16 of its top universities teach Sanskrit, along with classical and modern Indology, compared to just ten teaching Sanskrit in the US and four in the UK.

and seller of Indian sandalwood.

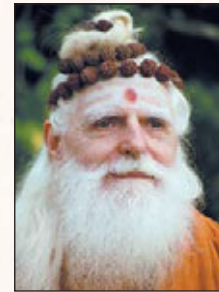
IN JULY, 2015, ALOK KUMAR SET the record straight with his newest publication, *A History of Science in World Cultures: Voices of Knowledge*, published by Routledge. The book focuses on how Europe’s scientific revolution depended profoundly on ideas and innovations passed down from ancient cultures. It traces the origins of European “discoveries,” demonstrating that many derived, at least in part, from much earlier

work in China, India, Persia, Babylonia and elsewhere.

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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

A Model for Interfaith

How the diversity of thought within our own religion can teach us to be tolerant of others

BY BHARATHWAJ NANDAKUMAR

THE UNIVERSITY OF Southern California (USC) is one of the most religiously diverse campuses in the US. With 90 student religious groups—and around 1,200 Indian students—it promotes interreligious understanding and harmony. As the director of Hindu Student Life at USC, I am a contact and point of interaction for Hindus or anyone who wants to know about Hinduism.

We have a dedicated Hindu prayer space on campus, and I’ve been performing the pujas at USC for almost ten years. We do the pujas with an explanation before every chant and will often ask people to repeat them back. It culminates with an arati which everyone can do and is then open for singing. We also organize well-attended events and popular festivals.

I’ve often heard those of older generations say that younger people don’t really know or care about religion. But students here love the pujas and listen intently. If you come to one of our events, you can see how many people stay through them. You’d think someone might get bored and start looking at their phone, but it never happens. I think it’s because they feel so involved and are able to understand what the priest is doing.

There’s a great deal of information out there for these and other Hindus, but I don’t think it’s as important to educate them about their faith as to inspire legitimate curiosity about core aspects of it. This way they can discover its meaning for themselves. In this regard, it’s the responsibility of elders to answer the questions of our youth, and if they don’t know the answers, they should educate themselves. Elders shouldn’t expect our youth to follow traditions without explanation.

Explanations are what this generation looks for. For a lot of students who come to USC from India, it’s the first time that they are away from Hinduism. They’ve never



even had a reason to ask questions, because everyone around them was doing the same thing. In the US, they are suddenly responsible for upholding their own religious life. This doesn’t just mean understanding Hinduism, but a little about other faiths as well.

Because Hinduism is so broad, there is no single person or dogma to follow. Each Hindu family can have a different tradition; and yet, Hinduism accepts everyone. You could be from a different community and have different beliefs and practices, and that’s okay—you’re all still Hindus. This can be an important model for how we treat other faiths. If you’re a Muslim and I’m a Hindu, we’re both still part of the human race.

There are recent surveys which show that some young people are giving up on religion. Youth are seeing so many wars and controversies caused by opposing faiths that they disassociate themselves from their religion in an effort to distance themselves from these controversies. In my opinion, people follow varied traditions because that’s just who they are. Some people change their religion in their lifetime because that’s what they’re here to experience. You can’t say that they’re wrong. There’s no wrong. After all, our scriptures say you have to come to know all the different experiences human life has to offer in order to attain enlightenment.

I believe that if we do things right there will be a point where people who have given up on religion will begin to admire the different faiths, which ultimately advise us to be loving and peaceful. Ideally, people will begin to find strength in their own religious traditions, while at the same time loving and appreciating the similarities and even the differences between other traditions.

BHARATHWAJ NANDAKUMAR, 30, is the director of Hindu Student Life at USC. He has a masters in computer science and is currently a video game developer in LA. Email: nandakum@usc.edu

BRIEFLY...

ON OCTOBER 8, 2015, A US FEDERAL court ruled against copy-righting yoga poses. The founder of “hot yoga,” Bikram Choudhury, sued several yoga studios for teaching yoga routines that he has published. His actions prompted the US Copyright Office to issue a new policy clarifying that individual yoga poses are not subject to copyright laws,

just as a choreographer cannot lay claim to a ballet sequence.

THE WORLD’S SECOND MOST expensive tropical hardwood, sandalwood, is becoming big business to an Australian company called TFS. With an annual production capacity of 2,000 metric tons, TFS claims to be the world’s leading grower, producer

Drawing Close to Ganesha

How sincerely approaching Him as a real being can deepen your relationship with the Lord of Obstacles

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

HINDUISM IN THAILAND, A PRE-dominantly Buddhist nation, has been the subject of several articles in HINDUISM TODAY magazine over the years. To many people's surprise, the country has a number of Hindu temples, including a large and ornate Ganesha shrine right in the middle of Bangkok's financial district. Our journalist asked several Thais why so many in the country worship regularly at Hindu temples. The common answer was, "The worship of Buddha helps us in a purely spiritual way, whereas worshipping the Hindu Gods helps in our daily life."

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, stressed this same idea: "Among all the wonderful Hindu Deities, Lord Ganesha is the closest to the material plane of consciousness, most easily contacted and most able to assist us in our day-to-day life and concerns. Worship of Lord Ganesha leads the devotee most naturally to the other great Gods....Lord Ganesha is a Mahadeva, a Great God, created by Lord Siva to assist souls in their evolution. He is the elephant-faced Patron of Art and Science, the Lord of Obstacles and Guardian of Dharma, the first son of Siva. His will prevails as the force of righteousness, the embodiment of Siva's karmic law in all three worlds."

Many great saints and sages of Hinduism have had visions of Lord Ganesha and shared them with their devotees, thus strengthening their faith in the Gods of Hinduism and expanding their understanding.

In ancient times Auvaiyar, a Tamil mystic who had visions of Ganesha, shared her experiences in devotional poetry. In "Vinayaga Ahaval" she wrote, "Desiring to make me Yours this instant, You, like a mother, have appeared before me and cut the delusion of unending births."

In modern times, Gurudeva shared his mystical perspectives and experiences of Ganesha in a book called *Loving Ganesha*: "There are a great many liberal Hindus and/or Western-influenced Hindus who don't think of Ganesha as a real being. To them He is a symbol, a superstition, a way of explaining philosophy to children and the uneducated. But this has not been my experience of our loving Lord. I have seen Him with my own eye. He has come to me in visions several times and convinced my lower mind of His reality."

Since 1969 we have arranged group pilgrimages to India, where traveling seekers have had life-changing visions of Lord Ganesha and other Deities. Such visions, born of the intensity of pilgrimage and inner striving, would often come in the form of the



stone or bronze murti moving and smiling at them, or becoming an animated, human-like figure. With eyes closed, some devotees inwardly saw the Deity's face, as real as any living being.

Though not many have such powerful visions, in the year 1995 hundreds of thousands of Hindus experienced firsthand the widely publicized milk miracle in temples around the world. They watched as devotees offered milk to murtis of Lord Ganesha, who actually drank the milk. The remarkable happening was recorded by video cameras and well documented in world media. This increased many people's faith in the reality of Lord Ganesha.

In his many inspired talks to large crowds in South India's ancient temples, Gurudeva explained that the stone or metal Deity images are not mere symbols of the Gods; they are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. Knowing that the Gods are real beings and that the purpose of going to the temple is to experience their blessings transforms the temple from a cultural hall to a truly sacred place for the devotee. Some readers may wonder what I mean by saying that Lord Ganesha and the other Gods are real beings. If they are real, where do they live? To answer that question, let's provide some background. Hindu scripture speaks of three worlds of existence: the physical plane, the subtle or astral plane, and the causal plane.

The physical plane is the world we perceive with our five senses, the realm of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Of the three worlds, this is the most limited, the least permanent and the most subject to change. Within the physical plane exists the subtle or astral plane, the mental-emotional sphere. We function in this realm through thought and feeling and reside there fully during sleep and after death. There, in our astral body, we meet other souls who are sleeping or have died and do not have a physical body. We function constantly in this in-between world by our every thought and emotion.

Deep within the astral plane exists the causal plane—the world of light and blessedness, the highest of heavenly regions, extolled in the scriptures of all faiths. This is the superconscious world, where the Gods and highly evolved souls abide. It is this world that we seek to access through deep meditation and through temple worship, which opens a channel for the Gods' blessings. This most refined realm is not distant. It exists within us as the abode of our divine Self, our



SHUTTERSTOCK

pure immortal soul being.

My Gurudeva often said that religion is the working together of the three worlds. In a sanctified temple, we can readily experience the Gods and devas as an uplifting, peaceful, divine energy, or shakti, radiating out through the murti from the causal plane. It is easiest to feel these blessings at the high point of the puja, when the flame is held before the Deity, or after the puja, in a quiet moment of reflection. The shakti of Lord Ganesha is a gentle, soothing force. Even a subtle encounter with the Lord of Obstacles has the power to bring

A Practice for Contacting Ganesha

In *Loving Ganesha*, Gurudeva detailed the following spiritual practice that you can use to contact the Lord of Obstacles.

"Wherever His devotees are—in the home, the factories, the offices, the hospitals, the marketplace, orbiting in space or tilling the soil on the farm—Lord Ganesha is ever there. Intimate access is acquired by simply loving Ganesha and holding His robust image in your mind. Carefully visualize the large head and ears, His long trunk, massive body, big belly and the objects He holds in His many hands. Look into Ganesha's eyes. Train yourself to see Him within your own mind with your eyes closed. This is the key. Hold His form steady in your mind through the power of visualization. Now you can talk to Him. Pronounce the words mentally into His ear. He is listening, though He will never speak back but take into His vast mind your prayer and slowly work it out. You must simply speak all of your questions and your problems into His right ear. When you are finished, open your eyes. Go on with your day and go on with your life. Wherever you are, remember this simple way of making contact with Lord Ganesha and as a good seeker exercise this psychic power, this siddhi.

"Starting today and in the days to come, you will notice how He answers questions and solves problems for you through the course of your daily life. You will notice how He influences events and decisions slowly and subtly, in unseen ways. Situations will change for you, unexpected doors will open, and accustomed ones will close as you are propelled through His grace toward your inevitable glorious future. Read and reread the above formula for immediate access to Lord Ganesha until it is firmly implanted in your subconscious memory patterns, and then begin to make contact with Him often through each day wherever you are and whatever you are doing."

A global God: (left) Lord Ganesha embodied in an elegant life-like statue gracing the town of Kuta, Bali, Indonesia. The golden writing on His trunk includes the Sanskrit Aum.

us into the secure consciousness of the muladhara chakra, the force center of memory where Ganesha resides. This blessing keeps us above the lower seven chakras, home of the base emotions such as jealousy, fear and anger.

There is a Tamil saying, "Ganesha is my support," "Ganapati tunai," which conveys the idea that Lord Ganesha looks after us and influences everything in our life for the

better. You can develop a close relationship with Lord Ganesha, in which He feels like a good friend, if you take the time to get to know Him through bhakti yoga, the practice of devotional disciplines, worship, prayer, chanting and singing with the aim of awakening love in the heart and opening yourself to the Deity's grace.

The 2,000-year-old South Indian scripture *Tirumantiram* declares, "Five-armed is He, elephant-faced, with tusks protruding, crescent-shaped, son of Siva, wisdom's flower; in heart enshrined, His feet I praise."



LETTERS

Great Book

Alok Kumar's book *Sciences of the Ancient Hindus*, 2014, is a masterpiece that throws authentic light on how the ancient Hindus in India discovered the basics and had made advances in so many sciences, such as mathematics, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, medicine, health and so on. Many other civilizations were not even born during India's discovery of those arts. Plenty of references are given; just the bibliography is 49 pages long.

Alok Kumar's volume will dispel any doubts about who invented what. This book is a must for any library. The author may want to develop the material in two or three, lighter paperback volumes. That will be much easier for handling and reading, particularly by senior citizens and school students.

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Book Review

Thank you very much for publishing the book review on *Indra's Net* by Rajiv Malhotra in the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2015, issue of HINDUISM TODAY. Malhotra has been fighting this battle against very powerful, entrenched and biased academia for many years and deserves our support.

Another excellent article in the same issue, *passing on our Heritage* by Shiva Seejore, talks about preserving our heritage in the present *Kali yuga*.

We all could play our little part by recognizing that what is written about Hinduism in school and university texts, and taught by teachers and professors, is not necessarily true or accurate. It has been a long battle

to change these resources. We cannot and should not wait and do nothing until we change academia.

Parents of young Hindu children need to learn about our true heritage from reliable sources and lead a life according to our highest moral and ethical principles. Just earning money and providing luxury items to children, or going to temples and performing rituals without understanding their significance, is not enough.

Expose children at the youngest possible age to our traditions and to their significance. Once they are exposed to negative ideas in schools and universities, it is very difficult to eradicate those ideas from their minds. Start Sunday schools, *bal vihars*, in all neighborhoods and enroll the children.

Temples can become centers for learning, and with the help of the Internet a large number of families can be reached to provide true knowledge about Hinduism in an easy to understand language. HINDUISM TODAY's website is an excellent source for these activities.

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Other London Temples

I always enjoy reading HINDUISM TODAY. The Oct/Nov/Dec, 2015, issue was no different. I appreciate all of the articles, however, I felt it hard to believe that the cover story—*London's Hindu Temples*—had no mention of the Swaminarayan temple in Neasden. As per Wikipedia, the Neasden temple is Europe's first traditional Hindu stone temple and as per the Guinness book it is the biggest Hindu temple outside India. The temple is truly

mesmerizing in art and architecture, and I always had a very peaceful experience there.

If the focus of the article was Saivite temples it would have helped if you had made the headline more specific. Also, the Neasden *mandir* houses *murtis* of Siva, so even if the focus was on Saivite temples it still deserved a mention in the main article.

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The Oct/Nov/Dec 2015 cover titled London's Hindu Temples should have been London's Saivite Temples, as the article was meant to only focus on Saiva temples.

Ahimsa Needed

I was surprised and disappointed to learn of the little-publicized embargo of food, fuel and other necessary goods crossing the border from India into Nepal, especially in view of the catastrophic earthquake there. Does not the ideal of ahimsa override any political reasons to put pressure on another country? This embargo seems like striking a person when they are already down.

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Hindu Astrology

I read with interest your piece, *Jyotisha, Hindu Astrology*, October/November/December, 2015. From the perspective of *Advaita* (non-dualistic) *vedanta*, law of karma, actions, performers of actions, fields of actions, modes of actions, times of actions, reasons of actions, results of actions, free will, predetermination, and the like fall in

the domain of *maya* (cosmic delusion) which is a potency of Brahman, for Brahman is all there is, according to the *Upanishads*. Therefore, my philosophy is to have the primary focus on *moksha* (liberation from the cycles of birth, death and rebirth), while performing my actions skillfully, sincerely, honestly and selflessly, using our intellect, as long as we are alive, without paying any attention to astrology, which is also a part of *maya*.

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One with God

One hears and reads about being one with God in reference to liberation or *moksha*, meaning they have reached the ultimate. However, that's using a dual phrase to connote a singularity. Monism (mono means single) is an alternate perspective to dualism. Monism is, in essence, what the Sanskrit word *advaita*, meaning not two, suggests as well. Although, this word uses duality to mean singularity. Both monism and dualism are traditional perspectives of all that is, different ways to look at Siva, and each can be useful in its own dimension.

Can you create? Of course you can—not just “things,” inventions or art; you can create your life and your response to it, moment by moment. Being “made in God's image” means having God DNA, being able to do what God does, i.e., create and enhance the universe. Everyone is one with God? Yes! But if you're not feeling it, perhaps you haven't been practicing it. It's time for the phrase “one with God” to evolve by adding another dimension. Use “one within God” from now on. A creator within a creator.

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Toxic Veggies

This letter is in praise of vegetarianism promoted by HINDUISM TODAY. However, one should be careful to avoid genetically engineered vegetables in which bacteria and plants are unnaturally joined by combining their DNA.

The result is toxic vegetables containing toxic protein insecticides inside them.

WILL M. DAVIS
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In our article on Varanasi published in the July/Aug/Sep, 2015, issue, we inadvertently neglected to thank Dr. Rajni Kant and Professor Yogendra Mishra for their kind assistance to our India correspondent, Mr. Rajiv Malik, before, during and after his visit to the city. Without their assistance, Rajiv's comprehensive coverage of Varanasi would have been much more difficult.

The missing photo credit list for the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2015, article London's Hindu Temples: Shree Ghanapathy Temple Management committee; Highgate Hill Murugan Temple Management committee; Mr. S. N. Navarathnam; Mr. Prashanthan Chandravarman; PK Del Mar Creations; Fiona Reilly Photography; Dr. Vatshalan Santhirapala; Dr. Ramai Santhirapala

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Publisher's Vision for HINDUISM TODAY, Part II

Including our magazine in your estate plan is the most powerful way to guarantee its future

“THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE been supporting HINDUISM TODAY during these first thirty-five years of its existence,” says HINDUISM TODAY publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. “Thank you for helping carry forward its mission—disseminating Sanatana Dharma's incomparable teachings to today's hungry world in a way that it understands and appreciates. You have been an invaluable part of the team.

“Now is a good time to take our next step and make the magazine solidly secure going into the future. The need for its contents will only grow over the coming decades, and we want to be sure it is there, financially independent and fully functional to respond to the demand.”

“What is that next step? It is to strengthen the Hinduism Today Production Fund to the point where grants can cover all of the magazine's production expenses. Then it will have become financially independent.

“It is a huge step, but we can take our time and reach the goal incrementally through estate gifts. When enough donors have told us they have included us in their estate plan so that their collective gifts amount to USD 5 million, then we will know the magazine's



Publisher Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami with his team who devotedly watch over the Hindu Heritage Endowment—of which the Hinduism Today Production Fund is a part.

future is solid and secure, no matter what ups and downs the world may bring.

“The gifts of donors who have told us they have included the Fund in their estate plan currently amount to 15 million. So, we have 35 million to go.”

If you have already included the Hinduism Today Production Fund in your estate plan, then please do let us know, so we can add the amount to our ongoing tally and know that we are that much closer to the goal.

Otherwise, when the time comes to make your estate plan, or to revise it, please do think of our magazine and its perpetuation. Readers of the future will benefit immeasurably and thank you for your generosity and vision. You will have done a great service to Hinduism and to the world.

There are many good reasons to make one's estate plan. As you will undoubtedly want to include non-profits to some extent in your giving, you can, with competent guidance, judiciously select which assets to give to heirs and which to leave to non-profits, resulting in a considerable tax advantage to you. Even more tax benefits will accrue when you make your gifts at the time of maximum earnings.

Competent professionals are available to offer guidance in these sometimes complex matters.

You can also visit our website www.hheonline.org, which is rich in valuable information on this subject, pleasantly presented with clarity and relevance. Subscribe to our Production Fund Newsletter at gurudeva.org/email-news.

Or contact us at hhe@hindu.org or 1-888-464-1008.

Annual Statement of Ownership

Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (required by USPS DMM 707.83) of Hinduism Today, published four times a year at 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304, for October 1, 2015. General business offices of the publisher are located at 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of publisher is Swami Bodhinatha Veylan, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of editor is Swami Sadasivanatha Palani, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of managing editor is Swami Arumugam Katir, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Owner is Himalayan Academy, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. There are no known bondholders, mortgagees, or other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities. The average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months is: (a) Total number of copies printed: 13,004; (b) Paid circulation: (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: 6501; (2) Paid or requested mail subscriptions: 3,628; (c) Total paid and/or requested circulation: 10,129; (d) Free distribution by mail: 1,017; (e) Free distribution outside the mail: 1,074; (f) Total free distribution: 2,091; (g) Total distribution: 12,220 (h) Copies not distributed: (1) Office use, leftovers, spoiled: 784; (2) Return from news

agents: not applicable; (i) Total: 13,004; Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 82.89%. The actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is: (a) Total number of copies printed: 13,238; (b) Paid circulation: (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: 6,209; (2) Paid or requested mail subscriptions: 3,984; (c) Total paid and/or requested circulation: 10,193; (d) Free distribution by mail: 656; (e) Free distribution outside the mail: 1,391; (f) Total free distribution: 2,047; (g) Total distribution: 12,240; (h) Copies not distributed: (1) Office use, leftovers, spoiled: 998; (2) Return from news agents: not applicable; (i) Total: 13,238; Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 83.28%. I certify that all information furnished above is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this statement or who omits material or information requested on the statement may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties).

Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator



QUOTES & QUIPS

Living begins when one contributes something that will bring about more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom. Until then, one merely drags one's life.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930–2015), founder of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, teacher of Vedanta

Ever afterward, though the dance of creation change around me in the hall of eternity, I shall be the same. **Anandamayī Ma** (1896–1982), Mystic Bengali saint

When one remains without thinking, one understands another by means of the universal language of silence.

Ramana Maharishi (1879–1950), South Indian mystic

A million times they are born and die; In a million follies they forget this. In the darkness of mala they are enveloped. When at last the hidden grace of Siva bursts forth

and chases away the night, then comes the moment for the soul to renounce, and it then becomes a radiant light. *Tirumantiram* 1615

A common misconception is the belief that thinking is the creation of thought. Rather, it is the reception of thought from a source which has no name and from a place that cannot be found. Since one can't decide to think nor can one decide thoughts' contents, why does one claim their ownership? Is every sound Wu Hsin's because he can hear them? **Wu Hsin** (403–221 bce?), Taoist philosopher

The most important thing a spiritual master does for his spiritual children is to make them consciously aware of something vast and infinite within themselves, which is nothing other than God Himself. **Sri Chinmoy** (1931–2007), spiritual leader, author, poet and artist

Hinduism is a faith of almost infinite diversity, and yet it is the broadest, most complicated religion on the planet that caters brilliantly to the individual. It seems every Hindu is free to create and follow his or her own unique religion, choosing his own Gods and methods of

worship. The Gods of non-Hindus are respected, and Hindu Gods generously shared. **Sarah Macdonald**, Australian journalist, author and radio presenter

Give away love like you're made of it. **Bob Goff**, American author

All the diverse elements of Hinduism are held together by a mystic sense of unity and by an attitude of reconciliation, acceptance and harmony maintained by its followers. **Swami Bhajananda**, disciple of Swami Vishnudevananda Saraswati of Prayag

Thoughts are like arrows; once released they strike their mark. Guard them well, or one day you may be your own victim. *Navajo proverb*

The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best. **Epictetus** (55–135 ce), Stoic philosopher

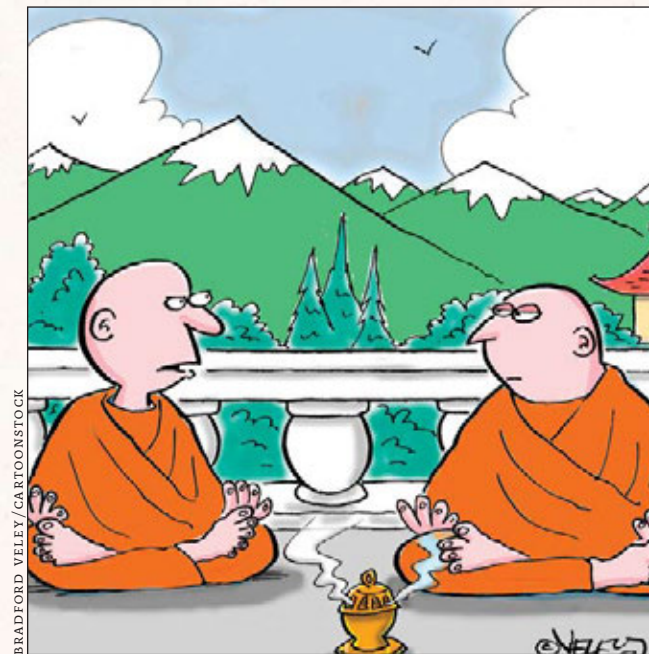
He who from the depth of his soul seeks to know God will certainly realize Him. He must. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886), Indian mystic

The season of failure is the best time for sowing the seeds of success. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952), founder of Self Realization Fellowship

It is nature that causes all movement. Deluded by the ego, the fool harbors the perception that says, "I did it." **Veda Vyasa**, author of the Mahabharata

The key to unusual success lies in one's ability to be sensitive to opportunities as they arise, and more so, in one's courage and willpower to actually act on them. These moments pass quickly and if not seized will often not come again. We are in a flow and must willfully act at the appropriate times to be successful. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

Every belief creates certain attitudes. Attitudes govern our actions. Our actions



"I would really appreciate it if you would refrain from shouting 'KA-CHING!!!' every time you attain oneness with the universe."

can thus be traced to our inmost beliefs about ourself and the world around us.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

DID YOU KNOW?

Honoring Snakes During Nag Panchami

NAG PANCHAMI IS THE FESTIVAL OF WORSHIP and reverence for snakes (naga) observed by Hindus throughout India and Nepal. The festival occurs on the fifth day of Shravana in late July or early August, according to the lunar calendar.

Snakes have many symbolic meanings in Hinduism: kundalini, death, infinity, misfortune. Some Deities wear snakes as sacred threads, representing purity, self-control and perfection in speech.

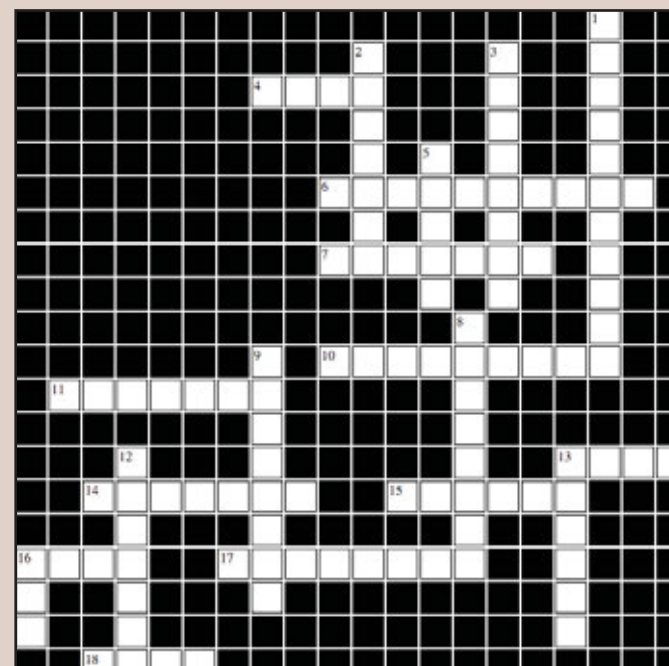
During Nag Panchami, fasting is observed by devotees while snakes are worshiped with offerings of milk, sweets, flowers and lamps. Images and murtis of nag Deities are bathed with water and milk, then praised with mantras used just for this occasion.

A common practice is the offering of a lotus flower that is placed in a silver bowl. On the floor in front of the bowl, a colored pattern of a five-hooded snake is drawn with a brush, using sandalwood or turmeric paste as the paint. Devotees then worship the painted image.

In villages, the anthills where snakes often reside are decorated with turmeric and flowers and worshiped. Milk is offered to the anthill, along with incense to entice snakes to come out and partake of the offerings.

Doorways and walls outside houses are painted with pictures of snakes and adorned with auspicious mantras to keep poisonous snakes from entering the home.

