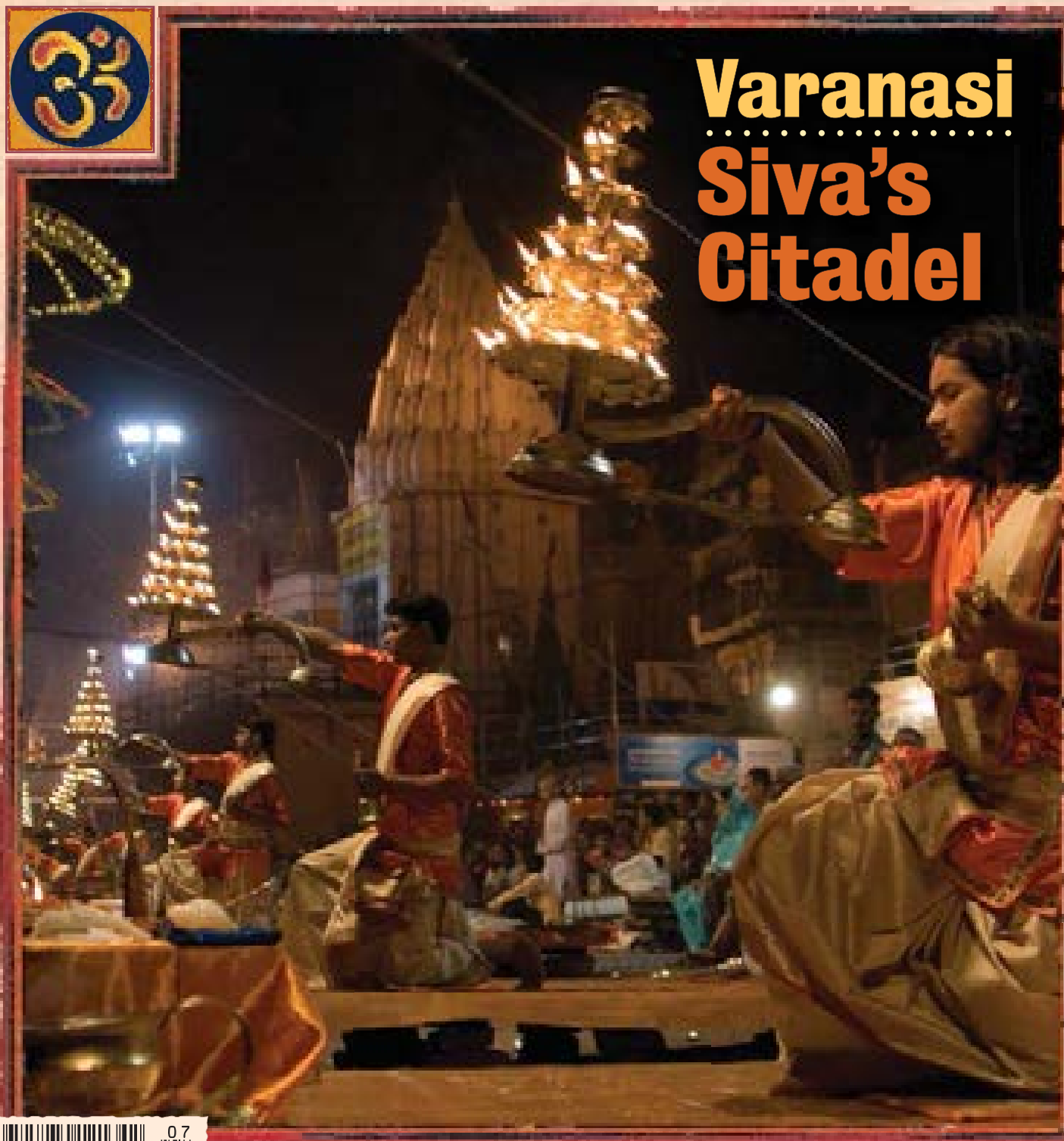


HINDUISM TODAY

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