Crossword



Across

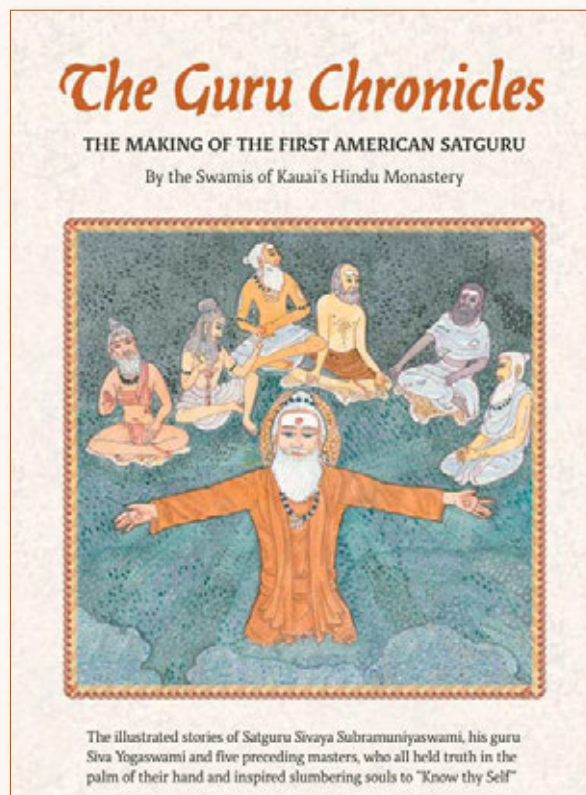
4. Sanskrit for "serpent," often the cobra.
6. Sanskrit for "Service to the guru."
7. The official language of Myanmar.
10. "Householder." Family man or woman.
11. One of 18 celebrated Saiva siddhas (adepts), and accepted as the first grammarian of Tamil language.
13. "Eon" or "age." A time span, from tens-of-thousands to one million years.
14. A term coined in 1969 by Mircea Eliade to contrast the Eastern view of bliss as "standing inside oneself."
15. Sanskrit for "Non-injury," non-violence or nonharmfulness.
16. The major agricultural product of Myanmar.
17. "Abode of snow."
18. "Goddess." A name of Shakti, used especially in Shaktism.

Down

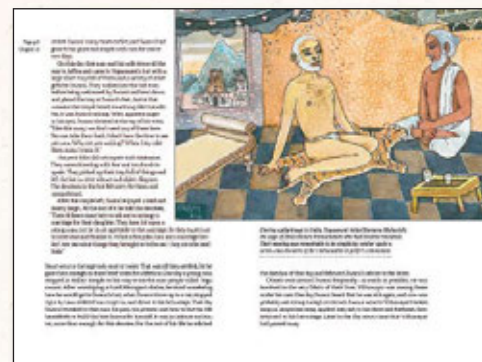
1. Sanskrit for "Cherished or chosen Deity."
2. True remover of darkness.
3. Primary religion practiced in Myanmar today.
5. The previous name of Myanmar.
8. A fee or honorarium given to a priest at the completion of any rite.
9. One who performs *tapas* or is in the state of *tapas*.
12. "Dhupa." Substance that gives off pleasant aromas when burned.
13. Largest city in Myanmar.
16. "Veda of verse." The first and oldest of the four *Veda* corpora of revealed scriptures

For completed puzzle as well as an interactive online version, visit: bit.ly/Hinducrossword

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Here is an adventure into the rarely divulged world of spiritual masters, full of extraordinary stories, insights and spiritual encounters. At its heart is the untold life of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who founded HINDUISM TODAY, his guru Siva Yogaswami and five preceding masters of the spiritual lineage. Illustrated by the South Indian genius, S. Rajam.



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FROM THE AGAMAS

Formless Siva's Full & Perfect Body

In His body, composed of five mantras, Siva reveals scripture to the sages

The following is a lucid translation from the Paushkara Agama, jnana pada, chapter 10, verses 26–32. It speaks of Siva's need to create a form in order to transmit the Vedas and the Agamas. This partly answers the question of why a formless God would create itself as form.

EARLIER IT WAS SAID THAT LORD SIVA IS FORMLESS AND He is free from being associated with the organ of speech. If so, He would not be capable of revealing scripture through direct instructions. Considering His activity related to such revelation of scriptures, it could be deduced that He is associated with a definite body (*shariri*).

In spite of the formlessness of Lord Siva, the creation of the sound-universe (*shabda prapancha*)—in the form of all letters—is performed only by Him. This occurs through His inseparable oneness with His own will (*iccha*), in the same way as the creation of the world is performed by Him. Moreover, He has to assume a definite form for instructing competent Gods and sages in the *Agamas*.

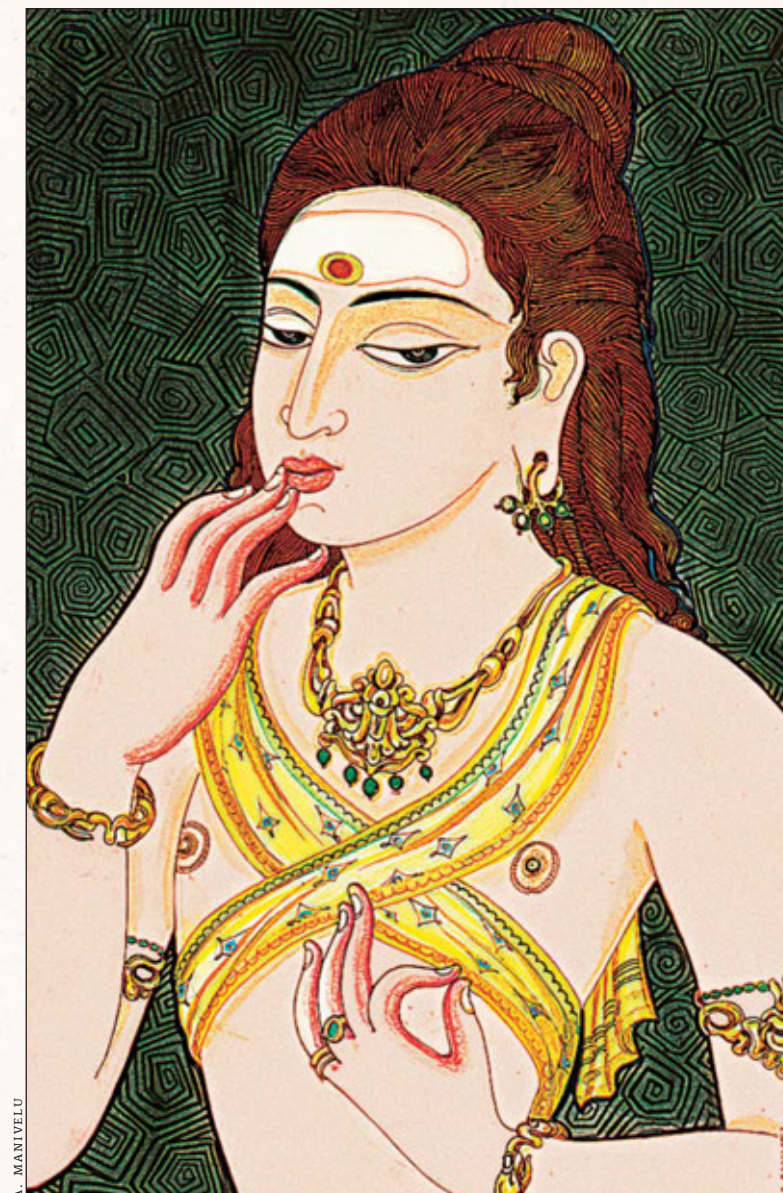
Now I will explain the nature of Siva as associated with the features of a form, according to the ancient lineage. For the sake of bestowing grace on bound souls and to redeem them, He has to create certain things from the relevant causes.

For such creation, Siva needs a form which is of His own nature and which is complete and perfect in itself. His form is of the nature of fullness and perfection, being constituted of the five mantras: *sadya, vama, aghora, tatpurusha* and *isana*.

In His fully manifest form, He is with the head constituted by *isana* mantra, with the face designed with *tatpurusha* mantra, with the chest designed with *aghora* mantra and with the feet and other limbs constituted by *sadyojata* mantra. Since His form is constituted of *kala* mantras, He is known as *Sakala Siva*.

This form does not actually belong to Him; meaning it is not His innate form. In His essential nature He is formless. Just as the embodied state is falsely attributed to the bodiless soul (*atma*), even so is *sakalatva* (the nature of being associated with *kalas*) figuratively attributed to Siva.

If such an attributed state does not exist, then the essential activities—such as worship, meditation, incantation and offerings—related to Siva would not be fulfilled. Just as in the absence of a body, we cannot conceive various parts, such as skin and bones, and are unable to speak and perform other activities, Lord Siva has to manifest Himself in a specific form constituted of the *kala* mantras for the revelation of the scriptures.



Through form comes sound: For the sake of all souls, Siva must create form in order to have speech, which allows for the transmission of wisdom from the Gods to the sages to the devotees

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



THOMAS L. KELLY

Keeping the faith: Hindu children pose with their schoolbooks in front of the Shri Kumar Kartikai Temple, Phutown, where they study Hindu religion and either Hindi or Nepali language

MYANMAR'S 2.9 MILLION HINDUS struggle to maintain their identity amidst the country's historically dominant Buddhists. Indians have been present in Myanmar for 2,000 years, but most came in the mid-19th century, when the country's British rulers brought a million people from various parts of India to take up posts in the government and the army, build roads and railroads or engage in commerce and farming.

During World War II, Myanmar (then Burma) was a major battleground between Japanese and Allied forces, with huge loss of life on all sides. After the war, the newly independent government considered most Indians "resident aliens," not citizens, regardless of how many generations they had lived in the country.

In the 1960s, the military regime nationalized almost every business in the country. They seized the property of hundreds of thousands of Indians and forced them to leave the country. Those left behind were—and remain—deeply traumatized. They continue to occupy a much-diminished niche in both politics and business. Only after 1982 did the government establish a path to full citizenship for Indians, with the right to vote, own land and attend government institutions of higher education.

Now just two percent of the population, Myanmar's Hindus are an unassuming and apolitical community focused on their farms, trade and small businesses, rejoicing in the freedom they have to practice their religion. To convey their little-known story to the world, HINDUISM TODAY sent reporter Rajiv Malik and photographer Thomas Kelly on a two-week tour of the country. This is their account.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Meet the Hindus of Myanmar

How Hindus—brought here by the British from all over India in the 19th century—have adjusted to life in this strongly Buddhist nation

BY RAJIV MALIK, YANGON

MYANMAR REMAINS A COUNTRY with strong control of the press. I was able to enter on an official journalist's visa only because HINDUISM TODAY was unexpectedly invited to attend the International Press Institute World Congress in Yangon. As the theme of the March 27-29, 2015, government-endorsed conference was "On the Path to a Free Media," our request for a journalist visa to cover Hinduism in the country following the congress was graciously granted—with strategic help from congress organizers. The event brought together publishers, editors and senior journalists from more than 65 countries to discuss press freedom at this crucial point in history as Myanmar transitions from military rule to democracy.

After the informative meeting, I was joined by Nepal-based photographer Thomas L. Kelly, who was especially interested in the large community of Nepalese now living in Myanmar. Together we spent nearly two weeks traveling through the country, visiting areas with concentrated Hindu populations.

Inquiries through the offices of India's Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh led us to an affiliated organization, the Sanatan Dharma Swayamsewak Sangh, Myanmar's most prominent national Hindu body. Their chief coordinator, Professor Ram Niwas, helped to arrange meetings with key Hindus across



THOMAS L. KELLY

contacts and sources for Myanmar, we were struck by how little is known about Myanmar by Hindus in India. The RSS seemed to be the only major Hindu organization with any interest at all in the country. After the Ramakrishna Mission was ejected in the 1960s and its temple and hospital seized by the government, it decided not to return. In the entire country, there is not a single Hindu sadhu or swami, either Myanmar-born or sent from India.

Buddhism

In stark contrast, the country has 800,000 Buddhist monks vigorously promoting their religion through temples, pagodas, vihars and public preaching sessions. Yangon's walls are filled with posters and banners of the popular Buddhist monks announcing their talks. Hindus here live immersed in an ocean of Buddhism.

We saw hundreds of young Burmese boys, and some girls, dressed as monks and *bhikshunis* and accompanied by their families in traditional outfits on their way to the various spectacular Buddhist temples. The children were about to commence a period of monastic life lasting ten days to several months during their school summer vacation. Every family is keen for their children to have this experience, and delighted if one or another becomes a full-time monk as an adult.

Myanmar abounds with huge and majestic

golden pagodas and stupas that dominate the skyline of every city and town. In downtown Yangon the Burmese throng to a large Buddhist temple with a stupa and huge statues of Buddha. It is surrounded by a busy marketplace and prestigious government offices. Every surface of these Buddhist temples, stupas and statues is gold leafed. Asked why so much gold is used, the Burmese told me the offerings of gold please the Buddha and bless them with health, wealth and prosperity, not only in this life but in their future births as well. Such is their passion and love for their religion and their beloved Lord Buddha.

Thaung Su Nyein, managing director of the Information Matrix company, told me at the IPC conference that Buddhists and Hindus get along well, though he felt few Buddhists really know much about Hinduism except that they share some practices, such as celebration of the full moon day. Some likely think the faiths are

Temple styles: (counter-clockwise from above left) Girls selling jasmine garlands for the Deity at Shri Muneeshwaran Siva temple; Hinduism Today correspondent Rajiv Malik, far right, at the International Press Institute meeting on freedom of the press in Yangon; map of Myanmar and surrounding countries; Krishna, priest of Shri Murugapperuman temple, performs arati. The temple, patronized by the Tamil Chettiar business community, is located on Shwe Bon Tha Street in Yangon.



THOMAS L. KELLY



THOMAS L. KELLY

International Press Meet & Yangon's South Indian Temples



RAJIV MALIK



UNKNOWN



interchangeable. He said the Burmese are Theravada Buddhists, as are the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, and that they consider themselves pure Buddhists. The Mahayana Buddhism of neighboring Thailand incorporates both Hindu and Chinese influences.

In contrast to the overwhelming presence of Buddhism, most Hindu temples are inconspicuously hidden in the jungles of concrete that are Myanmar's cities. Exceptions include the two Tamil temples to Lord Siva and Goddess Durga located in one large compound on the outskirts of Yangon city.

The Hindu temples are popular with the Buddhists as well, as they say our Gods more quickly respond to their prayers. This shared worship fosters good relations between Buddhists and Hindus and avoids the kind of clash seen with, for example, the Rohingya Muslims here, who are also descended from 19th-century Indian settlers.

Myanmar's Hindus are concentrated in and around Yangon, Mandalay and several of the rural areas. For our visit between March



Horse guardians: (left) Devotee outside the Durga temple with its horse guardians. The paste on her face looks like sandalwood but is thanaka, a fragrant wood paste used for its cooling effect. (above) Compound of the Siva and Durga Temples outside Yangon.

30 and April 13, we spent the first days in Yangon, then stopped at the rural areas on the way to Mandalay in the north.

Yangon

Our first objective was to encounter the Tamil community in the city center, and the old Sri Murugapperuman Temple—one of

about 1,000 Hindu temples in the city. It's a legacy of the 1930s, when Indians were 55 percent of the city's population, most of them Tamils. On the aptly named Moghul Street we found dozens of Tamil Hindus engaged in trading diamonds and gold out of tiny shops and small showrooms decorated with pictures of Hindu Deities. The shops' small size gave no indication of the value of the precious items for sale therein, and we were told they enjoyed quite a high turnover both in sales and as brokers and commission agents. It was difficult to assess how well they were doing, but every Hindu business person interviewed looked happy and contented. Despite the lack of a visible police presence, the traders said the area was completely secure,

with bags of money and gems moving in and out daily with little concern. In general, the crime rate is low in Yangon—one of the possible pluses of decades of harsh military rule. The area has wide roads between its high-rise buildings, but it reminded me of old Delhi: substantial portions of each street are occupied by hawkers selling street food, vegetables and other items day and night.

The Murugapperuman Murugan Temple is located on Shwe Bon Tha street on the first floor of an old building. It was built by the Tamil Chettiar business community, some say 120 years ago and others 400 years. The

Busy worship: (below, left to right) Burmese Buddhist mother and daughter worship at the popular Durga temple; Indian Hindu worshipers at the Shiva temple prepare their offering; a brother and sister at the Durga temple; a neighborhood Indian merchant who sells curd and kheer drink from his small shop

Yangon's Durga and Shiva Temple Complex



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS L. KELLY



Yangon's Famous Buddhist Temples



main structure of the wooden temple, housing the chief Deity, is painted in various colors and lit by rows of multi-colored bulbs. While we were there, Tamil bhajans played continuously through a loudspeaker system, making the atmosphere extremely devotional. Krishnan, a bachelor aged 50, was filling in for the regular priest who was helping at the rededication of another temple. Krishnan told us his forefathers came from Tamil Nadu but he was born and brought up in Myanmar. His father was a farmer and he himself used to run a business until one day Lord Murugan appeared to him in a dream and told him to become a priest. He studied with Archaka Shanmugam Shekhar, also born in Myanmar, to learn enough basic mantras to do the puja. He told us, "I am not very educated, but my level of devotion to the God is very high and that is the reason I have chosen to become a priest." We met many such priests who were managing the worship with a minimum of training.

Next we set out for the Shri Satyanarayan Temple in Yangon's Pabedan Township, passing along the way many beautifully lit altars of Lord Buddha by the sidewalks. At the temple we were welcomed by Banwari, its caretaker, who came from Uttar Pradesh, the state where I was born and spent my youth. Our chemistry was instant; together we sang some of the old popular Hindi bhajans and songs, which made us dance. We bonded like two brothers from the same village, meeting after ages. Similarly, Thomas bonded instantly with one of the temple priests, Prem Sharma, whose family came from Nepal three generations ago. They chatted in chaste Nepalese, to the delight of all. Prem Sharma

was previously priest at the Mormin Satyanarayana Temple for 18 years, and has been here for 11.

The temple itself belongs to the Marwari community. It is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi, but has murtis of all the main Gods and Goddess—as well as a beautiful statue of Buddha. It has a large hall for satsang and katha, which is also used during major festivals. Some 50 to 100 devotees come to the temple each day, and many more on festival days. The Marwari community meets all the temple expenses, neither soliciting nor expecting donations from anyone else.

In addition to the temple, they run summer classes in Hindi for the children. In fact, across the country we encountered major efforts to educate the children in their ancestral language, be it Hindi, Tamil or Nepalese, to counter the fact all are using Burmese in normal day-to-day life and schooling.

The chief priest, Vishwanath, told us his parents were born in Churu, Rajasthan, as was the temple's founder, Bhagwan Das Bagla. The story is that Bagla was on a ship in a typhoon and took a vow that, if saved, he would build a temple to Lord Vishnu. In fulfillment of that vow, he built not only this temple but also one in Mandalay and another in Mormin.

The area around the temple had been densely populated with Hindus, with some 2,000 Mewari families, but many fled to Nepal in the 1960s when the government seized their property. Only 70 Mewari families live in Myanmar now. Businessman Sanjay Kedia told us it is difficult to find suitable matches

for their children within such a small group, and they have to look to India and Nepal. The Mewaris are pure vegetarians, Kedia explained, and nearly all other communities in Myanmar are non-vegetarian.

Thomas and I encountered this issue ourselves, as there exist no pure vegetarian restaurants in Yangon. The best we could do for food was Titu's Indian Banana Leaf Restaurant, which offers a wide variety of North and South Indian delicacies, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. The owner is a Sikh, Sardar Ranjit Singh Narula, who hails from Singapore. He told us there are just a handful of Sikhs and a single gurudwara in Yangon, with perhaps 100,000 Sikhs nationwide.

Society of worshippers: (counter-clockwise from top left) the spectacular gold-leafed Swedagon Buddhist Temple, one of the most famous of Yangon's landmarks; massive statue of Buddha inside the temple (the boys in front have taken up Buddhist monastic life for at least five days, a custom of the Burmese families); a thriving marketplace; the Ganesha temple at the corner of Bandoon and Pansodan roads in Yangon; priest Tek Narayan Khatiwada stands before the temple's large Ganesha Deity





About 30 kilometers outside Yangon, in a compound spread over several acres, sit two of the most popular Tamil temples: Shri Muneeshwaran, dedicated to Lord Siva, and Shri Ankaala Parmeshwari for Goddess Durga. Their worship began in 1861 in small shrines at the base of a banyan tree. Today the two large temples are overflowing with devotees—not only Tamils, who are the largest single group of Hindus in Myanmar, but large numbers of Burmese and Chinese as well. Devotees also gathered with families and friends in huge covered areas outside the temples. Most of the Tamil women wore traditional saris, and others wore Burmese dress.

The temples are well maintained. Entire floor areas in several sections were covered with rangoli designs made by devotees. Worshipers were standing in long queues at both temples to offer fruits and other traditional items, which are available for sale within the temple compound itself.

Several priests and their assistants at each temple manage the worship in a systematic way. After the ritual bathing and worship of the Deity, a priest brought out the lighted arati lamp, whose flame is considered especially auspicious and powerful. The lamp is not only offered to the devotees present but

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Farming communities: (counter-clockwise from left) Sri Laxmi Kumari teaches a class at the Arya Gurkul in Jiwabari; a farmer with ox cart and hay shed in the background; elephants are still used for work here; Manochan Vidya Bhawan in Phyu, most of the students are Indian, the rest Nepali

taken around all the areas of the temple.

To be at the temple was to be in Tamil Nadu, a feeling greatly enhanced by the musicians playing the taval drum and nadaswaram, just as you'd find in any temple in South India. Hundreds of devotees were following these musicians as they did circumambulation around the temple. We asked one of the nadaswaram players, Ganapati, how he had come to play the instrument. He said he learned it from his father, but finds it a very exhausting job, and does not want his children to take it up. He is mainly a rice farmer, but performs at the temple two days a week and at private functions from time to time.

The temple's president, Ulaganathan, welcomed us warmly. It turned out they have been receiving HINDUISM TODAY on a regular basis for some years. He took us personally around the entire temple and introduced us to the priests. His family has been in Myanmar for four generations and are farmers. The four main priests here follow Sama Veda tradition and are trained by Indian priests who come periodically. In 2011 the temple brought 120 priests from India, who stayed two months for the kumbhabhishekam rededication ceremony.

The temples remain in close contact with Tamil Nadu, Ulaganathan explained, regularly bringing artisans from Mahabalipuram to provide the murtis and decoration. He said, "This temple is considered to be very powerful and is visited not just by Hindus but people of other faiths, including Buddhists, Christians and Muslims." According to one devotee, Guruswami, a retired banker, 30 percent of the Burmese people come to Hindu temples like these to pray.

The temple's annual firewalking festival, expected to draw tens of thousands of devotees, was to be held in a few days. We returned to Yangon in the evening for an appointment with Lal Bahadur Subedi, president of All Myanmar Gorkha Hindu Dharmik Sangh. As we walked to his shop, we again observed the all-pervasive nature of Buddhism here. One finds Buddhist monks, bhikshunis and child monks almost everywhere in public places. We remembered the large numbers of Burmese families we had seen earlier in the day, dressed in their best clothes, taking their children to the temple for their week or so of living as a monk.

Lal Bahadur Subedi runs a shop that deals in ghee, dry fruits and traditional Indian sweets. He attends SDSS *shakha* meetings every Sunday and also visits the Ram Janaki Temple on weekends with his family. The Nepalese community built this temple 21 years ago, and it is popular with all Hindus. It observes the major festivals and has a good facility for hosting traditional weddings.

Subedi estimates the Nepalese population in Myanmar to be about 250,000. Most in the rural areas are farmers, those in the cities are traders, and some work in the ruby mines.

He shared, "Nepalese are loved, respected and trusted here because many of our ancestors were in the army, the Gorkha Battalion, which defended Myanmar from the Japanese. In fact, all Nepalese here are called Gorkhas. About 80 percent have citizenship, and those that do not have themselves to blame for being of two minds when it was easy to acquire.

"The SDSS is a binding force that brings all the Hindu communities under one umbrella. We are concerned about our children, as they

The Rural Areas



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: THOMAS L. KELLY

RAJIV MALIK

no longer have time for any religious activities—it is all consumed with study. We are providing special classes for them in Nepalese language. Another big change here is marriages taking place across different jatis and communities, which previously was considered taboo. In part, this is due to the financial success of individual families.”

We next visited the centrally located and popular Shri Kali Temple, originally set up in 1871 by seven Hindu communities including the Gujaratis, Bengalis, Marwaris, Chettians, Tamils and Hindustani or North Indians. It is the only temple in Myanmar established in this cooperative manner. Shri Bahadurg Bagla, who founded the Satyanarayan temples, was instrumental in getting this temple completed as well, according to Sadanananda Singh, one of the temple trustees.

Singh recounted that his father came to Myanmar at the age of 14 from his home area of Gorakhpur, first by land and then by ship, and started a dairy business. Now Singh runs companies engaged in transport and construction.

Ancient capitol: (above right) This ancient Hindu temple of Bagan enshrines Lord Vishnu; (below, left to right) Bagan in Mandalay region was the region's capital from the 9th to 13th century; reclining Vishnu in the Bagan Vishnu Temple; this young girl is having her ears pierced in a Buddhist ceremony at the Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay

The immaculate temple, located in a posh area of Yangon, receives a large number of devotees each day, including Burmese and Chinese, some of whom have donated large sums for the temple's maintenance and ex-



pansion. One devotee we met was a woman having puja done to ward off the “evil eye,” which she felt was the cause for her son's ill health. We had previously seen puja done for the same purpose at other temples, and learned that it was one reason Burmese come to our temples.

Trustee Ram Kishore said that sometimes the Burmese outnumber the Hindus in the temple. “The wishes the Burmese ask of our Gods and Goddesses in this temple are fulfilled, and that strengthens their faith in our

Gods,” he explained. He says the temple is one of the richest in Yangon; besides conducting Hindi and Tamil classes, they promote language study all over the country.

Every tourist to Myanmar visits the Swe-dagon Temple, Yangon's most famous Buddhist shrine, and here we experienced a vibrant Buddhist religion. Everything—from the towering temple stupas to the small statues—is made of gold or covered in gold leaf. In my entire life I have never seen anything so rich and glittery as this temple. Devotees thronged the compound, some to worship at the many shrines and statues, others to meditate in the large halls with huge gold statues of Buddha. I was surprised to see abhishekam, bathing with water, done to statues of Buddha, just as you see in Hindu temples. There is also a place where people can pray to the nine planets, something I also thought was only a Hindu practice. Here, too, we saw child monks with their families, many engaged in photo sessions to capture the moment. At one point, the grandly attired little ones were taken in procession for their initiation.

We spoke with Srinivasan, age 65, a Tamil man living here with his Burmese wife. Learning of our purpose in Myanmar, he told us their story. They were classmates in school. When his parents tried to arrange a marriage with a Tamil girl, Srinivasan insisted he would only marry his classmate. He did so, converted to Buddhism at the request of his wife's father, married in both the Tamil Hindu and Buddhist way and then followed

both religions. “Our two children also pray to Lord Siva and Lord Buddha and follow Hindu and Buddhist cultures,” he shared, “and we see no conflict in this.”

In the afternoon we went to downtown Yangon to visit the office of S.S. Selvam, a prominent businessman and president of the All Myanmar Tamil Hindu Foundation. Selvam's family came from Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu six generations ago. He estimates that there are a total of one million Tamil Hindus in Myanmar, mostly living in the states of Yangon, Mawlamyine, Thaton and Pha An, and that 95 percent of the Tamils came from Ramanathapuram. As there has been no proper census by religion in Myanmar recently, such estimates are at best educated guesses. But Tamils are, no doubt, the majority Hindu community.

According to Selvam, about 20 percent of Tamils are businessmen, 30 percent farmers and the rest employed in other occupations. There are Siva, Murugan, Mariamman and Vishnu temples wherever the community is found. These are managed jointly by his foundation and the Hindu Central Council. Their two major festivals are Deepavali and Pongal. “The biggest change that is happening today,” Selvam emphasized, “is that our Tamil youth are marrying outside our community”—a trend that obviously started in earlier generations, given the above example of Srinivasan and his Burmese wife.

In the evening we visited the home of Krishna Padhi, a retired gold trader and leader of the Oriya community (from Orissa), which numbers just 500 nationwide. The community's biggest festival for the year is a grand Jaganath Yatra procession. In addition

they celebrate Holi and Kartik Purnima.

A large number of Oriya came to Myanmar in British times, mainly to work on the roads. There are four Jagannath temples in Yangon alone, clearly showing how many Oriya must have been there in the past. Many were forced to return to Orissa between 1962 and 1970. Like others returning to India, they settled in the “Burmese Colonies” that sprang up across India at the time. Now, in the second generation, they have mostly been absorbed into the surrounding communities. “Those who went to India never came back,” Padhi stated. “Right now the situation is that if we Hindus of Myanmar face problems, we get no support from India.”

Later we visited the famous Ganesha Temple of Yangon, located in the main downtown area. Here again we saw a Burmese businessman getting puja done by the temple's Nepalese priest, Tek Narayan, to ward off an evil eye—he believed a jealous competitor was creating problems for him. The priest assured us the puja was only to negate the evil eye, and not to cause harm to anyone in return.

The temple has not only the Hindu Gods and saints but also Lord Buddha and a Chinese Deity. According to Tin Oo Lin, whose great grandfather, a Tamil, founded the temple and married a Burmese lady, the temple is popular with Hindus, Burmese and Chinese alike. Tin himself has a Chinese wife.

The last temple of this day is Shri Shri Durga Bari, founded 127 years ago by the Bengali community. The temple's senior patron, Minal Kanti Bhattacharjee, age 80, estimates there are 10,000 Hindu Bengalis in Myanmar, half of them living in Yangon. He explained that during major festivals, such

as the ten-day Durga puja, Bengalis from all over Myanmar converge here. The ample facilities are also used by other communities for weddings and social functions. As with all other temples we have visited, a substantial number of Burmese worship here.

On our fourth morning in Yangon we met with Ram Niwas, head of the SDSS and the most prominent leader of Myanmar's Hindu community. A fifth-generation Burmese, he is a professor of Pali language and literature in the State Pariyatti Sasana University, Yangon. The SDSS, he explained, was founded in 1950, and is inspired by and molded after the RSS of India, though legally an independent and locally run organization. It has some 2,000 active members and volunteers. Niwas himself is a *pracharak*, a life-long bachelor and fully dedicated worker for the organization. India's present prime minister, Narendra Modi, who was himself a full-time RSS *pracharak* for many decades, was briefed by Niwas on the issues of Hindus when the PM visited Myanmar in 2014. Niwas was instrumental in our visit, helping arrange appointments with key Hindus and providing guides from one end of our journey to the other.

In two lengthy interviews he recounted to us the history of Myanmar and the presence of Buddhism and Hinduism here, dating from ancient times. He estimates that of the country's 2.9 million Hindus today, seven to eight hundred thousand are Tamils, four to five hundred thousand are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, four hundred thousand are from Nepal and the rest are Bengalis, Oriya, Marwaris, Gujaratis, Punyas (brahmins from Manipuri) and a few others. Each community tended to settle in an area similar in

Bagan, Land of Buddhist Temples



climate to that of their places in India. Some maintain contact with their ancestral homes; others have lost track.

Today, he says, there is no discrimination against Hindus; in fact, the government gives him free passes to travel by ship or train to any part of the country for promoting the religion. But, he added, those who did not take citizenship when it was offered now face limits on what they can do, such as going on for higher education.

He lamented the complete absence of any Hindu sannyasins in the country: there is no one trained, as are the Buddhist monks, to influence the people and connect them to their religion. Hindus here suffered, he explained, due to lack of contact with India over a long period of time. SDSS is now running a campaign to make people more knowledgeable in the religion, the Gods and Goddess, the great Hindu saints and the traditions and festivals. They have established four Sanskrit schools for priest training and try to work with all the temples in the country.

They initiated the Hindu Dharma Shiksha Samiti to teach the children and produced school books in Hindi, with the goal that Hindi be spoken in the homes where it is the ancestral language. The language effort is being aided by the easy availability of Hindi TV channels from India, though to some extent the religious goal is mitigated by the worldly

content of those same channels. A more recent addition, with help from the Indian Embassy, is instruction in classical Indian dance and music.

But, he shared, there is resistance from



parents who want the children to focus solely on their school education. Many would prefer their children learn Chinese instead of Hindi. In contrast, he spoke admirably about the Buddhist novice monks system in which children of both rich and poor families participated on an equal level and received good exposure to their religion.

Our last interview in Yangon was with L. Subramaniam of the Telugu community. He estimates there are 100,000 Telugu people in Myanmar, of which 10,000 live in Yangon.

There is one major Telugu temple in Yangon, the Shri Ramalyam Mandir. Ugadi, the Telugu New Year, is a major festival, as is Makar Sankranti. They share the same problems as the other communities with regard to language, intermarriage, etc. He recounted that at one point in time, some Buddhist preachers starting speaking against Hinduism. He worked with the offices of the SDSS and through the government to put an end to the harassment.

Subramaniam explained something that puzzled me: the tan paste worn by men, women and children alike on their face. Initially I thought it was sandalwood paste, but learned it is *thanaka*, made from the bark of one of several scented woods. Its use here dates back at least 2,000 years. He explained, "Thanaka is very good for the body. Our sandalwood is a bit

hot, but thanaka is very cool. I apply thanaka on my whole body during night time before

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Retaining culture: (above left) early morning yoga class by yoga teacher Kashi Tunda Nath in Mandalay; (below, left to right) Shri Satya Narayan Temple main sanctum with worshipers; bhajan group at the Sikh Temple, Thayeze, in Mandalay; girls in Hindi class at the Neelkantha temple school in Pyin Oo Lwin

I go to sleep for its cooling affect. Most of the men use thanaka only at home, as they feel shy wearing it during the daytime when they are working in their offices or moving around publically."

Our last visit in Yangon was to the city's unusual 100-acre, all-religions cremation ground and cemetery, which caters to Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims, and also has areas for Chinese, Japanese and Bahai funerals.

Rural Myanmar

After five days in Yangon, we drove north 150 kms to Kyauktaga and Zeyawadi, where Hindus with their roots in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar settled. The Kyauktaga SDSS branch is headed by another full-time unmarried pracharak, Subhash Chandra Ahuja, who is based here at Manochan Vidya Bhawan school. In a detailed interview Subhash Ahuja described the school they are running for the children of the Hindu community, stressing the teaching of culture, traditions and language.

We were taken around the huge complex in which Manocha Vidya Bhawan, an SDSS office, and a Saraswati temple are situated. Here we met with other prominent Hindu leaders of the area. One fascinating story told to us by Kanti Lal Verma of the SDSS was that when the people first came here from India around 1885 it was a dense jungle. To keep at bay the ghosts believed to haunt the jungle, they would regularly recite Hanuman



As soldiers: Historic photo of a Gurkha who fought in the British army against the Japanese in World War II in Burma

Chalisa. That tradition of invoking Hanuman continues to this day.

He said the British only wanted to bring illiterate workers to Burma, on the theory that they would blindly follow orders. But as the educated people caught on to this policy, they posed as illiterates in order to seek potential new opportunities.

From the Manochan Vidya Bhawan we drove to the complex of the Ram Janaki Temple to see its school for children, and then on

to Phyu to two Siva temples. Now I felt I was back in India, and could easily spot many Indians on the roads or in the shopping complexes by their typical features and dress. In Yangon we rarely saw an Indian unless going to a specific shop owned by Hindus. But here Hindus were all around.

Next we drove into the Zeyawadi area to visit the home of Prakash Chandra, a local leader, and then the small temple of Sagoon Basti village. There are easily 120 villages in this area, Chandra told us, each with at least one temple. Sagoon Basti and neighboring villages are nearly 100 percent Indian; the only non-Indians you see here are Burmese laborers hired to work in the fields, which are mostly owned by Indians. In part, these Burmese workers replace educated Indian youth who have gone to neighboring countries, such as Thailand, for better employment.

We enjoyed the breathtaking views of the agricultural fields as we drove to a large gurukul set up by a local businessman in a nearby village. Its approximately 50 students recited Sanskrit slokas for us upon our arrival. Next we went to the Arya Samaj in Zeyawadi, where Hindi was being taught in an intensive manner at its Valmiki Ashram and Gurukul under the guidance of Siya Ram, a retired professor of engineering.

Pandit Dharam Raj Shama of India initially taught here, Ram explained, and along with a few other priests from India, was quite popular. Eventually they all returned to India, after training some of the educated people

Mandalay and Pyin Oo Lwin





Loku in the North



as purohits. These now tend to the needs of the community in a self-sustaining manner. Recently they conducted a sacred thread ceremony for 44 children.

That evening we set off for the ancient city of Bagan, a major tourist destination. Bagan is a must-see place for anyone visiting Myanmar, though for us it did not have much to do with Hinduism in the country.

In the early morning at Bagan we joined hundreds of others from around the world determined to view the area's famous sunrise, best done from a multi-story tower with a warning posted at the bottom that it is ancient and possibly unsafe. This did not prevent hundreds of tourists and photographers from ascending. Nor was sunrise a disappointment; as far as one could see there were thousands and thousands of small and large Buddhist temples and pagodas bathed in golden light. They were all built between the 9th and 13th centuries; a few thousand remain in good shape or have been restored, but most lie in ruins. In the midst of all this we came across two Hindu temples. One is

Hill country: (left) Shri Rameshwar Vidya Peeth Parahith Dham in Lokhu; (below, left to right) Dr. Vishnu Dutt with students of the Shri Rameshwar Vidya Peeth Parahith Dham; depending on the day of the week you were born, you do abishekam to a certain statue of Buddha—here Tuesday; these young boys at the Gorkha Theravada Triratana Buddha Vihara in Pyin Oo Lwin spend a week to a few months as monks; student at the Nepali language school in Mandalay

for Vishnu, and fairly well known. Another is to Siva; with no sign board on display, it was only from the imagery on the walls we could deduce what it was.

Mandalay

After a day photographing Bagan, we took a short flight to Mandalay, a major center of commerce with a large Hindu population mostly engaged in business. We visited the Shri Sanatan Hindu Dharma Temple and Shri Ganesh Temple, two of the most popular of the city's 17 Hindu temples, the local Arya Samaj center, which caters to about 80 families, and met K. Sunder Gopal Sharma, a prominent Manipuri Brahmin of Mandalay and vice president of the Upper Myanmar India Business Association, at his residence.

The Manipuri Brahmins, we learn, were brought from India 500 years ago by the king of Myanmar to perform rituals at the palace and give advice on astrology, medicine and scriptures. Numbering about 5,000, they and the Mewari community are perhaps the only Hindus in the country with a significant percentage maintaining a vegetarian diet. The Manipuri Brahmins are Vaishnavites in the tradition of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Their temples are private, only open to members of their own community.

The day after our arrival, we set out in early morning to join a yoga class conducted by Kashi Nath on the rooftop of a nearby commercial building. Nath, of Manipuri origin, learned yoga from the SDSS expert Subhash Changra Ahuja, whom we had met in Kyauktaga. We were surprised that the majority of those in the class were Burmese and Chinese. Later we visited Nath's spacious home

and learned his grandfather, Asin Charaj Dev Sharma, was priest to King Thi Mo Ming in the early 1900s. Their home was a royal gift to the family.

We were next taken to a Sikh gurudwara that serves some 400 Sikhs in the area. As with the Hindus, the Sikh children are adopting Burmese language and culture. Consequently the community is making major efforts to teach Punjabi language and Sikh religion, bringing *granthis* (teachers) here for every summer vacation. The children we met could expertly recite stanzas from the Guru Granth Sahib accompanied by music.

Our last destination in Mandalay was the Nepalese Dharmashala guest house and temple. More than one hundred Nepalese children were being taught Nepalese language and Hinduism under the charge of retired army captain Bahadur, 82. He said there are about 1,000 Gorkhas (as the Nepalese are called) in Mandalay itself, with possibly 100,000 in Mogok, 200 km to the north of Mandalay, where many ruby mines are located.

When they first came from Nepal, most Gorkhas chose to stay in the hilly areas; but now that they have become more educated, they are opting for opening their own businesses in the cities, Bahadur explained. Many Gorkhas go to neighboring countries for work. The Dharmashala itself, which accommodates about 100 persons, is only open to the Nepalese Hindus and not others. Most guests have come to Mandalay for medical treatment which the dharmashala helps them with.

We next drove three hours to Pyin Oo Lwin where we visited the home of a prominent

Nepalese community leader, Mani Lal Poudyal. He is president of All Myanmar Gorkha Hindu Religious Association, which has 36 branches in the country. Overall, he told us, he is satisfied with the progress the Nepalese community is making in Myanmar, noting that he finds the Nepalese of Myanmar more religious than those of Nepal itself these days.

While they are well connected with the other Hindus in the country, they differ in their celebration of festivals, with the Nepalese observing Dussehra and Teej in a grand manner, while the Indian Hindus do so for Raskha Bandhan and Diwali. The community has some 360



Portraits of life: (above) gem merchant shows off his favorite emerald and diamond ring; (below, left to right) Taval drummers and nagaswaram players lead devotees through the Siva and Durga Temples outside Yangon; Laksmi temple worship in Yangon; Ram Niwas, center, with the Hindu Youth Society at the headquarters of the Sanatan Dharma Swayam Sewak Sanga in Yangon, the nation's most important Hindu organization; the back of the youth shirts reads, "We are proud to be a Hindu;" (above right) on a parting note, our team left Yangon at the commencement of the annual Buddhist "water festival," which is like a liquid Holi celebration where no one is immune from dosing—including our cameraman, Thomas Kelly, who prepared his camera for just this possibility

temples in Myanmar, mostly dedicated to Ram, Pashupati (Siva) and Durga.

Mani Lal Poudyal told us, "Out of the total Nepalese population in Myanmar, around twenty percent are Buddhists. They converted because initially they stopped using Nepalese language. They would only use Burmese language and therefore gradually became Buddhists." Most marriages are arranged within the community, according to him, but love marriages are also taking place with Indian Hindus and others.

There is also a substantial Tamil community in Pyin Oo Lwin. With the help of our guide, Vijay Gupta, a businessman and Hindu community leader here, we visited the Tamil Vishnu Temple located in the Jheel Basti Vilage. The priest here, Arumugam, is Nepalese in origin and learned puja in South Indian style from his father. For major festivals, he said, five hundred Tamils may attend, while on a daily basis it is mostly the nearby Nepalese who come to worship. He reported that a

lot of Nepalese have converted in the past decades, mainly to Buddhism but also to Christianity, because "the Hindu community did not take care of their problems and aspirations." He gave the example of a low-caste Hindu family who wanted havan performed for the ailing mother, but no priest would go to the house. The Christians came to know of this, aided the family and ultimately converted them to Christianity.

Just a few kilometers from the Vishnu temple we came upon Tri Ratna Buddha Vihar, where a Vipassana meditation camp was being attended by 500 Burmese. This ancient Buddhist practice has been recently popularized by, among others, S.N. Goenka, a Burmese of Indian descent. I was impressed with the large number of people taking ten days out of their lives for this camp. This was no social affair, and we observed men and women deep in meditation in pin-drop silence.

Later we visited the Shri Neelkantheshwar Shiv Mandir, also located in the Jheel Basti area. There we found a dedicated team of teachers instructing Hindu and Nepalese children in those languages. In the evening we visited the Ganesha Temple managed by the Tamil community; here, too, the temple premises were being used to teach Tamil and even English to the Hindu children.

After visiting Durga Mandir and Pashupati Nath Dham, two temples of the Nepalese community which are located in one complex, we went on to Shri Krishna Kali Bari Temple, located right in the heart of Pyin Oo

Lwin. Here the devotees came mainly from the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh. Moti Lal Gupta, the temple's former president, offered this blunt assessment of their youth: "It is wrong to say that our youth are too busy. They fail to come to the temples due to lack of interest in the religious activities. In contrast, the Buddhist youth are much more involved in their religion."

In planning our two weeks in Myanmar, we had unwittingly saved one of the most impressive institutions in the country for last. The Shri Rameshwar Vidya Peeth Dham in Lakhu is known all over Myanmar for the teaching of Sanskrit and training of temple priests. It was founded 50 years ago on 80 acres of land. Its present head, Dr. Vishnu Dutt Mandavya, age 48, has greatly increased the school's popularity and impact in recent years.

Born and raised in Myanmar, Dutt studied Sanskrit for 18 years in India, including Varanasi. He is an initiate in the Nirvani Akhara under his guru, Swami Satyaprakashananda, who was also the guru of the school's previous head, Swami Devananda Saraswati. Long before he passed away in 2009, Devananda, insisted Dutt go for higher studies in India, as otherwise the school would be unable to carry forward the traditions of Vedas and Sanatana Dharma in Myanmar. Dutt explained that he has not taken formal sannyas, but is a brahmachari.

The school has over 100 students learning Sanskrit, Nepali and Hindi in a full-time course of study. It accepts students from all castes. Even Burmese Buddhist monks have



among our people and thereby socially and religiously uplift the community," summarized Dutt. His plan is to build a team of a dozen brilliant, dynamic, knowledgeable and totally dedicated graduates who will then work for the betterment of Hindu dharma all over Myanmar. He also hopes that with the improving political situation it will be possible to bring Hindu saints and scholars from India to teach in Myanmar.

Road's End

Though I have done my best to present all the facts and information collected by me, still I feel I have not done justice to the immense story of the Hindus of Myanmar.

On the one hand, I was touched and impressed by the Hindu community living so harmoniously with the majority Buddhist population. On the other hand, the trauma of the expulsions of the 1960s was just below the surface. To a great extent, the newly minted citizenship for Indians has created a much greater sense of security, but in other ways this is still a volatile country.

The curriculum includes Sanskrit grammar, the writings of great saints such as Kalidas, plus geography, social science, English, computers and other topics of modern education. The students live at the institution, and their room, board and education is free of charge. Dutt estimates that in the past few decades they have trained around 700 priests who are now serving in temples around the country. Considering that is about 35% of all the priests in Myanmar, one gets a sense of the importance of this institution. The priest of the Nepalese Dharmasala in Mandalay, for example, Harish Chandra Ghimre, 30, learned his profession at this school in Lakhu in a four-year course.

They plan to gradually expand to 300 students. "Our vision is to propagate and promote our own religion and Vedic culture

Back to Yangon



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Karma Yoga

Exploring the benefits of selfless service
and the art of spiritualized action

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



WOULDn'T IT BE WONDERFUL IF WE HAD A WAY TO TURN OUR ordinary work into a spiritual practice, a contemplative art that could transform drudgery into acts of concentrated, worshipful effort? Wait! We do! It's called karma yoga, union with the Divine through service and sacred action. ¶The word *karma* means action, or deed. It also refers to the principle of cause and effect. In its most profound sense, karma yoga is the doing of all actions in a spiritual manner, consciously, selflessly, excellently, as an offering to the Divine. Vamadeva Shastri shares, "Through karma yoga—as we learn in verse 2.50 of the *Bhagavad Gita*—we discipline ourselves to be skillful, efficient and wise in action, meaning that we act from a state of unity, doing the work for the highest value and most helpful result. All our attention goes to perfection in our work for the Divine, not in seeking glory or recognition for ourselves." ¶Karma yoga is most commonly practiced as selfless service (*seva* in Sanskrit) at a temple or ashram. This is its most potent and accessible expression, one which helps establish the foundation of good character required for the more sophisticated aspects of yoga. This effort can be extended into other areas as well, such as the workplace and the home, quietly helping others willingly and without complaint. We are never too young or too old for karma yoga. Artist Lynda McClanahan depicted this fact by creating a river of karma (left), the waters of life flowing out from Lord Ganesha. As life flows from the source to the sea, our giving evolves. As children, we gather flowers for worship. As youth, we keep the temple clean. As young adults, we feed the needy. As grihasthas, we polish the temple brass and teach the dharma, and finally in our mature years we may weave garlands for the Lord and offer life-affirming guidance. The form of karma yoga changes, but its spiritual purpose remains the same throughout life. ¶We begin this Insight with an exploration of karma yoga as the age-old science of spiritualized action, citing its sources in scripture and discussing how and why it is performed. Then we turn to *seva's* many forms as practiced today by Hindus, sharing testimony on how it benefits devotees, subtly strengthening their spiritual life. And we don't sidestep the conundrum of whether *seva* is a path to God sufficient unto itself or a preparatory step on a longer path.

LYNDA MCCLANAHAN



How Simple Actions Become Divine Expressions

TAKEN IN ITS HIGHEST AND TRADITIONAL sense, karma yoga is the constant effort to surrender to God's will, to see Her/Him in everything and everyone and to perform every action as a divine offering, in a spirit of love and detachment.

In his translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Christopher Isherwood commented on acting without attachment: "In general, mankind always acts with attachment; that is to say with fear and desire. Desire for a certain result and the fear that this result will not be obtained....The doer of non-attached action, on the other hand, is the most conscientious of men. He does not run away from life; he accepts it much more completely than those whose pleasures are tinged with anxiety and whose defeats are embittered by regret. No matter whether he is sweeping a room or calculating the position of a star, or taking the chair of a meeting, he does it to the utmost limit of his powers—so carefully, so devotedly, so wholeheartedly, that the dividing line between the chosen activity and the necessary chore disappears. All work becomes equal and vitally important. It is only towards the results



of the works that he remains indifferent." Satguru Yogaswami advised devotees, "Whatever work you have to do, do it well. That in itself is yoga."

Swami Chinmayananda taught in his book *We Must: Twenty-Two Notes on Self Perfection*, "Let our work speak for itself. No covering it with an excuse. Excuses are just the expressions of our weakness in the field of action. Reveling in our tiredness; joyous in our exhaustion, blissful with our fatigue, we shall still work on inspiredly in our endless love for Him who is thrilling us into performance from within....While thus working, we must cultivate in ourselves a special brand of independence—a spirit which shall sustain us, both in the busy marketplace and in the meditation seat. In the midst of the contending crowd or in the peaceful solitude, this daring spirit of freedom and fearlessness alone should spring forth from our consciousness that we are upright and pure, diligent and clean, both in our thoughts and actions."

My Gurudeva explained: "The [Tamil]

word *Sivathondan* signifies a 'devoted servant of God' or 'one whose service is devoted to God'—that is, one who does everything that he has to do for God, and not for himself. He must do his duty as a good servant. The results, whether successful or unsuccessful, are the concern of his master. As his actions are performed for God, he must execute them as well as he possibly can. Every act, from the grandest and noblest to the meanest and most trivial, thus becomes a sacred rite and then 'work is worship.' In this way the whole of life is sanctified and the distinction between 'material' and 'spiritual' ceases to exist." The attitude of surrendering all actions as service to the Lord is called *Ishwara arpana buddhi* in Sanskrit.

Sri Aurobindo wrote, "All work done for the Divine, from poetry and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect even in its smallest external detail, as well as in the spirit in which it is done, for only then is it an altogether fit offering."

.....
In the workplace: (clockwise from left) A craftsman restores a chair seat in Italy; an artisan paints the eyes of the Goddess in preparation for a Durga festival; discussing the next project with the supervisor



Transforming Your Work into Worship

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS I HAVE MET WITH A SURPRISING number of Hindus visiting our Hawaii temple and monastery who have shared the concern that "We are so busy with our professional and family life that we have little or no time to devote to religion." Their perspective is based on the belief that work and worship are totally separate. Worship is what is done in the temple, shrine room and meditation hall. Work is what is done in the fields, the factory or the office. Work is also taking care of our family members. When this perspective is held, the amount of time being devoted to "religious" practices is usually about one hour a day.

Imagine if we could devote the rest of our waking hours to religious practices without reducing the amount of time devoted to our profession and our family. To do this, clearly a new paradigm is needed, which Great souls have given us by saying that work—when performed in the right spirit—is worship. From this perspective, there are no longer any purely secular activities. Our daily work contributes to our spiritual progress just as much as attending pujas in the temple, worshiping in our home shrine, going on pilgrimage, singing bhajans, meditating or studying scripture.

My paramaguru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, verified, "All work must be done with the aim of reaching God." This is the essence of karma

yoga. Swami Vivekananda referred to it as the "science of work," meaning that by understanding the nature of work from a philosophical perspective, we can obtain the greatest spiritual benefits from it.



When we are stable in the viewpoint of performing all work with the aim of reaching God, this naturally leads to a deeper perspective that each task we are doing is an offering to the Lord, just as placing a flower in front of a murti or picture of the Deity is an offering. This observance is known as Ishvara Pranidhana, one of Patanjali's five niyamas. Yogaswami once told a young man just starting his career, "You are going out to work. You must dress well and look dignified. Everything should be an offering to God. The world is an altar."

Swami Ramakrishnananda of New York writes in *Yoga—Union with Reality*, "Far from instructing us to abandon our work

for a life dedicated solely to meditation or dividing our days into hours of labor and hours of spiritual life, karma yoga offers an attitude in which, once adopted, we can transform our work, as arduous or laborious as it may be, into yoga and meditation—tools for spiritual growth and evolution. It is essential for every aspirant who lives in our modern society to delve into the wisdom of karma yoga, without underestimating its value or importance."

Two Ways Hinduism Looks at Karma Yoga

HINDUISM'S FOUR YOGA PATHS BECAME HOUSEHOLD TERMS IN the West when Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) articulated Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta philosophy to Americans. He summarized it as follows: "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or mental discipline or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free." Thus, joining Patanjali's raja (ashtanga) yoga to the family of three yogas discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Vivekananda formalized the familiar foursome of karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga. Furthermore, he put them all on equal footing, while enjoining, "You must, at the same time, remember that these divisions are not very marked and quite exclusive of each other. Each blends into the other." Further: "We have found that, in the end, all these four paths converge and become one. All religions and all methods of work and worship lead us to one and the same goal."

Their equality was also promoted by Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh: "Union with God is the goal of this human life. It is the be-all and end-all of our existence. It is the summum bonum of life. This can be achieved by following the path of bhakti yoga, raja yoga, jnana yoga or karma yoga."

Within Shankara's writings, however, it is clear that in his view jnana yoga alone leads to the Ultimate. "The conclusion of the *Gita* and all the *Upanishads* is this, that moksha can be obtained by knowledge alone, unaided (by action)" (*Bhagavad-Gita with the Commentary of Sri Shankaracharya* by Alladi Mahadeva Sastri).

A *Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism* echoes this stance in its

definition of *karma yoga*: "Nishkama-karma (ordained actions performed without the taint of selfish desires) purifies the mind—this is called *cittasuddhi*—making it fit for the paths of either jnana or bhakti." The reference to bhakti calls to mind strongly devotional traditions, such as Vaishnavism, in which self-transcending love and surrender is lauded as the means to liberation. For example, Sri Ramanuja states that in preparation for "meditation," the contemplative remembrance of the Divine, one should engage in karma yoga.

Swami Vishnudevananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda, propounded a similar idea: "Before practicing jnana yoga, the aspirant needs to have integrated the lessons of the other yogic paths—for without selflessness and love of God, strength of body and mind, the search for Self Realization can become mere idle speculation."

In the Saiva Siddhanta school of Saivism, the spiritual path is comprised of four cumulative, progressive stages called charya, kriya, yoga and jnana. The successful accomplishment of one naturally leads into the next. Karma yoga, when understood as humble service, is encompassed in the stage of charya, which focuses on overcoming basic instinctive patterns and learning to work for the sake of work rather than the fruits of our labor.

However, in its deeper aspects karma yoga extends into the kriya stage. Dr. S. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar shares, "Karma yoga, considered as union through spiritualized action, comes under the kriya section of the *Agamas*. Actions performed with the intention of dedicating them at the feet of Lord Siva are called Pati-punya. Such actions elevate the sadhaka to a higher level, enabling him to involve himself in the path of ashtanga yoga, also known as Siva yoga."



Two Scriptural Sources

By Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley)

Bhagavad Gita

THE BEST KNOWN SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR THE YOGA OF ACTION IS the *Bhagavad Gita*. Within its pages we learn that karma yoga means pursuing the highest excellence and acting with the highest integrity for the Divine, guru and the good of all. This is the true meaning of its proclamation, “Yoga karmasu kaushalam” (“Yoga is skill in action”). Karma yoga does not mean simply acting without regard to consequences but rather seeking the highest good possible for everyone. It requires not seeking the fruits of action for oneself, on one hand, and making the action successful for the sake of dharma, on the other. Action done poorly or carelessly, or which fails to achieve its goal cannot be regarded as karma yoga.

Here are three key verses from Chapter Three, “The Yoga of Action,” instructions from Krishna to the warrior prince Arjuna translated and commented on by Swami Nikhilananda (1895–1973).

Verse 9: “The world becomes bound by action unless it be done for the sake of sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, give up attachment and do your work for the sake of the Lord.” Commentary: “Work that is done with a view to pleasing the Lord and not from any personal motive does not bind the worker.”

Verse 19: “Therefore always do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme.” Commentary: “A seeker who does his duty for the gratification of God attains purity of mind and ultimately realizes the highest goal. Wise men in the past acted in that manner.”

Verse 25: “As the ignorant act, attached to their work, O Bharata, so

should an enlightened man act, but without attachment, in order that he may set people on the right path.” Commentary: “An ignorant person acts zealously for his personal happiness; but a wise man should act, with the same zeal, for the welfare of others. The only incentive to action for a knower of the Self is the welfare of others.”

Karma yoga requires giving up the ego and attachment to material rewards. Yet, once we align ourselves with the Divine will, our power of action will increase manifoldly. The kriya shakti, or power of action, of the yogi is much stronger than that of ordinary people, who are limited by fear and desire. Detachment in turn improves our ability to act creatively and decisively. Those who are bound by desire act according to desire, which distorts their ability to see the

nature of forces operative in the world and causes them to disturb the natural equilibrium. The wise, who are detached in their vision, see things as they are and act effectively for the best that is possible.

Karma yoga is also not limited to seva or selfless service, as it is usually interpreted in the West. In Vedic thought, it includes puja and yajna, or ritual. All action done as karma yoga becomes a ritual or worship of the Divine. Even seva should be done as a ritual, accompanied by mantra, meditation and remembrance of the Divine. Temple worship is a kind of karma yoga. Karma yoga requires bhakti or devotion. We must surrender to the

Divine and to the guru for our action to carry the yoga shakti. Karma yoga ultimately means that our life itself must become a divine work, not merely a personal expression. As such, karma yoga is the basis of all other yoga paths.

Venerable teachings: (clockwise from above) Shri Krishna advises Prince Arjuna on the nature of karma; in India, a Vaishnava sadhu, seated at his place of sadhana, reads from scripture; beads of water on a lotus leaf, the perfect metaphor for detachment; Earth embraced by selfless, caring people



S. RAJAM

Seeing the World as an Ashram

HOW WE VIEW THE WORLD IS CENTRAL TO karma yoga. As Swami Krishnananda of Divine Life Society stated: “We see outside what we actually are inside.” To some, the world is a place where we have a chance to pursue pleasure; to others it provides opportunities to acquire wealth. Others focus on the many problems in the world and categorize it as troubled. To a karma yogi, it is none of the above. For him, it takes on a spiritual nature. Swami Vivekananda states: “The world is a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually.” Holding this attitude, we see life as it really is, the play of opposites, love and hate, joy and sorrow, and accept it all as Siva’s benign grace. The world is perfect at every point in time. We are poised in the eternity of the moment within that perfection, eager to perform our dharma,



fulfilling our duties and responsibilities in a clear and loving spirit, striving through the various yogas we have been taught to make progress in developing our character and making spiritual progress.”

Swami Vivekananda added: “To those who have not controlled their own minds, the world is either full of evil or at best a mixture of good and evil. This very world will become to us an optimistic world when we become masters of our own minds. Nothing will then work upon us as good or evil; we shall find everything to be in its proper place, to be harmonious. Such is the end and aim of karma yoga, and such is its perfection in practical life.”

Satguru Yogaswami sang, “Work for work’s sake; love for love’s sake. This world is a big temple to which all kinds of pilgrims come—good, bad and indifferent. Let us concentrate on our own worship, and not find fault with what others do.”

Isha Upanishad

It is highly significant that the *Isha*, the shortest (having just 18 verses) and by most accounts the oldest of the *Upanishads*, extols karma yoga in its first two verses.

Verse 1: “The entire universe is pervaded by the Lord—whatsoever there is in this changing world. By this attitude of renunciation experience your life. Do not desire the wealth that anyone has.”

Commentary: If we recognize the atman as the indwelling Self and spirit, pervading the entire universe, present in each thing within the universe, we naturally develop a sense of renunciation and detachment. We will not seek what anyone has, because we realize that no one really owns anything. Everything belongs to and is rooted in the Divine. We need to surrender to that Divine will which is the energy behind all.

Verse 2: “Thus (in that spirit of renunciation) performing your work, may you wish to live a hundred years. Only in this way will karma not cling to your soul.”

Commentary: This recognition of the divine Self behind the entire universe is the foundation for karma yoga, action done with the attitude of renunciation—not merely renouncing the fruit of action but giving up the sense of being the owner and doer as well. Ishvara is the only doer, and His shakti is the only real power. Only if our lives are a form of karma yoga, rooted in an awareness of the divine presence, will karma not cling to and bind our souls.

To approach the wisdom of the *Upanishads* and jnana yoga, the understanding of our true nature, we must first develop the attitude of karma yoga—that we are not the doer. Karma yoga is rooted in devotion but also requires wisdom or jnana. We must be aware of the nature of the doer and the nature of the action. Karma yoga is action done with consciousness and creativity in accordance with the divine will.



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To Work without Attachment

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE UNATTACHED to the results of our work? We do what is right simply because it is the right thing to do. We raise our children with lots of attention and love; and whether they show appreciation or not we continue to do so. Our love is unconditional. We help out our neighbors often; and whether they reciprocate or not, we still continue. We run for public office; and whether we win or lose, we are unaffected—losing does not cause us to become depressed. We do our best at work; and if others get recognition and we don’t, we still continue doing our best.

Remaining detached from the outcome



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of our actions allows us to remain apart from the swirl of outer emotions that comprises the world and be a witness to it. We become like the pearls of water on a lotus leaf, resting upon the leaf but not attaching to its surface.

Swami Vivekananda counseled, “Let the end and the means be joined into one. In other words, when you are doing any work, do not think of anything beyond. Do it as worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being, that is, the right performance of duties of any station of life, without attachment to results, produces spiritual advancement.”

Nine Keys For Karma Yoga

PRACTICING KARMA YOGA CAN SOUND COMPLICATED, abstract and difficult. Here are nine keys to help bring it down to earth, ideals for practicing the yoga of doing—whether in a formal seva program, helping out at the temple, performing daily household chores or tackling tasks at your place of work. Is it practical to impose such a system without hindering one's concentration on the task at hand? Yes. It is actually normal for our awareness to shift between five, six or more areas of concern through the day, like a bee flitting from one flower to another. Look at this set of keys as a new mental overlay of conceptual points for awareness to touch upon as you work, enjoy a meal, attend a class, or put on your shoes. No matter how well you fulfill them, they will be of benefit. Karma yoga can become a vital part of your daily life, making everything you do more selfless, effective and enjoyable.

- 1 Offer all work to God.** A mantra may be chanted, verbally or mentally, before beginning.
- 2 Let Ganesha guide your karma yoga.** He rules over all karmas, their fruition and their transcendence.
- 3 Act selflessly, detached from the results.** Focus on serving, helping, giving and surrendering egotistical urges.
- 4 Do your best.** Make the work a worthy offering, completing it as perfectly as you can. Then stop, review what you did, and make it even better.
- 5 Be industrious.** Stretch your capacities to overcome lethargy, fatigue, confusion and doubt. Remember to breathe.
- 6 Stay above the fray.** Refrain from disagreements, criticism of others, cynicism, blame and other base emotions.
- 7 Stay focused.** Be centered in the now, not thinking of other concerns. Pause between tasks and renew your yoga.
- 8 Align your will with the divine will.** Be rooted in an awareness of the divine presence within and around you. See the world as perfect.
- 9 Enjoy the effort.** Be positive, free of worry. Relax; take your time. Be happy and radiate blessings to the world.



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Three Hands-On Ideas

1 SELFLESS EFFORT: RAMANA MAHARISHI EXPLAINED THE STRATEGY BEHIND karma yoga: "The effect of karma is two-fold; one is the immediate seen effect in the physical sense, the other is the effect left by the action on the mind of the person, a subtle latency called samskara which will come to fruition at a later date as a prarabdha karma. Therefore, what then is the technique to get over the trick played by the double-edged weapon of karma? If karma is performed without an eye on personal benefits, but entirely as an offering to God, as a service to the people concerned, not only the old samskaras or latencies find a way out, but also no further latencies or samskaras are impressed on the mind. Thus the mind gets cleaned, which in turn prepares the ground for moksha, or liberation" (*Power Unlimited: Relation of Man with God*, By D. N. Saraf).

2. Disinterested Service

Swami Ramakrishnananda tells us, "For me, there is a great similarity between what we search for in karma yoga and the treadmills where people run for hours in gyms. I believe this to be an appropriate comparison because this is running

Working with Our Karma through Seva

THE FACT IS, THE MORE SELFISH WE ARE, THE LESS HAPPY WE ARE. And the less selfish we are, the happier we are. My Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, advised: "Through service and kindness, you can unwind the subconscious mind and gain a clear understanding of all laws of life. Your soul will shine forth. You will be that peace. You will radiate that inner happiness and be truly secure, simply by practicing being kind in thought, word and deed."

Every action we perform creates a samskara, a subtle impression in the mind. Each of us is the sum total of countless samskaras which makes up our unique individuality, determining our character and temperament and influencing our tendencies. The impressions left by previous actions become seeds or tendencies (vasanas) toward future effects. This is how we carry forward our karma. If our actions have been inharmonious, selfish or even cruel, then we will create situations in our future in which we absorb the effects or reactions of those actions. Samskaras of this quality bind us to the world in a way that makes life seem a bitter place. Spiritual or refined lifestyles are not possible when one is going through the turmoil of difficult past karma.

What is the remedy? Karma yoga. When we perform positive, unselfish, uplifting actions, we start accumulating positive samskaras. These mingle with our other less meritorious samskaras and begin to reshape our nature and future. Difficult karmic effects that we would have fully faced in the future become softened by the positive impressions of our present actions. If we act selflessly, offering the fruits of our actions to the Divine, the creation of troublesome new samskaras is lessened and our overall karmic burden is gradually diminished.

Slowly the world becomes a more cheery place. But the world did not change. We have begun creating a positive and joyful nature simply through our own actions, a nature that is calm and balanced. In this newfound peace, we see the world in a positive light. Turning within, we become sensitive to subtle depths of our existence, not previously experienced.

Gurudeva explained it in terms of "actinic," or spiritual energy. "The best way to keep the actinic force flowing through the physical

body is practicing the art of giving, doing little things for others that you have not been asked to do. This keeps you creative; and being creative is actinic, superconscious and religious. Giving, doing without thought of return, affectionate detachment, creates an odic vacuum which your actinic, spiritual forces flow into and fill."

This is a gradual transformation, as Swami Vivekananda noted, "We have to begin from the beginning to take up the works as they come to us and slowly make ourselves more unselfish every day. At first our motives are selfish, but gradually this selfishness will melt by persistence until we are able to do really unselfish work."

Narasimhachar Prativadi of Columbia, Missouri, offered, "Doing seva allows us for a short period of time to forget about our selfish thoughts and worries and focus on helping others. It is in a sense, another form of meditation. 'Manava seva, Janardhana seva,' 'Service to man is service to God.'"

Helping hands: (clockwise from above) Comforting the aged and infirm; in Bangladesh, a newly thrown clay pot in the hands of its creator; a craftswoman in Kolkata decorates clay pots during the annual State Handicrafts Expo 2014



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without destination, running without reaching a certain end. Running is the goal in itself. This running benefits the practitioner's health, preventing the muscles from withering, improving circulation and strengthening the heart. In other words, the results cannot be separated from the act, which is similar to what happens in karma yoga. Service is the goal of our action, and it is this service itself that prevents the doors of the heart from withering away. This disinterested service will make us flow beyond the limits of our minute 'I' with its egoistic interests. We widen our hearts and surpass egoism."

3. Abidance in Dharma

The question arises, what work should be done and what work should not be done. Some types of actions produce spiritual progress, others produce no benefit and some even cause us to move backwards spiritually. Spiritualizing our actions, transforming our work into worship, begins with overcoming basic instinctive patterns such as the tendencies to become angry, hurtful or competitive. A helpful list of the qualities we need to develop to control these tendencies is contained in the ten classical restraints called yamas, which are: noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, divine conduct, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and purity.



Testimonials on Replacing Pride with Humility

SWAMI SIVANANDA USED TO PRAISE THE EXAMPLE OF GANDHI, "He never made any difference between menial service and dignified work. Scavenging and cleaning of the latrine was the highest yoga for him. This was the highest puja for him. He himself did the cleaning of latrines. He annihilated the illusory little 'I' through service of various sorts."

Performing menial tasks is an effective way to reduce pride and increase humility. Opportunities for such humble service are readily available at ashrams and temples all over the world—washing dishes, washing clothes, cleaning the kitchens and bathrooms, working in the gardens, polishing brass, chopping the vegetables, sweeping the paths—without seeking praise or approval.

Nurse Hiral Patel of Houston, Texas, gives this testimony: "Seva in my mandir has allowed me to grow both spiritually and mentally. It has taught me many valuable lessons which I wouldn't have experienced otherwise. In today's age, it is so easy to become self-centered and surround yourself with the thoughts of 'me, my and how will that benefit me.' Through seva, I've been able to learn what it means to be selfless and think about others before myself. The joy experienced by placing others before you is a concept taught by my guru: Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

Mata Amritanandamayi offered, "The beauty and charm of selfless love and service should not die away from the face of the Earth. The world should know that a life of dedication is possible, that a life inspired by love and service to humanity is possible. Meditation and studying the scriptures are like two sides of a coin. The engraving on that coin is selfless service, and that is what gives it its real value. Our compassion and acts of selflessness take us to the deeper truths.



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Through selfless action we can eradicate the ego that conceals the Self. Detached, selfless action leads to liberation. Such action is not just work; it is karma yoga."

Swami Sivananda shared this insight: "He who has understood the right significance of karma yoga will take every work as yogic activity or worship of the Lord. There is no menial work in his vision. Every work is puja of Narayana. In the light of karma yoga, all actions are sacred. That aspirant who always takes immense delight in doing works which are considered by the worldly man as menial services and who always does willingly such acts only will become a dynamic yogi. He will be absolutely free from conceit and egoism. He will have no downfall. The canker of pride cannot touch him."

Yogini Patel, a law student in Atlanta, Georgia, shares, "Seva in my life is a grounding factor. It tempers my success and drive for success with humility and selflessness. Without seva, I would have a very limited and tunnel-visioned outlook on my life. Seva reminds me that my life is bigger than my own goals or aspirations. It reminds me that my life is a vessel through which I can serve others and in turn God, and thus progress in my spirituality."

Manali Patel of Toronto, Canada, shares, "I can't define it but perhaps seva is like the mirror that reflects me just the way I am; the reality compels me to become a better person, every time I choose to face it, accept it and act on it."

Pitching in: (clockwise from above) Volunteers sweep the floor of Malaysia's Waterfall Temple; a traditional feeding of pilgrims in Varanasi, India; a BAPS volunteer serves meals to the impoverished



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The Hindu Heart of American Seva

By Lavina Melwani, New York

"SERVICE THAT IS GIVEN WITHOUT consideration of anything in return, at the right place and time to one that is qualified, with the feeling that it is one's duty, is regarded as the nature of goodness." —Bhagavad Gita, 1720

One of the most powerful words in the Hindi language is *seva*. This small, four-letter word can transform the world, transform lives. With it you can change the world by changing just one person—yourself.

Seva means service, devotion to others. It is the revolutionary Hindu concept of distributing happiness and peace wherever there is strife and poverty—by your own game-changing actions. It stems from the Hindu belief "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the whole world is one family) and the knowledge



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA

that your own karma or deeds are what help you attain oneness with the Paramatma, or Supreme Being.

Seva has always been a part of Hindu teachings, be it helping the needy or feeding the hungry—be it the lines of beggars outside the temple or the cows and the birds. Today most of the largest religious organizations in India have vast support systems, with free hospitals, free schools, kitchens and community centers that assist the needy and the sick. Some—like Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Chinmaya Mission, Divine Life Society, Isha Foundation and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha—have expanded their philanthropic work to many parts of the world, including the US.

Yet, in recent years, as many Hindus have migrated to the larger world, we have seen *seva* become more and more about building a

better world for humanity by taking on health and education of the needy, disaster relief, human rights and the environment.

America has a long history of volunteerism and philanthropy, and Indian-Americans have drawn from both these virtues to have an engaging *seva* dialogue with many charitable organizations in India, offering them their expertise and their dollars. Many go to India to do *seva*. At the same time, they have started organizations in the US that benefit the needy both in India and the US and create awareness of Hinduism around the world. These are uniquely American organizations with a Hindu heart. By way of example, here we showcase four of the dozens of organizations that are doing good work.

BAPS Charities is active in nine countries across five continents, and volunteers are the driving force bringing Hindu caring and culture to America. I recall going to an event organized by BAPS in a hotel, where all the food was cooked and served not by chefs and waiters, but by young BAPS volunteers. They take on everything from organizing walkathons to community health fairs to humanitarian relief during international disasters. As devotees say, "We perform *seva*. We see God in each individual to whom we extend a helping hand; we serve God residing within each individual." Janki B. Patel of Chicago, Illinois, offers, "Performing various karma yoga (*seva*) puts me in many situations and in contact with numerous people. By serving with them and for them I have learned how to be

compassionate, humble, honorable and understanding."

Hindu American Seva Communities (HASC) is a progressive body helping the dharmic community create change through service in temples, schools and community outreach. It works to unite faith and secular communities in social equity projects and to strengthen the civic engagement of Indian-Americans in their new home. Anju Bhargava, founder of HASC, has also used public and private partnerships to develop Dharma Seva Centers in temples and colleges, serving low-income areas and engaging in social justice issues. Another innovative way that Hindu values have been merged with volunteerism is *UtsavSeva* by which people come together to serve on festival days, combining service with fun and celebration.

HASC, recognized by the Obama White House, merges Hindu devotion with American volunteerism, incorporating youth and non-denominational partners. The HASC Young Scholars Program engages students in community and refugee service projects. Living and co-existing in a larger world, young Hindus learn to serve people of different faiths, be they Latin American or Middle Eastern. Sai Santosh Kolluru, for instance, a Research Assistant with the Bhutanese Service and Research Project (BSRP), coordinates service programs in Ohio and nationally for Bhutanese refugees.

Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus, founded by Sunita Vishwanath, champions tolerance and inclusiveness. *Sadhana*,



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA

Driven by Inspiration

THERE ARE MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO PERFORM SEVA BY HELPING out at temples with daily chores and puja preparations. We can also take time to hold classes for children, sharing the basics of our religion and culture. Visiting the elderly is a form of service that is greatly appreciated.

How much service should we perform? My guru suggested ten percent of one's time, or four hours a week. "Everyone, no matter what their skills, can and should give ten percent of their time each week in service to their religious institution. We calculate it as

four hours a week, which is ten percent of a forty-hour work week, which amounts to 208 hours a year. It is also acceptable to tithe, give ten percent of, one's time in intense projects all at once, rather than each week. For example, many of the devotees who helped build the Swaminarayan temple in London took months and even years off from their professions and labored twelve hours a day to build that magnificent edifice." All such acts of seva earn punyam, good karma, merit that we carry into our next birth. In fact, merit is the only true wealth, for it is the one possession we can take from one life to the next.

When asked if there are advantages of doing seva at a temple or ashram, Gurudeva affirmed, "It is much better to do Sivathodu in a sacred place, such as a temple or an ashram. Here acts of selfless

which means faith in action, seeks to be exactly that. This year the White House recognized her as a Champion of Change for strengthening social justice and protecting the environment.

"Project Prithvi is our grassroots green project through which we mobilize Hindus, especially the youth, to live out the principle of ahimsa by taking care of the environment," she explains. Too often we do things as we do in the home country, destroying nature even as we seek to honor the Almighty. "Currently we are working on a project to clean up specific beaches in Jamaica Bay, where Hindus worship and leave mountains of litter." She says Hindus in America have to do things differently to enrich the land and create good vibes about their faith, adding, "We will bring priests into this effort so they can encourage greener rituals and raise awareness of the problem. We hope that priests will help us make the point that our Hindu texts describe the earth and the water as Goddesses; we do not honor them by polluting and destroying them."

Hindu American Foundation (HAF) has perhaps most radicalized the notion of sacred service by making fearlessly speaking out a form of seva in Hinduism. The young leaders of HAF do seva not



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SYBO

service are part of the proper way of behavior. While performing your work, you are observed by the devas living on the inner, astral planes. You are noticed by the priests and the management of the temple. The guru of the ashram would observe you. The hearts of these beings go out to you to help your efforts acquire punyam. Thus, a spiritual fellowship is established. Many minds are aware of you, blessing your efforts. The effect is that you are drawing closer and closer to Lord Siva. More security comes as a result."

Examples of Seva Programs

Disaster relief is large-scale form of dynamic seva. For example, in 2004, when a giant tsunami lashed coastal areas across South and East Asia, causing death and destruction on a massive scale, Seva International sprang into action to build houses, community centers, vocational training centers, schools and orphanages.

Hindu seva is developing in the Diaspora in varied ways. Once a community is established in a new land, it has a choice: to engage with the population by helping, or to remain apart and sequestered. Groups who reach out and get involved in service projects earn respect, acceptance and good will. BAPS, known for their fabulous temples, places strong emphasis on bonding with the broader



HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

community. Here are just some of the creative offerings of the Neasden Temple in London: a special drive to enroll members of the South Asian community onto the National Bone Marrow Donor Register; a Community Health Fair; Neighbors Appreciation Day; a Party for the Elderly from local care homes; and an Annual Charity Challenge Supporting British Heart Foundation and Rosa (a charity that supports women and girls in the UK).

Many Hindu organizations in India are entirely seva-centric. A remarkable example is the Narayani Peedam in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, offering prodigious philanthropic events, health care, free meals for visitors, support for other temples, mass marriages, prisoner reintegration, shelter for cows, afforestation, recycling, educational programs and more.

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Heartfelt efforts: (clockwise from left) At BAPS London, devotees create colored-flour rangolis in preparation for Diwali; SYBO volunteers in Penang, Malaysia, clean the temple steps; members of the West Michigan Hindu Temple join with Habitat for Humanity to build homes for needy families; in South Mumbai, student cleans up Chaupati Beach after Ganesha Visarjana.

by distributing grain or chanting prayers but by making sure Hinduism is accurately portrayed in America, by fighting the perception and bias battles that few others are taken up. How is Hinduism represented in American school textbooks? How is it perceived in middle America? How is it promoted in the corridors of power in Washington?

HAF focuses on human and civil rights and shines a light on issues affecting Hindus worldwide. It also takes an innovative approach to nurturing future leaders by training interns in Washington's political process. HAF's seva is getting Hinduism a place at the table, be it in public policy or opinion. Whether it is yoga in public school, the ethical treatment of animals or the mistreatment of Hindus anywhere in the world, HAF does not stay silent.

In its summer internship program HAF teaches Hindu students this new form of seva in which ancient Hinduism is safeguarded by mastering the tools of the modern age. Pooja Patel, a sophomore at Princeton University, interns with Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, the first Hindu US Congresswoman and a great role model.

All these America-based Hindu organizations use the ideals of

pluralism, equality and human rights to showcase a timeless religion and use contemporary means to inspire a new America-born generation to do seva. They use new containers to introduce Hinduism to America, though the contents are thousands of years old.

As Aanandh Chandrasekar, 18, who wrote the winning entry in HAF's Next Gen essay contest, points out: "Hinduism is littered with heroes who paved the way to justice on the battlefield, but the heroes of today are different. Both fight for the same cause—morality, justice and peace—but the battles of today take place in the boardrooms, presided over by men whose decisions affect the lives of millions and fought by us, the citizens who desire to make a change. Some achieve fame, but even those who don't, who prefer the quiet of daily life, make a difference. After all, every one of us is inseparable from God, and every one of us has the power to change the world."

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Lavina Melwani is a New York-based writer for several international publications and publishes Lassi with Lavina, an arts and lifestyle portal for the global Indian woman—www.lassiwithlavina.com. Follow @lavinamelwani and @lassiwithlavina

Encouraging Youth to Get Involved

A YOUNG MAN STUDYING MY GURU'S TEACHINGS RAN ACROSS the statement "We must perform our duty to our community" and asked me what it meant. I answered that the community in which we live is like a distant part of our family, and as such we have a duty to help and support them. We need to devote part of our time and financial resources to helping solve community problems, such as providing food and clothing to the poor and organizing volunteers for after-school programs.

At the Auroville community outside Pondicherry, South India, we spoke to teachers about how they awaken spirituality in their students. One instructor shared a favorite tactic, to have each student secretly help another student in some way every day. She was delighted to find how much the children enjoy and are uplifted by the practice.

A recent news story featured a group of college students who traveled to New Orleans during school break to help with disaster relief in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. For two weeks they lived in simple conditions and helped repair damaged homes. Their testimony was heartfelt: they had never done anything like this before, were astonished at how good it made them feel, and hoped to have an opportunity to volunteer again and do more such rebuilding work in the future.

These stories illustrate the benefit of having youth participate in volunteer programs with their parents or other youth and be taught that Hindu dharma includes helping others and serving the broader community.

Mathan Kalimuthu, age 22, a volunteer at the Waterfall Temple in Penang, Malaysia, shares: "Our seva will give us a lot of benefit in times to come, if not immediately. We will carry forward this good

karma to our next birth. I appeal to parents to allow their children to join temples and do the service work. They need to understand what service and spirituality can bring to their lives. Through the SBYO (Shri Balathandayuthabani Youth Organization) I have developed a spiritual way of looking at life. I learned to walk on the right path and do good things." Young Nannthini Shunmugam shared, "We organize seminars twice a year after the exams to help youth plan for their higher education. It gives me a lot of satisfaction and peace of mind to serve the Lord through SBYO."

Parents are naturally focused on making sure their children are as successful in life as possible, which equates with studying hard and getting good grades. Unfortunately, they may feel that helping out occasionally in volunteer work or doing seva at the temple would be a waste of precious time. The SYBO example shows the opposite. While looking after the temple's various needs, youth learn to work as a team, interact with the public and function in an efficient, disciplined and organized manner. Working with SBYO has made them self-confident and enthusiastic and more successful in their academic

and professional work outside the temple. Parents who gained these qualities through decades of service in the SBYO are now working to pass them on to their children.

To experience such life-lessons themselves, children should be encouraged to spend time regularly helping others in any of the numerous seva programs that are available.

Pitching in: (above) Children of the Chinmaya International Residence school in Coimbatore join forces to plant trees; (right) youth volunteers of India's National Cadet Corps hold an awareness rally for disaster management



CHINMAYA INTERNATIONAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL



CHINMAYA INTERNATIONAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Here are more testimonies from youth.

Shalini Pandya, Atlanta, Georgia: "Doing seva has built my interpersonal skills, has created a supportive community for my academic and spiritual strength, but most importantly, has helped me create my purpose and identity in my life endeavors."

Roshni Dave, Houston, Texas: "Given the opportunity of doing Seva, I have benefitted both mentally and spiritually. Mentally I have gained more confidence and am able to balance my school, work, and

Seva. Spiritually, I have been able to keep moving closer in attaining shanti, inner peace and bliss."

Nakita Makan, Toronto, Canada: "The greatest reward in doing seva is the feeling of humility. Being able to understand that everything we have previously done, are currently doing or will do is due to the grace of God. So no matter how small, seva is seva as long as we walk away with this understanding, ego-free."

Four Ways of Serving Others

By Swami Yuktatmananda, Minister of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York

VEDANTA TEACHES FOUR WAYS WE CAN SERVE our fellow man, according to their needs and our resources. The *Upanishads* teach us that we are not limited individuals consisting of a body and a mind, but are divine in the core of our being. Our divine essence, called the atman, is the eternal source of all purity, power, strength, bliss and fulfillment. But being ignorant of this truth, we identify ourselves with our body and mind, seeking lasting peace and happiness in ephemeral things. However, after having our share of pleasure and pain from the world, we begin to understand the futility of worldly pursuits and realize that only a search for the Eternal Reality can lead us to true fulfillment.

One way to approach this reality is by



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Anna dana: A box of basic food items, collected to feed a needy family

rendering service to all with an attitude of worshiping God, who dwells in all. Such service purifies our mind and awakens the infinite dimension of our being. There are several kinds of service corresponding to various levels of our personality. According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, we have five different selves. These selves are layers of our being that cover up the atman, our real "I."

Physical self (annamaya atman): We are the physical self when we identify with our body. We look upon ourselves and others as a man or woman, young or old, dark or fair, and think and act accordingly.

Energy self (pranamaya atman): Usually translated as the life breath, prana is responsible for the functions of breathing,

assimilation of food, excretion, circulation of blood and the exit of the life breath from the body at death. Prana activates our hidden mental impressions (samskaras), which influence our thoughts, actions and behavior. In the dream state, prana stimulates the mental impressions that create dreams.

Mental self (manomaya atman): As mental selves, we identify with the mind's desires, emotions and feelings, such as pain and pleasure, love and hatred. Due to imagining that we are the mental self, we are tossed about by the varying states of the mind: happy, calm and peaceful; or miserable, confused and tense.

Intelligence self (vijnanamaya atman): When we identify with buddhi, or the higher mind, we are the intelligence self, from which stems our sense of judgment, decision-making, discrimination and living a righteous life. Identified with buddhi, we are able to exercise self-control and discipline our wayward mind.



Prana dana: A volunteer provides medical assistance following a natural disaster

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Blissful self (anandamaya atman): As blissful selves, we are detached from the other four layers of our personality and abide close to the atman, only removed from it by a fine screen of ignorance. Because of its proximity to the atman, this self is the source of bliss, unfiltered through the body, mind and senses. In the waking state, the ability to abide as the blissful self is a sign of some degree of spiritual realization. We also experience this bliss while listening with joy to elevating music or admiring an elegant work of art. We experience this bliss in deep sleep, though we are not conscious of it.

Swami Vivekananda classifies service into four types, which correspond to the

different selves described above.

Physical help (anna dana): Physical help is related to the physical self, or body, and takes the form of giving food, clothing or shelter and any service relating to the upkeep of the body.

Seva: A Remedy for Mental Turbulence

IN DISCUSSING THE CALMING AND PURIFYING ASPECTS OF KARMA yoga, texts often begin with a discussion of *prakriti*. Prakriti is primal nature, the original energy from which the intellect, emotions and physical body are formed. Prakriti, also called *pradhana*, is expressed as three gunas (qualities)—sattva, rajas and tamas.

Sattvaguna is rarified, translucent, pervasive, reflecting the light of pure consciousness. It is the most subtle of the three gunas. Rajaguna is the stimulative, restless, expansive energy of growth and movement. It is said to be the driving power animating the other two gunas. Tamaguna is the quality of denseness, inertia, contraction, resistance and dissolution. It is the densest of the gunas.

These three gunas manifest as light, activity and inertia, and in the mind as happiness, sorrow and delusion. They dominate the soul's powers of knowledge, action and desire (jnana, kriya and icchha), and form the guna body, *manomaya kosha*.

The challenge many of us face is that our minds are under the influence of rajas and are therefore restless, agitated and distracted. If we sit and attempt to meditate, the mind automatically continues its restless pattern of constant distraction and does not allow us to experience anything of a contemplative nature. Through the harmonious actions of karma yoga, in which we are active in a selfless and detached manner, the restless activities of the mind, which are rooted in the ego, can be gradually subdued.

Swami Krishnananda of Divine Life Society offered: "The agitation, which is also a kind of activity, can be subdued only by another kind of activity, as a disease is cured by homeopathic medicines of a character similar to the disease already prevailing in the body. *Similia similibus curantur*: Like cures like. Action can be controlled only by action; diamond can be cut by diamond.... God-oriented work is the means of putting down work that causes agitation. Binding action can be subdued by liberating action. This is known as karma yoga."



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Another obstacle to contemplation is a troubled subconscious mind. The subconscious contains all the impressions of our past actions and our reactions to them. Karma, or action, that is hurtful, selfish or self-indulging leaves impurities or darkness and trauma in the subconscious. We feel this as a sense of burden that we did not possess as a child.

Imagine a pond of water with large gold nuggets at the bottom. If the surface of the pond has ripples due to wind, or if the water is clouded by mud, we cannot see the gold nuggets. The gold represent our soul nature; the ripples represent an overactive intellect; and the water's cloudiness represents subconscious impurities. In order to experience our soul nature and its oneness with God, our intellect must be quiet and our mind must be pure.

My Gurudeva indicates how karma yoga purifies the subconscious: "Go out into the world this week and let your light shine through your kind thoughts, but let each thought manifest itself in a physical deed, of doing something for someone else. Lift their burdens just a little bit and, unknowingly perhaps, you

may lift something that is burdening your mind. You erase and wipe clean the mirror of your own mind through helping another. We call this karma yoga, the deep practice of unwinding, through service, the selfish, self-centered, egotistical *vasanas* (subconscious inclinations) of the lower nature that have been generated for many, many lives and which bind the soul in darkness. Through service

Lending a hand: (above) Raised hands represent the spirit of giving of one's time to help others; (right) the Helping Hands team at the Hindu Temple and Community Center of Mid-Missouri (HTCC) pose for a group photo in Columbia after the annual 5K Run/Walk for the Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty.



VELLORE S. GOPALABATNAM

and kindness, you can unwind the subconscious mind and gain a clear understanding of all laws of life. Your soul will shine forth. You will be that peace. You will radiate that inner happiness and be truly secure, simply by practicing being kind in thought, word and deed."

He spoke highly of the benefits of service, "The psychological secret is to have a goal, actually many goals, in service to humanity to accomplish. People helping people, people serving people; that is what the Hindu dharma is and has been proclaiming for some 8,000 years or more."

Gurudeva summarized, "Once a lot of Sivathondru (service dedicated to God) has been performed and the lower nature has been quietly sealed off, the raja yoga practices of breath control and deep meditation can begin. The process of purification is similar to clearing a mountain path to walk upon. First the big stones are removed. Then the medium-size stones are removed. This process goes on until the path is clear of all stones. This is the refinement process we must go through on the charya and kriya margas before we enter the yoga marga. Sivathondru is the refiner."

Saving life (prana dana): Saving a life, healing or extending it by medical means are ways of serving others pranically.

Giving knowledge (vidya dana): This is not just making people literate, but giving them the knowledge they need to stand on their own feet, think for themselves and solve their own problems. Dissemination of strengthening and character-building ideas also falls under this type of service to the mental self of others. Swami advocated "that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet" (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 5342).

Spiritual help (jnana dana): Awakening people to the goal of God Realization, helping



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Vidya dana: Illustration symbolizing the transfer of knowledge to another person

them strengthen their will and their power of discrimination, giving them spiritual instruction—these are directed to both the intelligence and blissful selves. Such help toward others gradually awakens the budhi, shows the way to the blissful self and, finally, reveals the pure atman.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "The gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest; the next gift is the gift of secular knowledge; the next is the gift of life; and the fourth is the gift of food." In his lectures on karma yoga, Swami discussed this gradation of the various types of service. He said that physical help does not remove wants permanently and does not transform the recipient's character. In other words, it does not result in

de-identification with the physical self. Swami sounds a note of caution about physical help: "In considering the question of helping others, we must always strive not to commit the mistake of thinking that physical help is the only help that can be given. It is not only the last but the least, because it cannot bring about permanent satisfaction. The misery that I feel when I am hungry is satisfied by eating, but hunger returns; my misery can cease only when I am satisfied beyond all want."

Saving a life or prolonging it is a little higher than physical help. But mere extension of life without a qualitative change in it does not help the recipient advance towards the goal of life. Next is the gift of knowledge or education. In Swami's words, "The gift



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Jnana dana: Swami Vivekananda, who articulated many of the ideas in this Insight, showed thousands the way to the pure atman

of knowledge is a far higher gift than that of food and clothes; it is even higher than giving life to a man, because the real life of man consists of knowledge. Ignorance is death; knowledge is life. Life is of very little value if it is a life in the dark, groping through ignorance and misery....The gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest, for it saves one from many and many a birth."

The higher we evolve spiritually, the higher the kind of service we are able to render. But we need not refrain from offering service to others just because we are not able to offer the highest service, that of spirituality. Giving food, saving or extending life, providing education—all are important on the road to spiritual realization when rendered with an attitude of worship.

The Rig Vedic People Were Indigenous to India, Not Invaders

B.B. Lal's newest book deftly quashes the myth that marauding foreigners brought language and civilization to the subcontinent

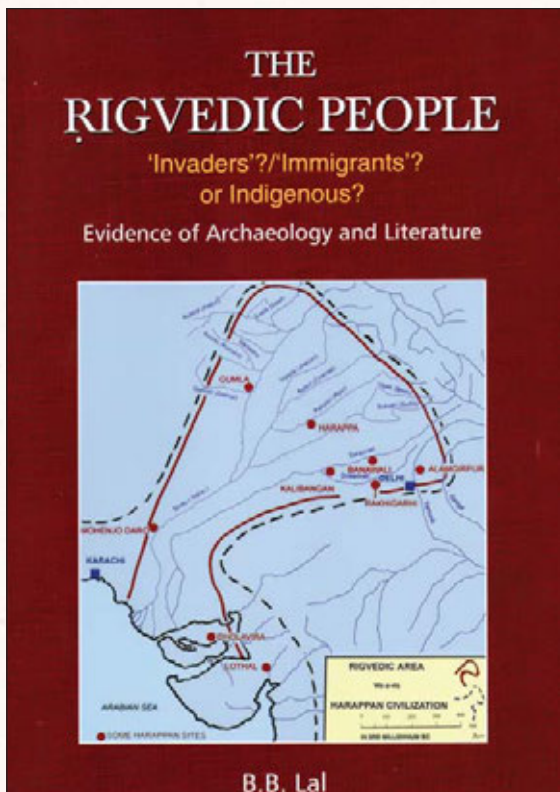
BY KOENRAAD ELST, BELGIUM

NONAGENARIAN ARCHAEOLOGIST Dr. B.B. Lal, 94, has synthesized his last few decades of research in his new book, *The Rigvedic People: Invaders? Immigrants? or Indigenous?* (Aryan Books, Delhi 2015). In it he seeks to answer three questions about the Aryans spoken of in the *Vedas*: (1) Did they originate outside India? (2) Did the Harappan civilization originate outside India? (3) Were the Harappans Vedic Aryans?

His answers are direct. There is no sign of a foreign origin of either the Indus-Saraswati civilization or the Vedic Aryans. In fact, recent excavations in Kunal and Bhirrana unambiguously confirm an existing civilizational continuity since the 6th millennium bce. Nor has anything "proto-Harappan" been found in Mesopotamia or anywhere else outside India from which the typically Harappan lifestyle could have descended. Moreover, the area known to the Vedic Aryans and described in the youngest layer of the *Rig Veda* (10:75:5-6) reaches from the Ganga to the western tributaries of the Sindhu, thus coinciding with the Harappan territory (minus its Gujarati borderland). In earlier layers, the Vedic heartland is already on the then-mighty Saraswati river in Haryana, exactly where the highest concentration of Harappan settlements is found. Lal's spade, after fifty years of digging, has never bumped into a trace of Aryans penetrating India.

Especially in his case, this latter fact is remarkable. It was he who, as a young archaeologist in the 1950s, made his name by finally digging up what was taken as the long-awaited proof of an Aryan invasion. He had identified a pottery style, the Painted Grey Ware (1200-800 bce), as typifying the Aryans' penetration into India. That is what was taught to us in university, and even recently published books upholding the Ary-

an Invasion Theory cite this finding as proof. But Lal himself has grown away from it. At the time, he had simply applied the reigning invasionist framework, until he understood that this was but a hypothetical construct unsupported by hard findings.



Linguistic-Archaeological Disconnect

Lal notes that in the late 18th century, historians cited India itself as the original homeland of the Aryans, a theory which was discarded in the early 19th century. He takes a rather skeptical view of this homeland search, as do some of the western homeland searchers themselves.

Latest among the homeland theories is said to be one by Johanna Nichols (1997). Lal says, "She holds that the dispersal of the Indo-European languages commenced from a region somewhere in the vicinity of ancient

Bactria-Sogdiana, thus bringing the scenario closer to the Indian subcontinent, but not quite there."

Nichols' theory is nothing new. In the running for two hundred years, it was discarded in the 20th century. She simply revived it with newer linguistic arguments. But she was ignorant of the archeological findings Lal relies on to push the homeland in the opposite direction—even farther east, into India. Lal asserts: "However, an important postulate in Nichols' thesis is that only the language got dispersed and not the people."

Just as predominantly black Jamaicans today speak the English imparted by white Britons, so, too, the Indo-European language has certainly spanned races. Either it started among Europeans and was adopted, through a very minoritarian migration, by different-looking Indians (that would be the invasion theory), or else it was originally spoken by Indians and adopted by Europeans. Today we have a defective understanding among archaeologists of what these linguists are busy with; and at the same time most Western linguists who cling to language theories to establish a western homeland for the Vedic Aryans are unaware of the findings that, to Lal, form such clinching evidence that India itself was the homeland.

However, if these linguists looked at the European side of Indo-European archaeology, they would see, around 2900bce, an enormous upheaval in Central Europe caused by an invasion from the east which is easily traceable in the material record, and includes a partial population replacement, now traceable with the new science of genetics. So, an Aryan invasion of Europe from the east is robustly supported by the archeological evidence. But the evidence for an Aryan invasion of India is totally and conspicuously absent in the archaeological record of India.

Chronology

Lal shows how the assumption of a non-Aryan identity for the Harappan Civilization in the 1920s followed from the chronology established by Friedrich Max Müller. He put the first Vedic hymns as late as 1200 bce, centuries after the demise of the Harappan cities. He later expressed his own doubts about this chronology. But it was too late. This completely arbitrary fiction became a consensus reality. As a consequence, for almost a century, we have had to sail upstream against the non-Vedic and non-Aryan paradigm of the Harappan civilization.

Like Umapada Sen and Shrikant Talageri, Lal dates the *Rig Veda* mostly to the 3rd millennium bce. This is one or two millennia earlier than in Max Müller's account, but more moderate and sober than the ages or eternities proposed by some zealous Hindu scripturalists.

Reply to Critics

The opposition camp has tried to refute Lal's previously published conclusions. Unlike the many would-be decipherers of the Harappan script, who have smugly buried their heads in the sands of their own pretended solution, unresponsive to criticisms or rival decipherments, Lal fearlessly tackles the issues raised by his critics.

He opposes the attempts to understand the "Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex" (BMAC, present-day northern Afghanistan and adjacent northern areas) as a settlement of pre-Vedic Indo-Aryans on the way from Russia to India. Soviet archaeologist of ancient Turkmenistan, Viktor Sarianidi, cites a bas-relief found in Bactria from some 2000 bce and relates it to objects found in Mitanni (Syria), where the local Hurrian language in 1500bce contained many Sanskrit words. Lal correctly remarks that this does not prove that Bactrians were ancestral to the (India-based) "Vedic Aryans," whom the invasion theory assumes to be more recent than the Mitanni Aryans. But it does prove (or at least indicate) something else: that the Bactrian culture was ancestral to the Mitanni culture, an east-to-west migration from Bactria to Mitanni. This may have been the second leg of a migration beginning in India.

Similarly, Lal opposes the late Gregory Possehl's claim that a horse find in Bactria indicates a Vedic horse sacrifice, performed by Aryans on their way to India. He points out that the horse was beheaded and does not satisfy the Vedic prescriptions for a horse sacrifice. But I would point out there is no need to refute Possehl. Since the *Rig Veda* was composed in the 3rd millennium (and not in

1200 bce as Possehl assumed), earlier than this Bactrian horse, as a sacrificial Vedic offering it would only confirm an India-to-Bactria migration, not the other way around.

Lal slices through the myth that the Sindhu-Saraswati Civilization could not have been Vedic because it lacked the Vedic glamor animal, the horse. Though few in number, they were clearly present in Aryan cities such as Hastinapura, both in depictions and in reality. Apart from mentioning their clear presence in Lothal and Mohenjo Daro, Lal goes through the evidence for horse bones from Surkutada, certified by the Hungarian horse expert Sándor Bökönyi.

Likewise, it is often claimed that there were no spoked wheels in Harappa, though they make their appearance halfway through the *Rig Veda* (as Talageri has shown). True, India's hot and humid climate is not conducive to the preservation of wooden implements, but terracotta models of the same spoked wheel have been dug up.

Finally, Lal's claim that excavated fire pits were Vedic altars has been ridiculed by Western academics who said they were just kitchen hearths. Lal quotes a leading Western archaeologist, the late Raymond Allchin, as confirming the ritual purpose of these fire pits. He also details why these cannot be kitchen hearths. Among non-technical reasons, he highlights a finding of fire-altars where a genuine cooking hearth stood close by, as if to demonstrate the difference.

Vedic Harappa

The continuity of the Harappan civilization is expressed in many ways. Several findings confirm the presence of Shiva in Harappa: lingam-yoni motifs are associated with a male figure seated in meditation posture, the same figure is the addressee of a bull sacrifice, and two attributes of Shiva are found together: a bull with a trident engraved on his hip. Ascetics are found depicted as sitting in Bhadrāsana (noble pose), Vajrāsana (diamond pose) or Siddhāsana (yogi pose).

There is also a depiction of a well-known Hindu fable: "The Thirsty Crow." A crow searching for water landed near a jug with a narrow top and tried to drink, but the water

was too low. It cleverly dropped stones into the pitcher so the water level rose and he could drink.

Statuettes show the namaste salute with folded hands. Married women are shown wearing red powder in the parting of their hair, like their modern granddaughters. The Harappan ladies wore spiraled bangles and other cosmetic gadgetry that is worn today.

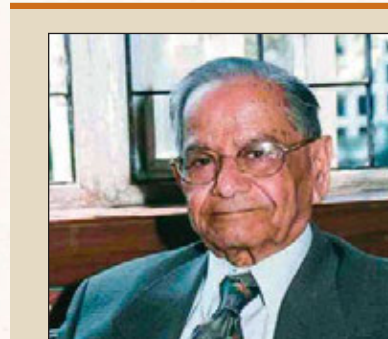
Concludes the dean of Indian archaeology: "So, it is abundantly clear that all the objections against a Harappan-Vedic equation are baseless." Indeed, "the Harappan civilization and the *Vedas* are but two faces of the same coin."

Ending the Aryan Homeland Debate

In the last fifteen years, two heady developments have made the westerly homeland theory hard to sustain. Philological work, mainly by Talageri and by the Greek Sanskrit professor Nicholas Kazanas, has given flesh to an Indian homeland framework and traced it deeper in ancient Indian literature. New genetic research has discovered proof for westward migrations from India.

The archaeological progress has been slower but no less spectacular. Though not given the proper publicity outside India, excavations in ever more Harappan cities have confirmed the emerging picture of full cultural continuity with early Neolithic as well as with later Hindu society. None of Lal's colleagues has discovered the long-awaited trace of an invasion.

We ought to be happy that a synthesis of the archaeological arguments against the Aryan invasion has now been published. B.B. Lal's life work has earned him a memorable place in history. After he had first discovered pillar-bases of the demolished Rama temple in Ayodhya, he was ridiculed and denounced as a "Hindu fundamentalist." Then, when he shifted from the invasionist to the "Vedic Harappa" position, he was denounced as that "known propagator of the non-existent temple." Yet, later Court-ordered excavations laid bare the entire foundation of the temple, proving him right. Likewise, new findings confirm his stand on the Vedic Sindhi-Saraswati civilization. 🇮🇳



Braj Basi Lal ("B.B. Lal", born May 2, 1921) is a renowned Indian archaeologist. He was the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) from 1968 to 1972, and has served as Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, and on various UNESCO committees. In 2000, he received the Padma Bhushan Award. After obtaining his master's degree in Sanskrit from Allahabad University, Lal developed interest in archaeology and in 1943 became a trainee in excavation under veteran British archaeologist, Mortimer Wheeler. Lal went on to work as an archaeologist for more than fifty years.

See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._B._Lal



BRADEN SUMMERS

TRADITION

Same-Sex Marriage and Hinduism

Examining lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues within the Hindu faith

BY MADHURI SHEKAR, LOS ANGELES
AND HARI VENKATACHALAM, TAMPA

FROM THE STONEWALL RIOTS IN NEW York back in 1969 to the recent legalization of same-sex marriages, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues have been central in discussions about civil rights and harassment in the Western world. This dialogue has forced individuals, organizations and governments to question their values and beliefs. Many religious organizations have turned to their scriptures, their followers and their spiritual traditions for guidance on how they should respond.

Well-known spiritual leaders from various faiths have stepped forward to present the views of their respective belief system, but there has been relative silence from the “movers-and-shakers” of the Hindu faith. Now, however—with recent deliberations regarding anti-sodomy laws by the Indian

Supreme Court, and growing populations of Hindus in European and North American countries, where these debates have been making headlines—these religious heads are speaking up. Their opinions on LGBT individuals run the gamut from outright condemnation through muted disapproval, apathetic indifference, conservative tolerance, to genuine acceptance. Recent surveys indicate that 3–7 percent of every nation’s population is gay, making a global population between 225 and 525 million.

LGBT History in India

Politically and socially conservative factions in India claim that homosexuality or alternative gender identities are an influence of Western ideas. This idea is based on the false assumption that being a homosexual or alternative-gender individual is a lifestyle choice. In fact, gender identity is an inborn

trait. Evidence suggests that prior to British legislation targeting what they regarded as “unnatural sexuality,” homosexual and transgender people coexisted with heterosexuals in pluralistic Hindu communities. Ruth Vanita, a scholar who has written extensively on South Asian LGBT themes, wrote in her book, *Love’s Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*, “Under colonial rule, what was a minor strain of homophobia in Indian traditions became the dominant ideology.”

Prior to the 19th century, historical sources that specifically refer to LGBT lives and lifestyles are relatively scarce. However, we can see a subtle intermingling of such perspectives and characters in Hindu legends and stories. Ancient Tamil Sangam literature compiled between the 3rd century BCE to 4th century CE contains stories about transgender individuals, referred to as *pedi*, and stories of deep love and attachment between men,

such as the King Koperunchozhan and Pisur-anthaiyar, and the King Pari and poet Kabilar.

The *Kama Sutra*, a classical text on human sexual mores and behavior, also acknowledges same-sex attraction and activity. The text describes individuals of the “third sex,” *tritiya prakriti*, and lesbian women, *svairini*. (For a comprehensive look into LGBT references in Indian literature, see *Same-Sex Love in India* edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai.) Outside of literature and religious stories, one can also look at the 11th century Khajuraho temples in Madhya Pradesh—famous for their erotic sculptures—to see same-sex love represented amongst the various temple carvings.

Under the dominion of the British Raj, homosexuality was codified and made illegal under the British penal code. In 1861 India saw the creation of the infamous *Section 377*, which criminalizes “carnal intercourse against ‘the order of nature,’” encompassing “sodomy, buggery and bestiality.”

Over 150 years later, *Section 377* lives on and has become a hot-button issue for LGBT activism. The movement to repeal the law was begun in 1991 by AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (the AIDS Anti-Discrimination Movement) and was continued in the 2000s by the Naz Foundation (India) trust. In 2009, in a historic move, the Delhi High Court struck down the law in a manner as to legalize consensual homosexual relations between adults. The case was challenged, however, and in 2013 the Supreme Court set aside the 2009 judgment, thus criminalizing homosexual activity once again. The main argument of the justices was that this was a law to be debated and repealed by parliament, not by the courts. Violation of *Section 377* can be punishable by a fine and imprisonment of up to ten years.

Section 377 and its Effect Today

The *Deccan Herald* of January, 2015, reported that nearly 600 arrests were made under *Section 377* in 2014 alone. In one case, a tech worker in Bangalore was turned in by his wife. Not surprisingly the threat of being jailed for sexual activity casts a shadow of fear and persecution over the LGBT community in India. Activists are well aware of cases where the fear of entrapment has been used to blackmail, harass and bully LGBT people.

A 2014 World Bank report, “The Economic Cost of Homophobia,” lists a few preliminary statistics on the harassment faced by LGBT individuals in India. Gay men were up to 12 times more likely to suffer depression, and the HIV prevalence was 15 times the general population, most likely due to lack of healthcare

access and education. LGBT individuals were up to 14 times more likely to suffer suicidal thoughts. These results, however, are preliminary, based on limited methodology, and show the need for more extensive academic research in the years to come.

Priya Gangwani, the editor of *Gaysi Magazine* in India, says, “Thanks to 377, we see the brutal symptoms of exploitation, hierarchizing identities, prejudice and discrimination.” Nevertheless, she goes on to affirm that the fight against 377 has fueled and united the LGBT communities and their allies. “Many stepped out of the closet in response to the Supreme Court’s judgment. It has made people protest, resist, rebel, choose, love and be anyway they want without bothering with what the law allows or does not,” Priya observes.

Even in the shadow of 377, we hear glimmers of good news for LGBT individuals, as demonstrated through city pride parades, the occasional same-sex marriage and the increasing visibility of gay and transgender leaders. India and Nepal, both Hindu majority countries, have been among the first and the few to legally recognize the “third sex” or transgender individuals, thus enabling them to benefit from basic citizenship rights and welfare policies. In August 2015, Nepal issued its first “third-gender” passport to a citizen, and in September 2015 the government made history by explicitly enshrining equal rights and freedom from discrimination for LGBT individuals in the constitution. This puts Nepal ahead of several Western liberal democracies, which still may not provide full constitutional protection from discrimination.

So what are activists looking to as next steps? Pallav Patankar, director of programming at Humsafar Trust, India’s pioneering

Changing times: (far left) Two women are married in a Hindu wedding ceremony; (right) LGBT rights protesters in India



GETTY IMAGES

AIDS welfare NGO, is energized about the work that lies ahead. “Our efforts are twofold. The first is sensitizing the masses through pride marches, through appearances and interviews on television and in the news, and getting our presence out there. The second level is to talk to our politicians to make them understand that we are part of their voter base, and that popular morality may not always be right.”

Patankar stresses that, due to the laws in India, the work done by Humsafar and other LGBT and AIDS-related organizations is limited to those above the age of 18, thus leaving adolescents at great risk. He agrees with Priya Gangwani that the *Section 377* ruling actually gave a new wind to the gay rights movement in India. “Had the ruling given us our rights,



ANINDITO MUKHERJEE/REUTERS



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that still would not have made it a mass public opinion. This could be a great opportunity.”

LGBT Themes in Stories and Theology

When Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami spoke at the 2014 Permian Basin Interfaith Panel about Homosexuality and Hinduism, he said: “Hinduism doesn’t have a structure where it can come up with one view. It doesn’t have a singular authority that says this is our way of looking at homosexuality. It has many independent groups, some liberal and some conservative.”

Today’s various Hindu theologies emerged from a landscape of peaceful debate throughout history. Different schools of thought have always argued over topics ranging from the nature of the divine to the avoidance of certain foods, without accusing opposing views of being heretical or blasphemous. Ancient Hindu society had room for opposing viewpoints and lifestyles, and it was in this atmosphere that many LGBT groups flourished.

While many modern Hindus see LGBT individuals as a product of foreign—specifically Western—influence, ancient Hindu scriptures detail LGBT individuals, their characteristics and the roles they played in ancient society. Throughout Vedic-era literature, society is divided into three main groups: *pums-prakriti*, heterosexual males; *stri-prakriti*, heterosexual females; and *tritiya-prakriti*, those of the “third nature.”

Tritiya-prakriti encompasses a variety of minority sexual orientations and gender identities. This identity is broken down into further specific subgroups, including *napumsaka* (gay men), *sandha* (transgenders), *kliba* (asexuals), *svairini* (lesbians), and *kami/kamini* (bisexuals). Portrayals of these groups and individuals in the literature were usually expressed in a descriptive and dispassionate voice. Their presence in ancient Hindu society was widely known, accepted and regarded as a natural aspect of humanity.

Devdutt Pattanaik is the respected author of 30 books and over 600 articles on Hindu mythology. When asked whether Hinduism regards these individuals in a positive or negative light, he responded, “The idea of judgment, control or commandment is alien to Hindu thought. So LGBT being seen as positive or negative springs from our desire to judge, which is not Hindu.”

Judgment against LGBT individuals does not have a strong foundation within Hindu literature, while gender fluidity and same-sex relations are commonplace. Hindu Deities often appear in multiple gender forms, and many stories detail their same-sex and opposite-sex romantic interactions and episodes. Gianna Love, an activist and independent

cultural researcher, details the importance of these episodes in the formulation of Hindu values. “The effect these narratives can have on cultural value formation and conceptions of sex and gender is of utmost value. Deities with gender and sexual fluidity, and their stories, form very real belief systems, cultural values and traditions with real followers that are themselves of various non-binary and non-heterosexual identities.”

This is exemplified in the worship of Sri Iravan in southern India, a hero from the *Mahabharata*. Folklore states that Iravan offered to sacrifice himself in order to ensure the success of his army, but desired to marry and experience conjugal bliss before



Set in stone: A sculpture of Mohini—Krishna embodied as a maiden—at the Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebidu

his death. As no parent was willing to offer their daughter, Krishna himself took the form of Mohini, married Iravan and fulfilled his worldly yearning. Today Iravan is a popular patron saint for individuals of the third gender. In an annual festival at a temple near Koovagam, India, thousands of transgender men reenact the legend by ceremonially marrying Iravan and then mourning his death the following morning.

The enchantress Mohini, an incarnation of Krishna/Vishnu, is found throughout various episodes in Hindu literature. She often tricks demons into self-destruction through seduction and allurements. In one story she deceives the demon Bhasmasura into turning against

himself his ability to reduce anyone to ashes. In another episode she offers to distribute the divine ambrosia of immortality to the angelic *devas* and demonic *asuras*, but serves only the *devas*. Mohini also, through union with the God Siva, becomes the mother of Lord Ayyappan, a hugely popular Deity in South India.

Gender fluidity of Hindu deities resulted in not only the switching between male and female as binaries, but through shades of gray between the two poles. The imagery of Ardhhanarishvara, an androgynous Deity that is half Lord Siva and half Goddess Shakti, is widespread, and sculptures often depict the Deity bearing both female and male attributes. A similar story involves Prince Sudyumna, who inadvertently entered into a forest in which all men were cursed to become women. Lord Siva subsequently modified the curse so that Sudyumna would spend alternating months as a male and a female, and eventually Sudyumna married the God Budha (Mercury) and spent his female months as Budha’s wife and his male months as his student.

In the *Mahabharata*, the warrior Arjuna assumes the form of a male-to-female transgender, disguising himself as a dancer named Brihannala to obtain shelter with King Virata. Brihannala’s speech and character so impressed the King that he instructed his daughter, Uttara, “Brihannala seems to be a high-born person. She does not seem to be an ordinary dancer. Treat her with the respect due to a queen. Take her to your apartments.”

While many of these examples can be seen as progressive towards LGBT issues, other sources are clearly proscriptive. Hindu scriptures are divided into two categories: *shruti*, divinely revealed scriptures—the *Vedas* and *Agamas*—which deal with human spirituality and the nature of the ultimate Divine Being; and *smriti*, secondary scriptures, which often deal with law, orthodoxy and societal duties. While *shruti* literature is almost universally recognized and revered, the authority of *smriti* literature is often debated between various Hindu groups. Many of the proscriptions against homosexuality arise from the *smriti*, a lesser category of sacred literature.

Of these, the *Manusmriti* is one of the texts cited most frequently in debates by those who oppose the recognition and acceptance of LGBT individuals. The *Manusmriti* deals amply with one’s sacred duties, known as *dharma*. One of the central themes of *dharma* in *Manusmriti* is the need to produce offspring for the continuation of society. At one point, it states that “men who do not copulate for the sake of progeny are

unworthy of making offerings to the gods and ancestors.” According to those who rely on the *Manusmriti*, individuals who do not participate in gender roles that promote classical nuclear families, and sexual relationships that do not result in progeny, can be considered as failing the aims and missions of Hindu life.

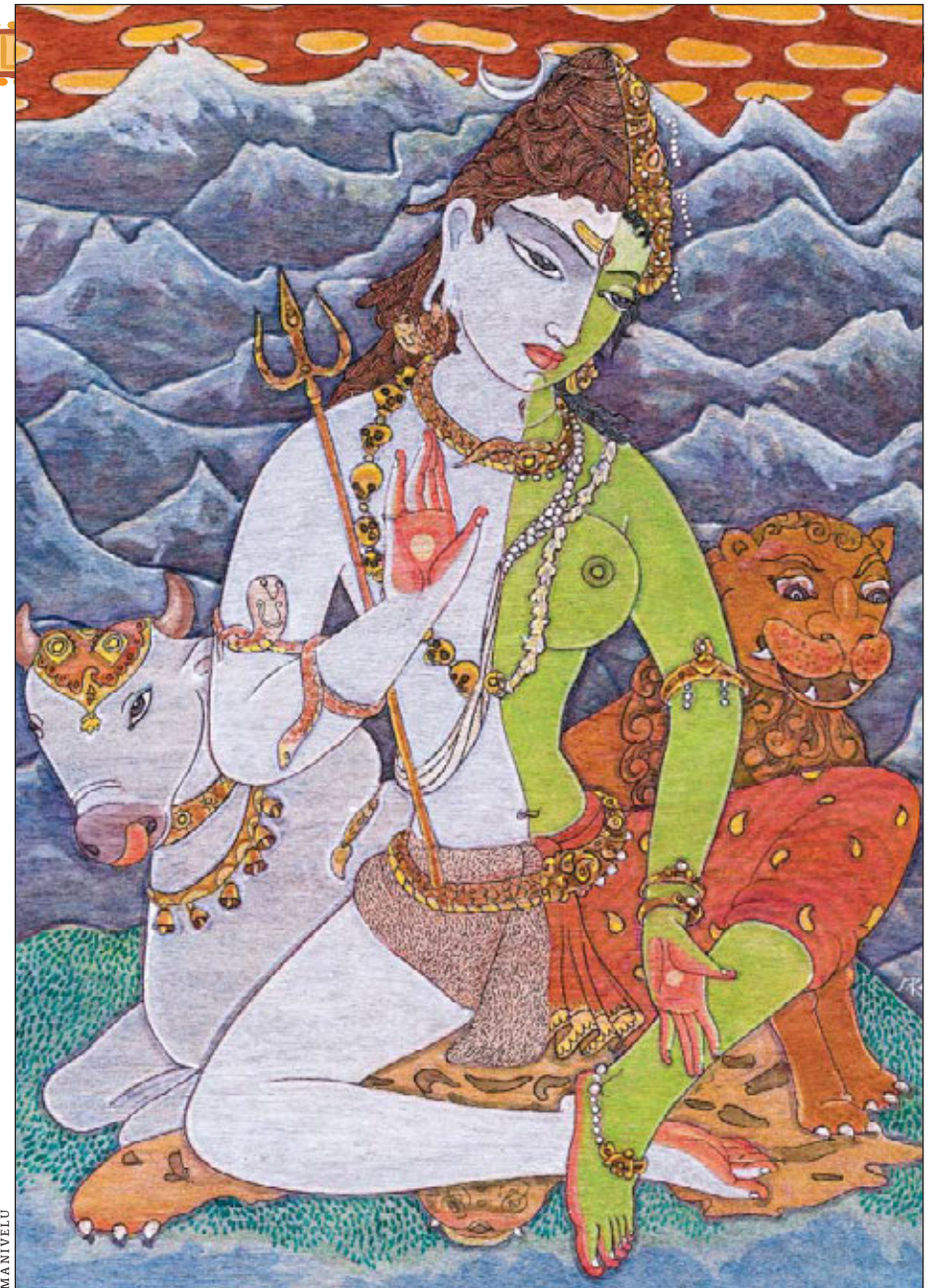
However, as Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami stated, there is no single Hindu view on any issue, including recognition of LGBT individuals. Some liberal viewpoints counter the purported need to form heterosexual relationships and produce progeny by citing the strict prohibitions against men of the third gender marrying women, as detailed in the *Naradasmriti*. Also, these liberal interpretations view same-sex attractions and their pursuit as falling under *kama*, or “sensual pleasure”—which, after all, is one of the four aims of Hindu life. The *Kama Sutra* even romantically describes the intimacy and commitment of LGBT couples with the words: “There are also third-sexed citizens, sometimes greatly attached to each other and with complete faith in one another, who get married together.”

While Hinduism’s folklore does not clearly establish the practical place of LGBT individuals in society, leaving the matter open for discussion, one needs to consider the Hindu tradition of acceptance and inclusivity. The culture of free debate and open conversation without the threat of persecution is what allowed different schools of thought to flourish, and for “third-natured” individuals to live unmolested. It is when this freedom breaks down that travesties occur and the beauty and breadth of Hinduism is forsaken.

A Rajasthani story tells of two women, Teeja and Beeja, who are married under the pretense that Beeja was a man so her father could acquire Teeja’s dowry. On their wedding night, however, the women accept each other as life partners, infuriating the rest of the villagers. Attempting to gain acceptance among the villagers, the female lovers undergo trials and tribulations; at one point they even use magic to temporarily change Beeja’s gender. Ultimately, however, each retains her natural gender and they flee to the forests, sheltered by the spirits who dwell there. In one version of the tale, the spirits ask the women whether they are afraid to be in the presence of apparitions. The women reply, “No, we are not. We fear humans more.”

Same-Sex Marriage in a Hindu Context

One of the cornerstones of Hindu practice is the focus on family life. Hinduism prescribes the four progressive stages of a dharmic life as the four *ashramas*. They are *brahmacharya* (student), *grihastha* (householder), *vanaprastha* (retire) and *sannyasa* (renunciate).



Male and female: a painting depicting Ardhhanarishvara, an androgynous Deity that is half Siva and half Shakti. The name itself means “half-female God.”

Can a committed same-sex relationship be considered the *grihastha* or family stage? Can the Hindu marriage ceremony have room for couples who do not conform to gender norms and expectations?

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami spoke on this issue at the Midland Interfaith Conference in 2014: “Marriage is helpful to create stable relationships. So, therefore, we take the Hindu point of view, shared by many, that gay marriage stabilizes relationships and is a good thing.”

We interviewed four different couples who are either already married or are planning their wedding ceremonies in the near future, to hear what Hindu marriage means to them.

Monica Elise Davis and Colleen Ryan

Monica and Colleen met in law school. Before their romance began, they bonded as study buddies preparing for the California bar exam. Several months later, they knew they were more than friends. They were engaged in December of 2011, and kept an eye on the developments towards marriage equality in California. They could not have timed their wedding better. Merely six weeks after marriage equality became legal in the state, Monica and Colleen tied the knot with a Hindu ceremony in Napa Valley.

Monica, who was raised Hindu, and Colleen, who was raised Catholic, thought deeply and carefully about the weight and meaning of their wedding. They were inclined



ELLE JAE

Recent weddings: (clockwise from above) Monica and Colleen Davis during their marriage ceremony in California in August of 2013; D'Lo and Anjali Alimchandani were married on the 16th of September, 2015; Sunil and Maarten were wed in Belgium in August of 2015

towards a Hindu ceremony, especially since they could find nothing in Hindu scripture that opposed their union, unlike in the Catholic tradition.

The ceremony wound up being an intermingling of rituals from both faiths that they held dear, with Colleen's uncle officiating. The brides exchanged garlands and walked around the sacred fire seven times. Who led whom around the fire? "We thought about that," says Monica, laughing. "We took turns in who led, and in the last round we tried to walk side by side, which was really hard to do. We were trying to be true partners in our ceremony."

The ceremony included more all-American details, such as the personal vows, the exchanging of rings and the kiss at the end. Monica who is chairperson of TriKone, a Bay Area LGBT organization, confides "We were in front of all of our friends and family, and growing up in the US everyone else kisses at the end! We wanted to show that this relationship is real; we're married!"

Sunil Sharma and Maarten Cornelis

Sunil and Maarten's wedding—a grand three-day affair—took place at the estate of Kasteel Van Leewergem in Ghent, Belgium,

in August 2015. By conducting an authentic Hindu ceremony in the heart of Belgium, Sunil and Maarten guaranteed an intermingling of their families and cultural backgrounds.

Cultural unification is important to Sunil and Maarten, who practice Hinduism and Buddhism respectively. They met in Los Angeles in 2010 and got engaged in 2012 while on vacation in Belgium. Maarten had all of his family members dress up in traditional Indian clothing and tell Sunil



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"Welcome to the family," each in a different language. Finally, Maarten proposed to Sunil in Sunil's mother tongue, Kannada.

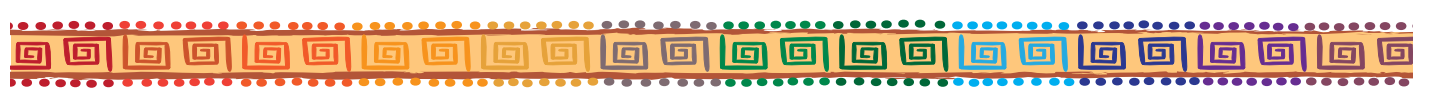
The couple weren't sure they could have a traditional Hindu wedding until they serendipitously met a Hindu priest in Europe earlier this year. Before agreeing to conduct the wedding, he put the pair through a rigorous conversation to truly examine their intentions. Sunil shares, "It felt like a pre-wedding interview, like in a Catholic wedding." Sunil and Maarten passed their priest's test with flying colors, which further solidified their commitment to their wedding and to one another.

Their wedding guests experienced a mostly traditional Hindu ceremony—including a spectacular entrance for both grooms in their own *baraats* (entrance procession)—with the rituals of the Ganesh puja, blessings from the parents and older siblings, fire sacrifice and the *saptapadi*, or seven steps.

"Instead of concerning ourselves on the gendered parts of the ceremony, we wanted to focus on being connected as two people in love," says Sunil.

Maarten agrees. "Marriage, any marriage, is two souls meeting and committing to each other in front of God." He pauses, and adds, laughing, "In front of Gods. Sorry."

Now that they are married, Sunil and Maarten plan to start a family, through adoption. "We're traditional," says Maarten, "being married first,



SREE SRIPATHY

then having kids and starting a family." Sunil chimes in, "I'm looking forward to spending the rest of my life with this guy."

D'Lo and Anjali Alimchandani

For D'Lo and Anjali Alimchandani, their wedding ceremony is more than just a personal commitment and a reaffirmation of their Hindu beliefs and upbringing. It's a political symbol.

D'Lo is a transgender Sri Lankan-American performance artist and political activist. You may have caught him on HBO's "Looking," Amazon's "Transparent" or the Netflix series "Sense8." D'Lo's work consistently marries his art and activism; and for Anjali, that was one of the things that drew her to him from the beginning.

"I had seen a couple of his shows and had a big crush on him," says Anjali. They started dating in 2010, and in 2013, began talking about the possibility of having a more formal, traditional commitment. They were both careful and considered in their choice—they identify as queer progressives, and even the concept of a state-sanctioned marriage held little appeal for them.

Their ceremony resembled a traditional Sri Lankan Tamil wedding, although they incorporated some rituals from the Sikh-Punjabi tradition as well. Anjali says, "Just the visibility of the two of us queer people taking part in this 'traditional' ceremony, usually reserved for straight people, is such a powerful statement for our communities to see."

D'Lo sees this ceremony as an important milestone in his relationship with his parents. "Throughout my queer life, it was about

distancing myself from them," he says. But this ceremony was an important opportunity to get them actively involved, and to seek their blessings for the union.

In Anjali's words, this ceremony is less about turning away from their communities and more about turning into them. They are excited about the enthusiastic response to their invitations. D'Lo recounts, "I wrote to my Appa's family and explained what was happening. Almost all of them wrote back—people I didn't even know—saying, 'We're coming!'"

Mala Nagarajan and Vega Subramaniam

When Mala and Vega got married at the Seattle Aquarium in 2002, they were making history simply by holding one of the first visible Hindu lesbian marriages in North America. They went on to become an even more iconic couple for the South Asian LGBT community when they joined the lawsuit against the state of Washington to overturn the *Defense of Marriage Act* in 2004. Although their case was rejected on appeal by the state Supreme Court in 2006, the lawsuit energized and accelerated the continued fight for gay rights. Now, in 2015, both the state of Washington and the state of Maryland, where Mala and Vega currently live, recognize their union as legal.

Thirteen years into their marriage, the couple reflect back on their South Indian Hindu ceremony and what it meant to them. "I didn't just want to have another party when we got married," says Mala. "I wanted to reclaim my religion."

Vega agrees. Despite being an atheist, she says that planning the Hindu wedding felt natural to her. "These traditions belong to us

as much as they belong to a straight couple."

They carefully designed the ritualistic aspects of the wedding. "We were really intentional," says Mala. "We were not going to do a ritual that replicated male and female divisions. We wanted something that talked about us as equals. And I felt like that was possible within the frame of Hinduism."

What still makes them laugh, however, is that when it came down to the day of the wedding, the priest and their family members wound up inserting and modifying rituals on the spot. "We thought—well, we've arrived!" says Vega. The interference of family members actually felt like a tacit blessing. Mala and Vega felt embraced and accepted.

The couple believe that the recognition of same-sex relationships marks a generational shift. "All of the more established religions are losing millennials," says Vega. Even though Mala's parents are among the founders of the Sri Siva Vishnu Temple in Maryland, they have not felt fully welcome there. "It's very clear to me that the temples have to change with the times to stay relevant."

They believe the Hindu temple could be the space that young LGBT Hindus need, and could be a bridge to future generations and their evolving attitudes, but that the responsibility is on temples to welcome and recognize them.

Personal Stories

The relationship between Hinduism and LGBT issues is a strained one. Tejal Kuray, an environmental consultant and social activist, learned about this at a young age growing up in New Jersey. When she asked her mother about homosexuality, her mother responded that homosexuals were dangerous and most

Responses: My Father's Answers To Tough Questions

BY HARI VENKATACHALAM,

OF COURSE THEY ASK QUESTIONS," Venkatachalam Mani, my father, laughs when asked if people pry into my sexual orientation. "I respond, 'It's none of their business.'" Since I opened up about my homosexuality to my father, he has found peace between his faith and my sexual orientation. "Hinduism is an old religion," Venkatachalam explains. "There are ancient descriptions of homosexuals. Even then, they knew humans were not all the same and differences should be tolerated."

Born into a poor weaver family in Southern India to semi-literate parents,

Venkatachalam lived a world away from his roots. "In my travels," he muses, "I have met many different types of people, with many different views. You learn to accept people as they are, and tolerate things with which you might not be familiar."

Still, I can't help but wonder if the accusations that homosexuality is wrong or unnatural affect him? "No," Venkatachalam responds. "Right and wrong actions are not absolutes. There is an ancient Tamil couplet that states: 'Even falsehood has the nature of truth, if it confers a benefit that is free from fault.' Even if one says homosexuality is a sin, if it does not harm anyone, how can it be wrong?"



PHOTOS: CAROLINE TSE



certainly not welcome in her household. "My mother, at best, sometimes insisted that she didn't have a problem with gays, per se," Tejal reminisced, "but why did they have to press for something like rights?"

Tejal made an active effort to shape her family's views and help them come to terms with LGBT issues. She offers advice to other Hindu Americans who try and reshape the views of more intolerant individuals in their families. "I wish that more open-minded Hindus would talk about LGBT rights with their parents the way my sister and I did with ours. All the rallies and protests in the world would not have changed my mother's opinion—but her children championing gay rights in the living room certainly did."

This grass-roots activism has helped welcome many LGBT Hindus out from hiding, but while some have been accepted with open arms, others have stayed in the shadows due to hurtful words spoken around them. Radhika (a pseudonym) had known she was a bisexual from a young age, having felt drawn to the idea of another woman's love. "I have always known I liked girls and guys," she insisted. "But I also knew the toll it would take on my family. So I had to decide to not let myself get too close to any girl, not let myself completely fall in love, because in the end I would have to be with a man if I wanted to keep my family in my life."

Radhika knew her family's views on same-sex attractions. When she was younger, her father reacted with anger and disgust when

he came across an Indian gay character on a television show. "Words like 'disgusting' and 'immoral' were thrown around between my older brother and father for the next few minutes." She tried explaining that attraction went beyond choice, and that many examples of same-sex attraction had been noted throughout the animal kingdom. Her protests were disregarded. "We're human," her family responded. "We know better."

Radhika initially was angered by her family's attitude towards LGBT issues, viewing it as blatant bigotry. However, as time passed, she began to empathize with their views and understand where they were rooted. She explains that society is often trapped between tradition and concepts that seem foreign or new. "Religion is simply a collection of ideas that help people deal with uncertainties in the world; and it often does just that. Letting go of any aspect may make people unravel and lose faith in their survival."

Although she stays on the sidelines and keeps her identity a secret from her family, Radhika hopes for a future where she can fully embrace both her Hindu and bisexual identities. She imagines a day where she can enter a temple with someone she loves and not face people's judgment or contempt. She believes additional exposure is the solution that will eventually bring about that change. The more exposure people have to the LGBT community, the more they can see that we are all human.

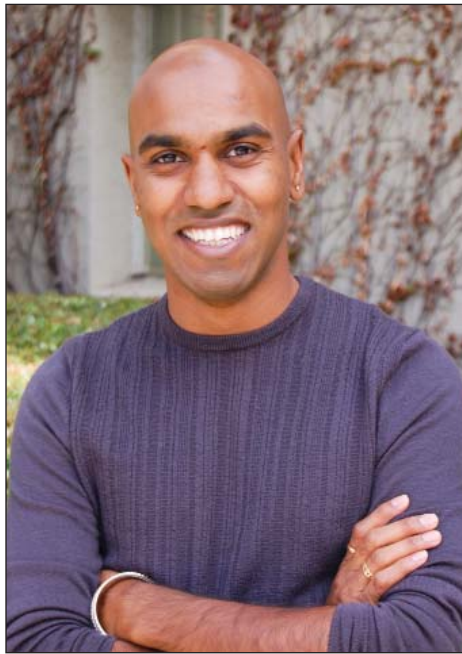
A life together: (left) Mala Nagarajan and Vega Subramaniam at their marriage ceremony in 2002; (right) Mala and Vega today, still happily married

Her hope, though, is tentative. She feels that the damage done by her family's views is in many ways permanent, and that the emotional scars will be always present. "I will never be as close to my family as I will be with my friends. I hide so much from them; and although it hurts, I know it's for the better."

On Allies, Coming out and Family Life

As societies evolve, families find themselves grappling with issues and ideas that had not presented themselves to recent generations past. Hindu families, with hundreds of years of tradition and expectations to contend with, can find themselves at a unique and sometimes painful crossroads when a child, sibling, spouse or even a parent acknowledges an alternative sexual or gender identity.

As a young kid growing up in Connecticut in the 90s in a devout and traditional Hindu family, Raja Gopal Bhattar was faced with several conflicting messages about sex, sexuality and gender identity. Raja remembers going to a library, setting up a separate email account, and emailing HINDUISM TODAY, desperate to get a real answer from a trusted spiritual source. Soon an email was sent back. "It was the sweetest email," Raja remembers.



ECOMMONS, LUC.EDU



PEMMARAJU RAO

Strong voices: (left to right) Raja Gopal Bhattar; Dr. Pemmaraju Rao

"I don't even remember who it was at this point, but they were an editor at HINDUISM TODAY, and they said, 'God made you the way you are. As long as you love yourself and you're a good person; you're fine.'"

Raja is now the director of the LGBT Campus Resource Center at UCLA, where he is a PhD candidate in Higher Education. Raja identifies as gender-queer and prefers the pronouns "they," "them" or "their" when being referred to, rather than "him" or "her." Raja traces back their journey towards growth and acceptance to that first supportive moment of validation from Hawaii, and the knowledge that they could still be a part of the Hindu tradition they were raised in.

Raja speaks to the unique issues of Hindu LGBT individuals and their families. "Our desi families, coming from our unique immigrant experience, have instilled this guilt and responsibility in us, since they have sacrificed so much to come to this country. So, there's a lot of pressure on young adults to achieve the 'right' career and 'right' marriage."

Dr. Pemmaraju Rao, a physician and psychiatrist based in Texas, elaborates on the "double-whammy" of expectations for LGBT youth: Even straight individuals have to struggle with specific cultural notions of who their partner should be.

Taking this into perspective, what should a young, queer Hindu individual do when considering the path of coming out of the closet? By and large, experts advocate caution and safety above everything else. "There's this white American notion that if you're not out to everyone, you're not queer enough," says Bhattar. "You don't have to come out to your family 'till you feel safe—your safety is most important. Part of our authenticity is living

in that complexity."

Pallav Patankar, from the Humsafar Trust in India, encourages LGBT youth to be strong and sure in themselves and to have a solid emotional—and financial—safety net before coming out to their family. He points out that the coming-out process will continue through one's entire life—to one's immediate family, to the workplace, to the neighborhood, to every new person one meets.

Dr. Rao encourages the parents of gay, lesbian and trans children to let go of their fears and traditional paradigms, and to truly listen to the feelings of their children instead of trying to control who they are. He urges parents to accept: "If this is their dharmic path, then nothing can stop that, despite our fear."

The process of integration and acceptance is very much a two-way path. Children have to be as accepting and patient with their parents as their parents must be with them. "Understand that the current generation comes from a very different framework than the previous generation," says Bhattar. "I can't expect them to change to accept myself, just as it is the other way around. It's a process, and it's a process both ways."

One source of hope for LGBT individuals

can be Hinduism itself. "Look to Hinduism," says Dr. Rao. "See how it embraces both the masculine and the feminine. Your karma and your past lives have led you to this point. It is a proactive choice by your soul. Your uniqueness gives you an extraordinary power to offer to the world, as a gift."

Conclusion

Over the course of our investigation into this topic, what has become clear is the diversity of voices and opinions within the global Hindu community. During the 2004 Kumbha Mela at Ujjain, HINDUISM TODAY conducted interviews with religious leaders at the gathering. Some of the swamis who came from a more international and cosmopolitan background voiced the liberal view of Hinduism being compatible with homosexuality, while others espoused the position that the Hindu tradition does not permit same-sex relationships.

In short, the situation remains complicated; but the need of the hour is continued conversation and introspection. India and Hinduism find themselves at a crossroads today. With increasing global awareness of LGBT rights, with same-sex marriage grabbing the headlines and the fight against Section 377 gaining steam, it is crucial for Hindu communities around the world to recognize and address this issue that affects countless individuals and families worldwide.

MADHURI SHEKAR, 29, was raised in Chennai and now resides in Los Angeles. She is an award-winning playwright whose plays include: *A Nice Indian Boy (about gay marriage in a Hindu family)* and *In Love and Warcraft*.

HARI H. VENKATACHALAM, 29, is an American Hindu activist and currently resides in Tampa, Florida, where he is pursuing a Masters in Public Health at the University of South Florida. Email: hari.venkatachalam@gmail.com

Further Reading

- *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai
- *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West* by Ruth Vanita
- *A Lotus of Another Color: An Unfolding of the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Experience*, edited by Rakesh Ratti
- *The Pregnant King*, by Devdutt Pattanaik
- *Shikhandi: And Other Tales They Don't Tell You*, by Devdutt Pattanaik
- *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath

A Proven Path to a Healthy Plant-Based Diet

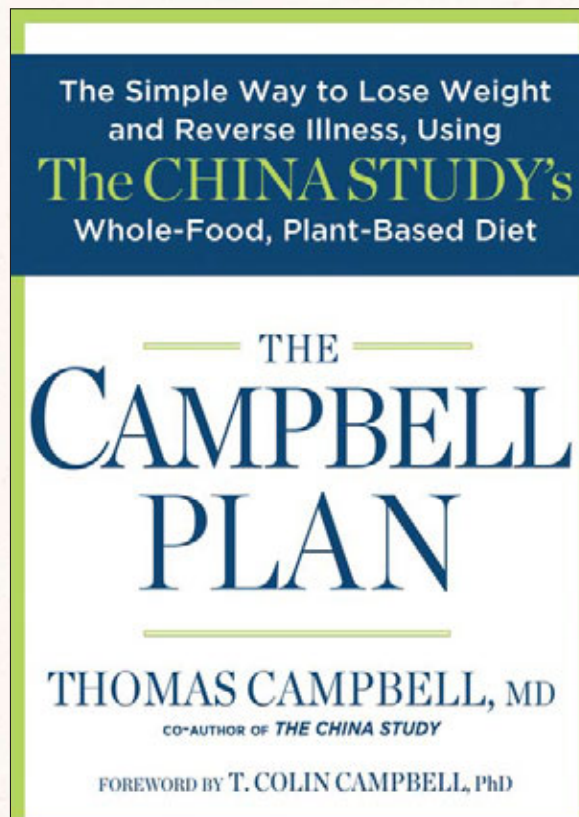
The Campbell Plan is both compelling advocacy and a toolbox for moving to optimal health by removing animal and processed foods from one's diet

By MATTHEW McDERMOTT

A DECADE AGO, THE GROUND-breaking book *The China Study*, coauthored by T. Colin Campbell and his son Dr. Thomas Campbell, presented compelling research showing how, by simply exchanging unhealthy dietary patterns with a diet based on whole plant foods, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and other serious illnesses can be eliminated. Now, in *The Campbell Plan*, published by Rodale Books, Dr. Thomas Campbell focuses on guiding us through a successful transition to a healthy plant-based diet. Hindu readers can take heart that an Ayurvedic, Indian vegetarian diet (minimal consumption of fresh dairy) comes close to the Campbell's target optimum diet.

After a recap of *The China Study* research, Campbell moves into a step-by-step approach to dietary transformation. Nearly half of the book consists of recipes and advice to help with that transition. Much of this information can be found in other sources, particularly in the wealth of online recipes and dietary tips for people already committed to a plant-based diet. For those who have grown up within a plant-based culinary tradition, many of the recipes may seem overly basic. Campbell's dietary recommendations and insights nevertheless offer useful guidance in tweaking culinary repertoires to be even healthier. Vegans and vegetarians who are advocates or faced with having to defend their choices will also find his cogent presentations of the science useful support for these discussions.

Committed vegans and vegetarians may be disappointed by this book's avoidance of the huge ethical and ecological dimensions behind a meat-free choice. The Campbells' emphasis on health and allowance for a small amount of animal flesh (lean chicken or fish) seems to be a concession to those in transition. For the main target demographic of the book—the person eating the Standard American Diet (S.A.D., see graphics



opposite), heavy in animal and processed foods—Campbell's recipes and meal plans are an invaluable jumping-off point to drastically improved health. Whatever your dietary goal, be it a complete transformation towards a plant-based diet or refining an already established one, the most interesting chapters of *The Campbell Plan* are those laying out his advice on how to think about food and his insights into contemporary hot-button dietary topics.

Start Thinking in Three Food Groups

Campbell recommends we think of food in three broad categories: animal products (Campbell makes no distinction between meat, dairy and eggs); processed plant fragments (sugar and oil, plus tofu and many other foods many people might not consider

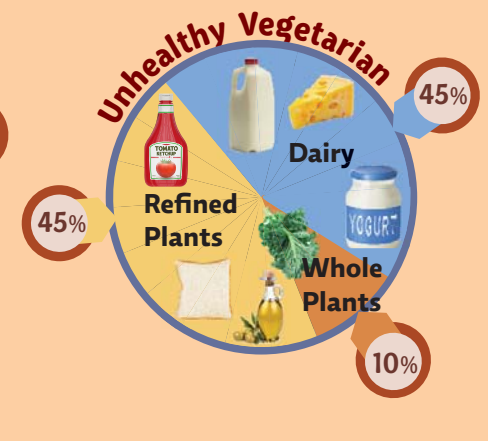
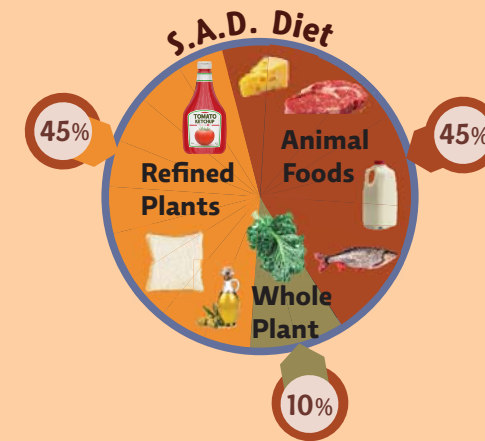
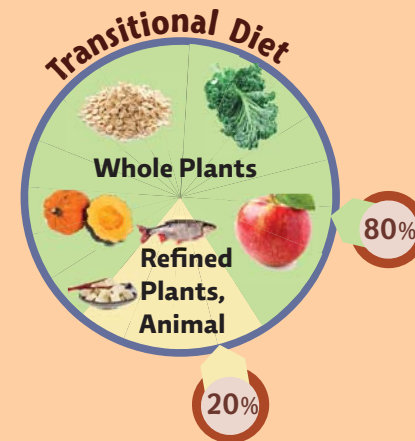
processed foods); and whole plants (does it look like something that came off a tree or grew in the ground?).

Identifying animal and whole plant foods is easy. Processed plant fragments are harder. Campbell says, "Processing means mechanical or chemical steps taken to isolate certain components of the original plant. There are different degrees of processing. Oils and sugar represent the ultimate processing results. Those mostly are just single components derived from a whole plant. But there are things like brown rice pasta in the health food section of your store. Is this refined? It has been mechanically reshaped, but read the label. The major ingredients of the food are whole plants, so I would consider the product to be almost equivalent to a whole plant."

Diets Differ Dramatically

Campbell goes on to break down different diets into his three food groups. If you follow the Standard American Diet, you are probably eating 45% animal foods, 45% refined plants and 10% whole plants. Following a low-carb diet (such as the once-trendy Atkins Diet), you're consuming 70% animal foods, 15% refined plants and 15% whole plants. Campbell's vegetarian diet estimate comes in at 45% refined plants (this assumes a high level of oils and refined grains), 35% animal foods and 20% whole plants. People eating what Campbell describes as a "healthy vegan" diet take in 75% whole plants and 25% refined plants. An "unhealthy vegan" diet reverses those percentages. Campbell describes his "Optimal Diet" as being "Whole food, plant-based," breaking that down as roughly 80% whole plants, leaving the remaining 20% as equal portions of refined plants and animal foods.

Campbell says, "The small animal-foods portion of the diet allows for infrequent fish and seafood consumption or for lean meat to



occasionally be used in very small amounts to flavor plant-based foods. The small bit of refined plant foods in the diet allows for use of practical conveniences that make it feasible for anyone to follow, such as some plain tofu, non-dairy beverages like almond milk, and occasionally some sweeteners."

What About Oils?

From the days of misguided margarine consumption to the current virgin olive oil fad, the debate on fats seem never-ending. Dr. Campbell's recommendation is simple: we don't need any added oil in our diet. Summarizing the reasoning and research behind fats, he writes, "We have heard that unsaturated fats are healthier, especially polyunsaturated fats. These polyunsaturated fats are billed as being not only less dangerous, but even health promoting." But, he concludes, "The most convincing scientific results come from trials in which patients with heart disease avoid every last drop of added oil, along with fish, meat and dairy. These studies have demonstrated the most significant reversals of heart disease ever shown. Taken together with the other evidence that added oils, even plant oils, actually damage the cardiovascular system, it seems the enthusiasm for olive oil and canola oil in the popular press is seriously misguided."

What About Paleo and Gluten-Free?

The popular Paleo diet eliminates what its proponents believe was not eaten before the advent of agriculture: grains, dairy products, legumes, salt, processed oils and refined sugars. Campbell sees a positive aspect of the Paleo diet—it eliminates processed foods and replaces them with lots of whole fruits and vegetables—but he questions its claim to historical accuracy. He points out that there is evidence we've been eating grass seeds and legumes long before we began cultivating them. The high amount of animal foods in the Paleo diet also get a thumbs down.

Gluten-free diets have become popular in

the past few years, with countless new gluten-free foods being created and old products being labeled gluten-free. Campbell writes, "Wheat gluten is currently considered a great evil in our pop nutrition world. But based on current evidence, I believe this is an inaccurate exaggeration. I also am disturbed by the popular proposal that gluten is so dangerous that if we just get rid of it we can eat creamy, cheesy foods, and meats galore, and find good health. This ignores far deeper and broader evidence that dairy foods specifically and animal foods in general are much more poorly tolerated than gluten." Still, Campbell offers, "I do find myself with serious concerns about wheat. Celiac disease provides the most damning argument against its consumption. Celiac disease is serious business.... In addition, we now know that non-celiac gluten sensitivity is real, despite the fact that it may be uncommon."

His conclusion is consistent with his overall dietary advice: Avoid processed white flour as much as possible. If you believe you have celiac, or some other chronic digestive issue, get tested. There's no harm in eliminating products that contain wheat or gluten from your diet to find out if you feel better.

How Bad Is GMO Food?

GMO food (Genetically modified organisms) is a highly contentious issue on a number of fronts: nutritional safety, environmental effects, food justice and corporate control of food. Proponents and opponents frequently make black and white statements about their need, usefulness, benefits and safety. Solely commenting on the effects on human health and nutrition, Campbell takes a skeptical but moderate approach.

"I don't feel convinced either way about the safety or dangers of genetically modified foods," he writes. "We've been eating some types of genetically modified foods now for a long time, and as guinea pigs we've fared okay, at least as far as we know. Over the past 15 years we have become sicker, fatter,

more diabetic and developed more allergies and asthma, celiac diseases and autism, but there are explanations for all of these things beyond eating GMO foods."

That said, Campbell lambasts the lack of effort placed into researching the safety of GMOs. Campbell says bluntly, "The truth is, we simply haven't looked for evidence of any safety or harm issues in a robust way. It is stunning to me how paltry the scientific literature is, given that this is a many-billion dollar industry creating the very food we eat every day....The impression I get is that industry has hijacked science. The public is left in the dark....I do not know whether GMO foods pose any real risk to humans. Most of them probably do not, but there may be a variety here and there that does. I just don't know, based on the science, and I don't think anyone else knows for sure, either. But this hijacking of science and politics leaves a horrid taste in my mouth."

Should We Eat Organic Only?

While there is compelling research showing the ecological benefits of organic agriculture, on a strictly nutritional basis Campbell says there is a bigger question we need to consider: comparative nutrition from equal amounts of plant and animal foods. He writes, "In reviewing the nutrient values of grass-fed beef/conventional beef, conventional spinach/organic spinach, it is readily apparent that the differences between beef and spinach, regardless of production practice, dwarf any small differences deriving from how those foods are grown. The argument for the possible health benefits of consuming animals raised on certain foods is simply a distraction from the true choice of eating animals versus plants." Campbell concludes, "The evidence overwhelmingly supports the argument that we should be eating more unrefined plant foods and less meat, dairy and processed foods. No other dietary recommendation even comes close in terms of comprehensive support."



ARCHITECTURE

The Forgotten Stepwells of India

With droughts the world over, we stop to reflect on the astoundingly complex ways Bharat's engineers assured life-giving water's availability in arid regions

BY VICTORIA S. LAUTMAN, CHICAGO

They are astonishing architectural wonders, virtually unknown beyond the villages in which they lie. Join us to explore the stepwells of India, marvels of water conservation from days of yore. Journalist Victoria Lautman was first enchanted by these marvels in the 1980s and remains mesmerized by them, visiting India frequently to catalog and hopefully preserve them. This article begins with questions from Mark Miller's interview for *Ancient Origins* (www.ancient-origins.net) and continues with additional questions from HINDUISM TODAY.

Which was the first Indian stepwell you visited?

The first was 30 years ago, on my first visit to India—it was Rudabai Vav in Adalaj, Gujarat.

That began your love of these marvels?

Yes, that memory of Rudabai had been

simmering in my memory for decades. I couldn't get it out of my head, it was so powerful, the whole experience of walking up to a low wall in what was then just a dirt patch (now there's a grassy park around it), wondering "what are we doing here, going to see a wall?" then peering over the edge and having the ground just fall away. There I was, looking down many stories. It was vertiginous, like walking to the edge of a cliff, but without realizing there was a drop—entirely unexpected. And the memory of walking down a seemingly endless flight of stairs, space telescoping into the distance, sounds hushed, light murky, the air suddenly cool instead of sweltering. I was enchanted and disoriented at the same time. I had been back to India many times since then, with this embedded memory, but not until four years ago, when I spent three months in India, did I decide to confront it. I wanted to see if that indelible recollection was real or embroidered over the

years. Well, you can see what happened. I became utterly obsessed.

In India, historical sites often have very little information on display. Was it difficult to find out about the origins of these masterpieces in some cases?

Yep, it's not easy, and in so many cases there's just no information at all. Even when there's a beat-up sign attached to a stepwell declaring it is "protected" by the local government, that's often the only information: no date, name, who commissioned it, nothing. It's terribly frustrating. But two points are important to me. I'm not a scholar but a journalist who embarked on a trajectory purely out of my own interests. I never dreamed of personally seeing what is now about 120 throughout the country! I backed into the subject in terms of research and, after seeing about ten or so, began vacuuming up everything I could read or discover or ask those

Water wizadry: (cities, clockwise from facing page): Jodhpur; Champaner; Abhaneri; Varanasi; the author at the entrance to Neemrana stepwell in Ahmedabad; Gwalior

more knowledgeable than I. So I am honestly a conduit for other people's research. The most relevant work was undertaken many years ago by a trio of scholars: Jutta Jain-Neubaur, Morna Livingstone and Julia Hege-wald. Without them, I'd be clueless about the history of these marvels.

Are there any that are fully functioning and being used as a water source?

Yes, though it's limited. Many of them, especially in the dry, western states, lack water due to the precipitous drop in the water table which, as you know, is a crisis only recently (but thankfully) being addressed. But in places like Madhya Pradesh, where the water table seems healthy, I've seen many wells filled with water being used for washing and irrigation. There are also wells still being used as temples, and others are being appropriated for clever contemporary uses, extending stepwell significance into the 21st century. For instance, a hotel in Rajasthan offers elegant dinners in a nearby stepwell, while certain renowned architects and artists have incorporated the wells into their work. There's even a zip-line in Neemrana that I'm told lands close to the village's stupendous baoli, though I haven't seen it, and even the thought terrifies me.

What was the most surprising find among these architectural wonders?

Oh, that's a long list, but I'll point out something physical and something personal. I've encountered several families living in a couple of the stepwells, which I didn't expect to see. I won't say where because I'd hate to inadvertently rat them out. What better use of a dried well than as a shelter for the destitute? As for the personal reaction which I'd never anticipated, it may contribute to my obsession. I find them so sad and diminished, in the same way we experience a formerly adored celebrity no longer recognizable after decades outside the public eye. It's sentimental, but I feel in a way that I'm paying homage to these once-loved beauties, and they make me acutely aware of our own mortality.

How many trips to India did you make to document them all and how many have you visited?

Since that first trip back in the 1980s, I've returned over a dozen times, but you just stop counting at some point. These days I stay for several months, which has been wonderful. But I've never come specifically to document

stepwells. I just plan excursions around them in areas that interest me, generally off tourist routes, and where I pursue other interests and stories. I travel all over. Delhi's my home base, and I'm constantly searching for material to use in various lectures and a blog I write in India. But I'll be staring into stepwells the rest of my life!

What are the dates of the oldest you saw, and the newest?

Last year I made it a point to see what are purportedly two of the oldest actual stepwells, not rudimentary precursors that appeared between the 3rd and 5th century (though those dates are flexible, depending on who you read). The Manjushri and Jhilani vavs in the rural village of Dhank, Saurashtra, are either 6th or early 7th century. Who knows? It was incredibly rewarding to see them, despite their being in deplorable states. And though it's not technically a stepwell, the Birka Bawari in Jodhpur is the most contemporary iteration I've seen. It was built around 2009 specifically to harvest water in a residential development. It looks fantastic, based on traditional stepwell design, and is to be applauded for adapting an ancient, efficient and gorgeous system to modern needs.

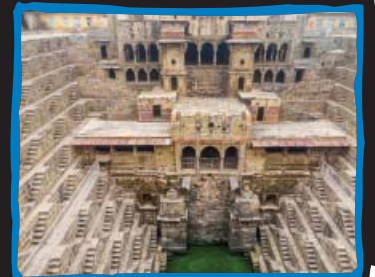
What about the deities you have found and whether they are still worshiped and how they are worshiped in the wells?

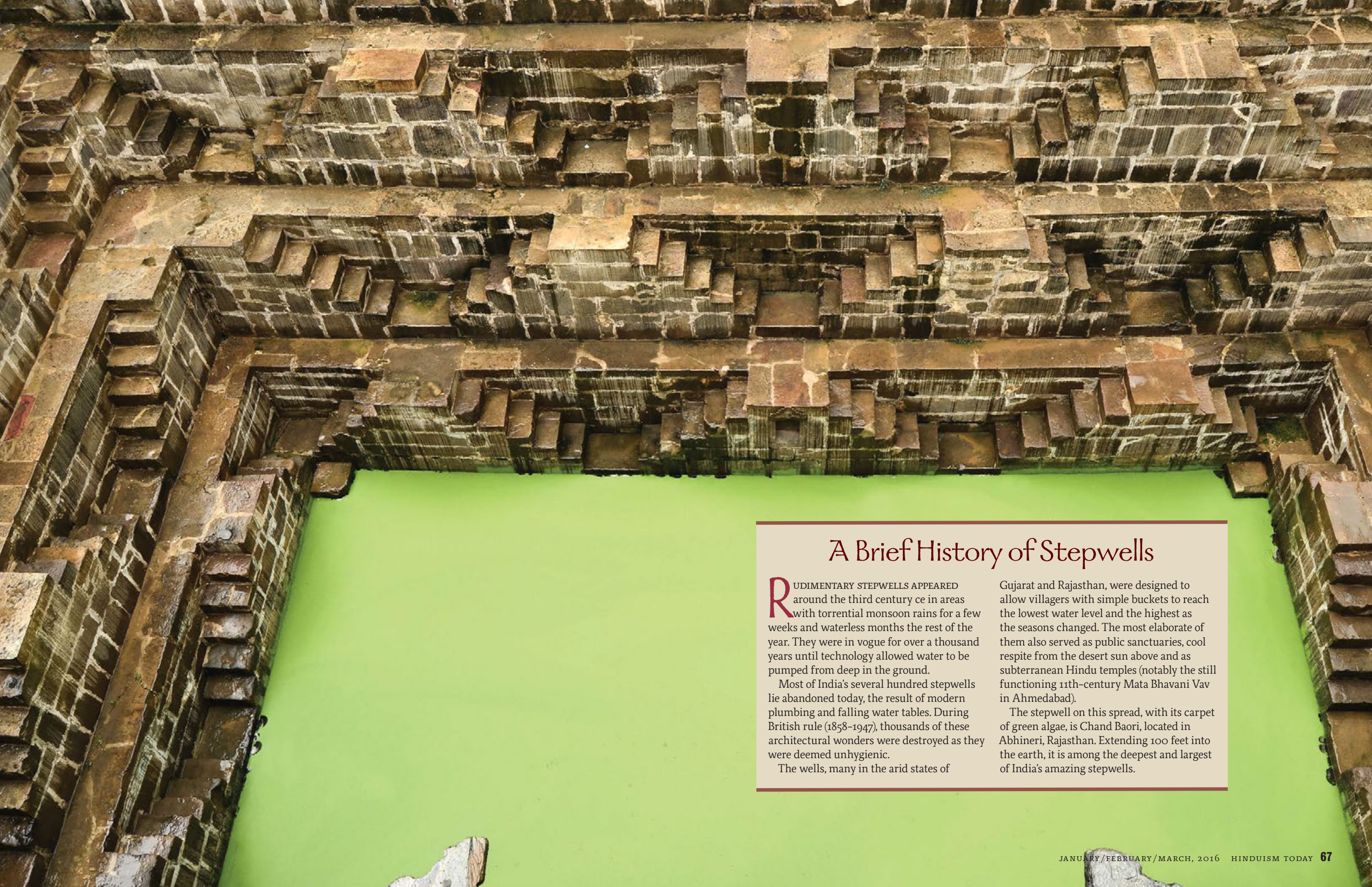
Most of the wells I've visited are devoid of people, water and any worship, but I know there are a number of active temples. The most marvelous working temple I've visited so far is Mata Bhavani vav in Ahmedabad. It's the oldest stepwell in the city, built in the mid-11th century, and even though it's technically protected by the government, the local community has been using it for decades, adding sculptures and decoration, building homes around it, performing daily rituals. Mata Bhavani is a form of the Goddess, and She is in the main sanctuary, but there are lots of other shrines throughout the well. Another stepwell, Gelmata-ni vav in the small village of Bhadla, Gujarat, is more a pilgrimage site. It's a vibrant place, built in the 13th century and with carved images of Shiva and Parvati, Ganesh and Vishnu. The water there is considered blessed, and everyone—families, babies, holy men—comes to drink it or pour it on themselves.

Is there any preservation consciousness within the Indian government, and have they cataloged the wells?

Yes, there is such a consciousness and it seems to be rising as India's water crisis worsens. The Archeological Survey of India has undertaken preservation of several wells, and protected many others. But in so

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY VICTORIA LAUTMAN





A Brief History of Stepwells

RUDIMENTARY STEPWELLS APPEARED around the third century ce in areas with torrential monsoon rains for a few weeks and waterless months the rest of the year. They were in vogue for over a thousand years until technology allowed water to be pumped from deep in the ground.

Most of India's several hundred stepwells lie abandoned today, the result of modern plumbing and falling water tables. During British rule (1858–1947), thousands of these architectural wonders were destroyed as they were deemed unhygienic.

The wells, many in the arid states of

Gujarat and Rajasthan, were designed to allow villagers with simple buckets to reach the lowest water level and the highest as the seasons changed. The most elaborate of them also served as public sanctuaries, cool respite from the desert sun above and as subterranean Hindu temples (notably the still functioning 11th-century Mata Bhavani Vav in Ahmedabad).

The stepwell on this spread, with its carpet of green algae, is Chand Baori, located in Abhineri, Rajasthan. Extending 100 feet into the earth, it is among the deepest and largest of India's amazing stepwells.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Respite for travelers: *This well in Adalaj, Gujarat, was built in 1499 ce by Queen Rudabai. As with many surviving stepwells, it provided relief from daytime heat for villagers and caravans following the trade routes. The larger wells also served as places for social gatherings and religious ceremonies, as seen in this ornate subterranean shrine which would periodically be engulfed by water.*

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many cases, protection means a gate, usually locked, and a sign saying the monument is protected. That doesn't stop it from falling apart, or keep animals and people from getting in to ruin things further. INTACH, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, is trying desperately to restore and preserve monuments. They have chapters all over, and interested people can call them. But even when intentions are good and the people devoted, there's simply not enough time, money or employees to tackle a country full of stepwells. There are outside organizations, too—Global Heritage Fund and Aga Khan Trust come to mind. It's a drop in the bucket. Still, a drop is better than nothing at all! As for a catalog, nope, that doesn't exist. I'm trying to get a book published that's simple, clear,

with beautiful photos, and maps: anything to generate more interest from the widest array of potential fans. The more tourists who see the wells, the better our chances to preserve them for the future.

What is the single most impressive, fully functioning stepwell?

That's hard to say, because "fully functioning" is tricky. Mata Bhavani is impressive because it's like walking back into the 12th century, getting a sense of how subterranean temples felt and looked and smelled. So it's functional in that sense, but not for irrigation or drinking or washing. Others are "well-kept" but don't function at all: Rani ki Vav in Patan was just designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is pristine from restoration, but it's no longer a temple or a well. Then there's a huge, gorgeous well in Madhya Pradesh with plenty of water to irrigate, wash and drink, but only one family uses it, whose ancestors have always lived on the premises.

How would you describe the average Indian's attitude about these wells?

The average Indian honestly has no idea what they are, or has maybe heard of them but never seen one. I met a fellow who grew up a few blocks from Agrasen ki Baoli in Delhi

and he had no idea it was there. He was really embarrassed. No one teaches about the wells. They're not in history books or guidebooks or on tourist itineraries. Little wonder they've become invisible. I will say though, that whenever anyone Indian or otherwise sees a picture of one, their jaw drops.

Can you share a personal moment during your many adventures that you have never told anyone?

Early in my explorations when about to descend into the Neemrana well, I was convinced I would die falling down the broken, treacherous steps. I hated the idea that my son would never see me again if I fell into that pit. I asked my driver to take a photo of me standing at the entrance so my son would have a final shot of his mom, smiling and happy! (see photo on page 65). That well remains one of my favorites to this day. Strange, but true.



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VICTORIA S. LAUTMAN is a freelance print and broadcast journalist specializing in architecture, art and design. She holds an MA in art history and lives in Chicago. Contact: victoria@victorialautman.com

Hindu Heritage Endowment

PLANNED GIVING TO HHE CHARITIES

What is planned giving? A planned gift can be any kind of gift, large or small, and can be for any purpose. While gifts of cash are the largest source of charitable gifts, planned gifts are typically not outright cash gifts. Rather, they are sizeable asset gifts, such as life insurance, real estate, stocks and bonds or mutual funds to be used in the future. Charitable remainder trusts, gift annuities and other gift-planning arrangements are regularly funded using assets other than cash. Another definition of planned giving is the process of making a charitable gift of estate assets to one or more nonprofit organizations, such as Hindu Heritage Endowment.

The most common example of a planned gift is through a will. A revocable Living Trust resembles a will, and setting it up is more involved, but it may have advantages for some people. Another example is a charitable remainder trust. During the life of a person, he or another person receives an income from the trust and then the remaining assets would go to one or more charities. In 2005 the Iraivan Hindu Temple Fund, HHE fund #2, received over US\$1.3 million from a charitable remainder trust.

Life insurance policies provide the means by which a donor can make a large charitable gift at a modest out-of-pocket cost. There are three ways to give through life insurance: (1) the charity is the beneficiary of the policy; (2) the charity is the owner and beneficiary of the policy; and (3) the life insurance policy is a replacement for donated assets. Several HHE endowments are beneficiaries of life insurance policies.

A popular deferred gift is the charitable gift annuity, which is a lifetime contract between the donor and the charity. It is relatively simple to understand and establish. The donor can also name someone else as the annuitant to receive the annuity payments. The donor gives a gift, \$50,000 for example, and receives a set amount of money every year for the rest of his or her life.

Some planned gifts, such as a charitable gift annuity, are irrevocable. Others, such as will bequests, can be revoked. Depending on the country of the donor, an irrevocable gift can generate an immediate income tax charitable deduction, whereas revocable gifts do not. A planned gift requires careful thought on the part of the donor, considering his or her overall estate plan. Legal documents, created with the help of planned giving professionals, are often required. Planned gifts are usually arranged now and fulfilled later. There are numerous professional advisors in the charitable gift-planning field: certified financial planners; estate planning attorneys; life insurance professionals; certified public accountants and trust officers.

In the USA, the Partnership for Philanthropic Planning is the primary association linking planned giving officers and allied professionals, with more than 108 planned giving councils represent 10,000 members. For the council nearest you call 317-269-6274 or visit www.pppnet.org. In Canada the Canadian Association of Gift Planners represents 1,100+ gift planners throughout the country. Their website is www.cagp-acpdp.org.

The Charities Aid Foundation in the UK is committed to helping donors give in a tax-efficient and easy way. Visit their website at www.cafonline.org/individual/ and download their guide to savvy charitable giving. CAF also has offices in Canada, India, Australia, Bulgaria, Russia, Southern Africa and the USA.

New to planned giving and want to learn more? Please visit HHE's planned giving link at www.plannedgiving.hheonline.org. Here you can read all about providing the security you seek from your investments while eventually providing much-needed gifts to one or more of the 75 HHE endowments and their charities.

To download an Estate Planning Tool Kit visit www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment

Anonymous	US\$ 217.51
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	158.65
Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00
Other Donations	56,725.23
Total	57,626.39

Iraivan Temple Endowment

Frank Burkhardt	30.00
Anonymous	48.00
Muthu Senthilkumar	100.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00
Ganga Sivanathan	216.00
Other Donations	30,424.00
Total	30,848.00

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

Anonymous	255.00
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	11.33
Shaun Deepan Cadle	50.00
Gunavadee Caremben	8.34
Somasundaram Caremben	8.34
Sukanta Caremben	8.34
Sitara Rupali Contreras	108.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	8.45
Anil Kumar	27.00
Saroja Devi Manickam	3.90
Saroja Maureemootoo	5.56
Jogendra Moorroogen	2.83
Vidyadevi Moorroogen	2.83
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Chinmayie Rajasankara	7.50
Arasen Pillay Samoo	436.29
Yuganesan Sandran	21.00
Thangaratnam Sanmugam	201.00
Muthukumar Shanmugam	144.00
Hemavalli Sivalingam	2.93
Deepan Sivasarana	120.00
Total	1,542.62

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund

Anonymous	324.00
Bhavesan Moorghen	5.59
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	5.59
Udeyadeva Moorghen	5.59
Bijamati Pareatumbie	20.00
Kirtideva Peruman	8.43
Anish Rastogi	500.00
Arasen Pillay Samoo	213.89
Sai Singh	120.00
Rohini Sivalingam	146.32
Total	1,349.41

Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund

Vel Mahalingum	16.83
Manogaran Mardemootoo	28.57
Total	45.40

Kadavul Nataraja Ardra

Abhishekam Endowment

Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	9.00
Devajyothi Kondapi	303.00
Umasankaran Mohambourame	114.57
Gowri Nadason	135.70
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00
Bala Sivaceyon	30.00
Anonymous	108.00
Total	793.27

Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	16.89
Gowri Nadason	135.70
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	11.00
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00

Matthew Wieczork	5.00
Other Donations	4,800.00
Total	5,097.59

Iyarappan Temple Trust

Muthu Senthilkumar	51.00
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Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam

Anonymous	358.00
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Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund

Anonymous	324.00
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Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund

Arumugam Alvappillai	100.00
Anonymous	900.00
Raj & Damayanthi Bharathan	300.00
Michael R. Eisen	25.00
Shun K. Sunder	600.00
Vigna & Nirupa Vignarajan	600.00
Manny & Vinothini Yogarajah	150.00
Total	2,675.00

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha

Temple Endowment

Off Road Riding Adventures	20.00
Mano Rajah	75.00
Total	95.00

Hinduism Today Production Fund

Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00
P.C. Ghosh	90.00
Hiranya Gowda	62.00
Suman Goyal	101.00
Rajiv Kaushal	72.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Periasamy Sakuntalai	33.48
Michael Zimmermann	4.00
Total	637.49

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund

Kiran Davane	100.00
Tamnash Gupta	108.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	158.65
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Michael Zimmermann	4.00
Total	850.65

Hindu Education Endowment

Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00
Krishnan Rajendram	25.00
Total	125.00

Hindu Press International Endowment Fund

Hiranya Gowda	42.00
Devagharan Nair	32.00
Total	74.00

Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund

Anonymous	29.10
Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Mano Rajah	225.00
Total	1,604.10

Saiva Agamas Trust

Ganga Sivanathan	56.00
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Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment

Anil Kumar	27.00
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Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
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Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund

Anonymous	150.00
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Kauai Aadheenam Religious

Art and Artifacts Fund

Rajadeva Alahan	102.00
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A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan

Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund

Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	15.00
Total	165.00

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund

Anonymous	9,394.19
Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00
Anil Ananda Badhwar	83.25
Radhakrishnamurthy Bhandaru	101.00
Prakash & Vandana Devalapalli	51.00
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Janava Dharmadeva	108.00
Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Ruchi Gupta	100.00
Subbarao Jagannatha	751.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	1,066.63
Gaurav Malhotra	0.00
Janaka Param	51.00
Mrunal Patel	507.00
Nuckiren Pyeneendee	28.80
Mano Rajah	150.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	1,332.00
Aran Sambandar	162.00
Hitesvara Saravan	108.00
Aran Sendan	108.00
Guhan Sivalingam	97.76
Hotri Sivalingam	11.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	11.00
Ganga Sivanathan	56.00
Ramesh Sivanathan	16.61
Anjeli Soopraya Patten	155.00
Puspharani Sukumar	67.00
Devi Tandavan	51.00
Anba Dayananden Valayten	10.97
Vayudeva Varadan	150.00
Michael Wasylikiw	648.00
Total	14,924.21

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment

Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
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Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund

Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
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Manitha Neyam Trust Fund

Anonymous	150.00
Bala Sivaceyon	60.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00
Total	240.00

Kerala Temple Trust

Susila Nair	100.00
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Karnataka Temple Development Fund

Hiranya Gowda	1,500.00
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Swami Vipulananta Children's

Home Endowment

Anonymous	150.00
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00
Total	210.00

Hindu Literature Fund

Rajendra Giri	110.00
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00
Total	263.00

Hinduism Today Complimentary

Subscription Fund

Hiranya Gowda	102.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00
Total	162.00

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund	Total	348.89	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Anonymous	150.00		Other Donations	600.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00			
Total	183.00			
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	Hindu American Foundation Endowment			
Rajendra Giri	Murali Balaji	101.00	Total Contributions	\$136,518.06
110.00				
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Funds at Market Value, Sep 30, 2015	
Anonymous	Off Road Riding Adventures	20.00	Total Endowment Funds	\$12,936,228.69
Anthony Buckland	Anonymous	8.00		
Marlene Carter	Rajendra Giri	110.00		
Sunil Chacko	Dheeraj Handa	11.00	Grand Total	\$12,936,228.69
Sasikumar Darmalingam	Natraj Narayanswami	44.00		
Michael R. Eisen	Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00		
Sivamayam Gunaratnam	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00		
Ruchi Gupta	K.D. & A.D. Williams	56.36		
Kerry-Fleur	Total	354.36		
Gaurav Malhotra				
Subramaniam Pennathur	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment			
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	Anonymous	150.00		
Andrew Stich				
Soma Sundaram	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund			
Subramaniam Thambyrajah	Sanjay Dahya	16.34		
Marianne Hvidsten Thompson	Anil Kumar	27.00		
Devasiva Veylan	Total	43.34		
K.D. & A.D. Williams				
Total	Panchangam Endowment Fund			
3,726.39	Venkatkrishnan Balaji	10.00		
Siva Poomi School Trust	Digital Dharma Endowment			
Anonymous	Anonymous	67.51		
150.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	5,000.00		
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	Rajkumar Sabbu	25.00		
Pathmini Saravanapavan	K.D. & A.D. Williams	225.44		
Vayudeva Varadan	Total	5,317.95		
36.00				
Total	Kauai Aadheenam Info-Tech Fund			
86.00	Michael R. Eisen	25.00		
India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund	Insurance Premiums			
Danyse Crotti	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00		
150.00				
Hiranya Gowda				
66.00				
Kulagan Moonesawmy				
16.89				
Toshadevi Nataraj				
60.00				
Ganga Sivanathan				
56.00				

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Mosum Shah, University of Chicago, 2013 HAF Congressional Intern

Education

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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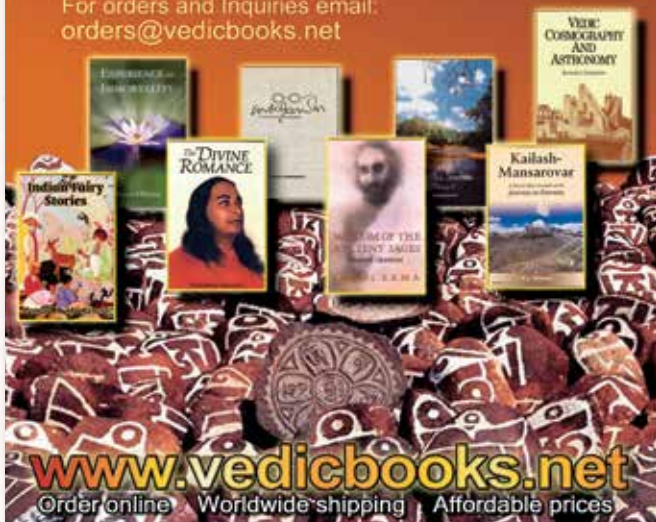
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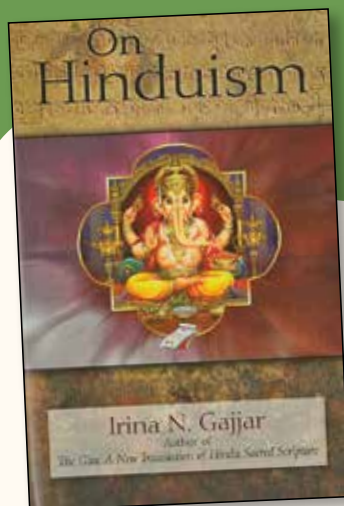


She has been honored with the *Jyotish Visharada* by CVA for her contributions to Vedic Astrology. She is co-director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies.

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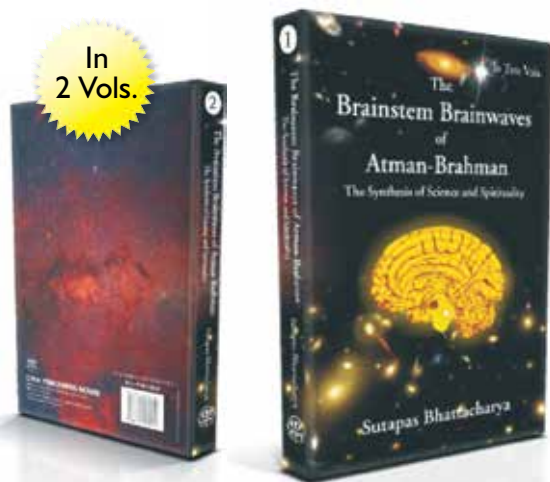
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This remarkable book undermines both the Physicalist-Materialist ontology of Science which imagines Consciousness to be a latecomer in material evolution as well the Theistic mythology of most religions which imagine a man-like God distinct from Nature and Humanity. It also resolves definitively the central problems of Eastern and Western philosophy.

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The Author: Sutapas Bhattacharya (www.sutapas.com) was born in India in 1964 but has lived in London since 1967. In 1986 he graduated with a First in Molecular Biology (London University) with prizes for top student in Biology. Having published a metaphysical paper arguing for Panpsychism in 1983, his real ambition was to explain Consciousness as Science could not do so. In 1994 he identified the physical correlate of the Divine Light (*a.k.a.* Pure Consciousness, *Atman*, Godhead etc.) with the brainwaves of the Reticular Activating System. This epoch-making discovery undermines both the Physicalist-Materialist ontology of Science as well as all Theistic religions. It also resolves definitively the central problems of Eastern and Western philosophy; i.e. the real meaning of Mystical Union and the Ontological Status of Consciousness. His 1999 book showed how the physical phenomena of Science as well as Consciousness and mystical phenomena, inexplicable to Physicalist science, can be integrated by grounding Science in a truly universal metaphysics based on Universal Consciousness and its energetic vibrations. It received remarkable plaudits from scholars familiar with Science-Mysticism interrelations (See quotes on page 3 of www.sutapas.com)

For the full evidence confirming RAS correlation see http://www.sutapas.com/Page_4.html

The Book: The Divine Light (Pure Consciousness) is central to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam/Sufism, Platonism/Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Hermeticism. It is the Universal Spirit within us. With masses of evidence drawn from scholarly sources, this book demonstrates how the archetypal spiritual experiences underlying religious myths are explained scientifically based on the true scientific explanation of The Light and of enlightenment. This overwhelming evidence provides the 'Authority of Evidence' which, combined with rigorous argument, allows the author to repudiate famous Western thinkers including Nobel laureate scientists in regard to Consciousness and Spirituality. Dominant Western academic myths denying the possibility of unmediated, mystical knowledge of the Transcendental Realm underlying natural phenomena are undermined along with the West's false pretensions to Universality. In so doing the author exposes the Institutional Racism of Western Academia which peddles Eurocentric and White Supremacist myths about 'Ancient Greeks' and the History of Science and refuses to take seriously non-European metaphysics. In establishing the One True Ontology, not only does this book truly integrate Science and Spirituality, Eastern and Western philosophies etc. but it also demonstrates that 21st Century Science actually resembles Ancient Indian metaphysics rather than the invalid, Anthropocentric myths of 'Ancient Greek' and Modern Western philosophers.

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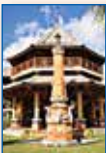
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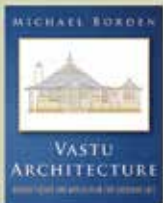
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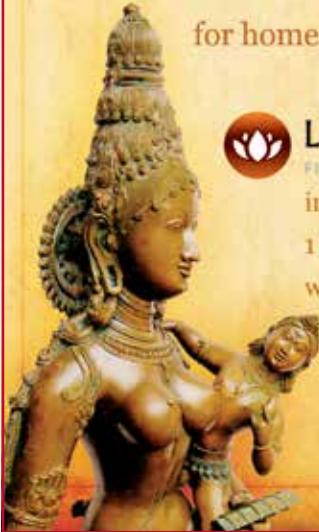
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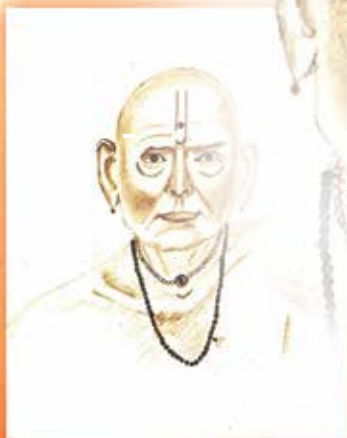
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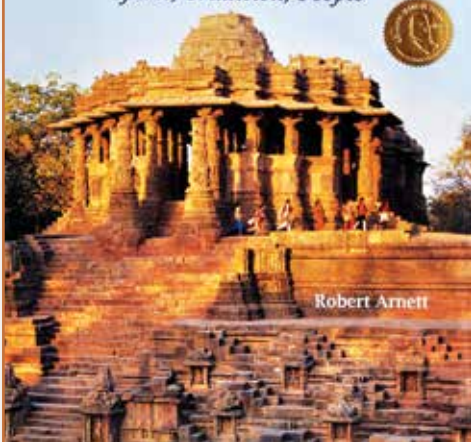


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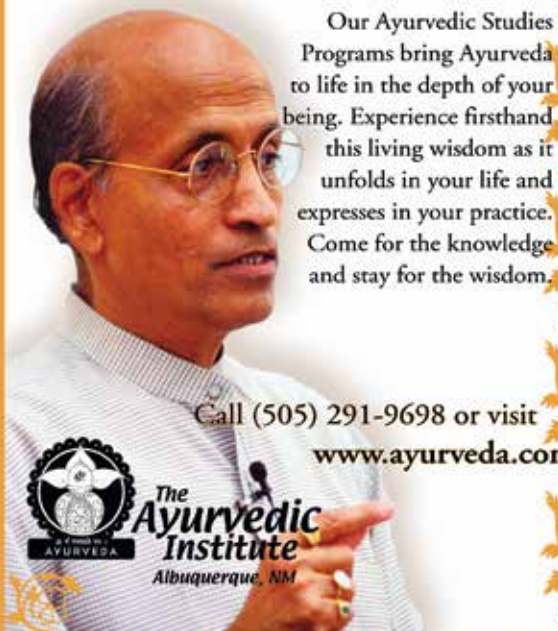
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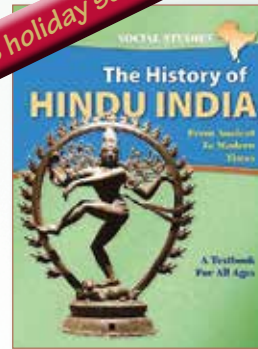
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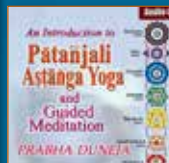
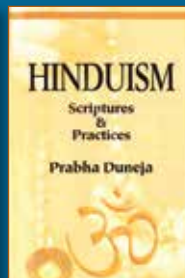
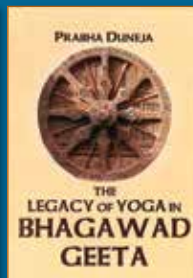
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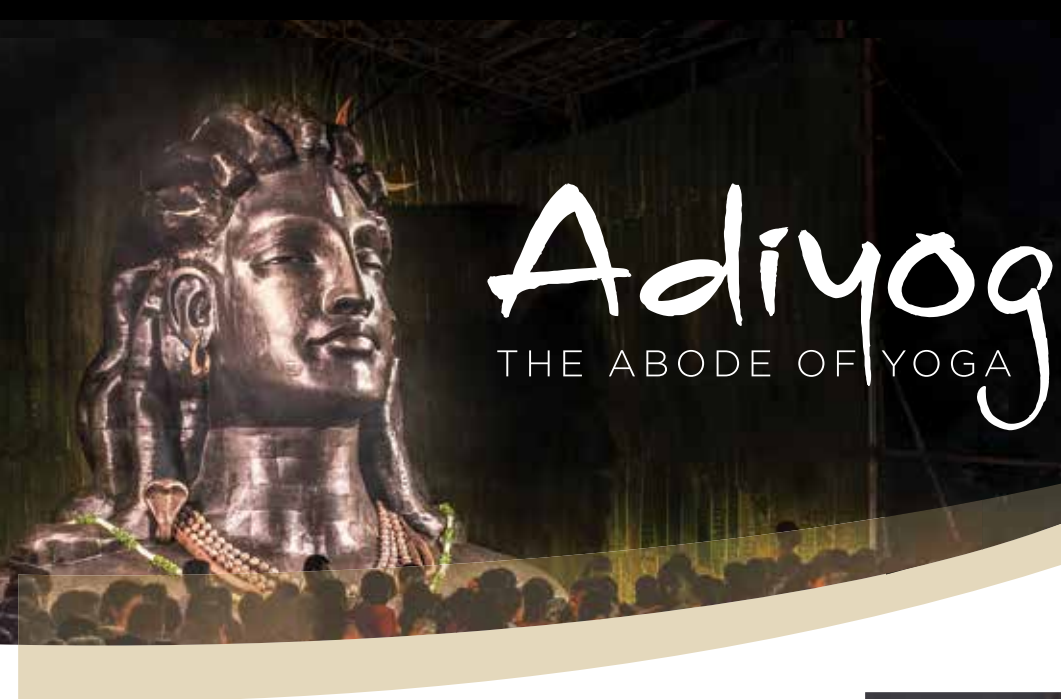


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The visually striking, \$8 million, 30,000 square foot Abode is a two-level structure. The main level features a 21-foot statue depicting the Adi Yogi in a meditative state alongside a consecrated copper linga. The linga will be submerged in water, and all will have the opportunity to touch and benefit from the energy that it will radiate.

Sadhguru, a yogi and mystic, conducted the consecration through the ancient mystical science of prana pratishtha, where life energies are used to create a powerful space for one's spiritual fulfillment and well-being.

"If you transform mud into food, we call this agriculture. If you make food into flesh and bone, we call this digestion. If you make flesh into mud, we call this cremation. If you can make this flesh or even a stone or an empty space into a divine possibility, that is called consecration." - Sadhguru.

For decades, Americans have traveled to India to imbibe energized spaces and now this opportunity has been transported to the West. An attorney who attended the consecration shares, "I no longer feel the need to travel to India for my spiritual growth, now the possibility is here." As a contemporary Guru, Sadhguru has a unique ability to explain and make relevant the ancient yogic sciences that appeal to all backgrounds irrespective of race, religion, nationality, gender and creed.



Use of five elements in consecration- Fire and Water by Sadhguru



The abode also details the yogic system of Bhuta Shuddi, which means "purification of the five elements." The basis for all creation, including the physical body, is comprised of earth, water, wind, fire, and space. The well-being of the body and mind can be established by purifying these five elements within the human system. This process also shapes the body into a stepping-stone towards one's spiritual transformation. Sadhguru's life's work is to offer the ancient science of yoga in its most powerful and authentic form. "Yoga does not mean standing on your head or holding your breath. Yoga is the science and technology to know the essential nature of how this life is created and how it can be taken to its ultimate possibility," Sadhguru adds, "I want this one message to reach every human being. No matter what they are going through in their lives – their struggles, frustrations, madness, longing – that if they are willing to strive, they can transcend all of this." There will also be various yogic processes offered at the Abode. These unique processes assist in every step that one takes in one's life, from birth and death, to everything in-between, such as baby naming ceremonies, weddings and more. These yogic processes are designed to ensure that every life situation becomes a possibility to be touched by the Divine. Visitors can also make offerings of garlands, oil for lamps, camphor and ghee.

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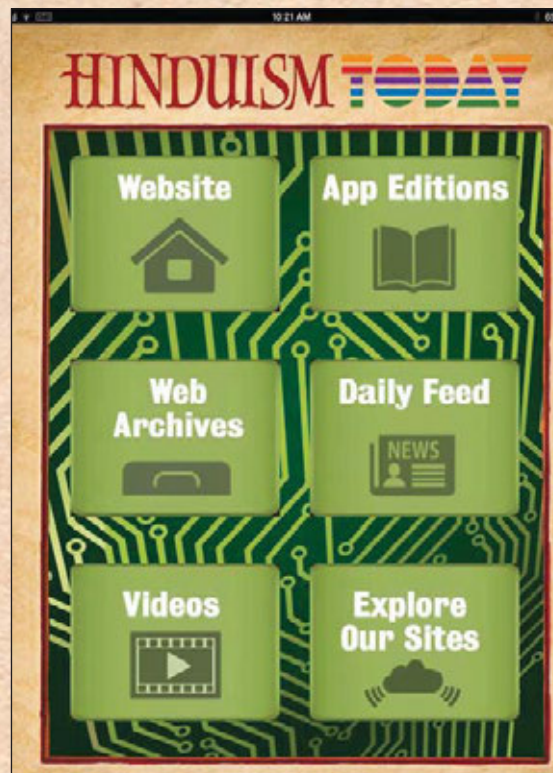
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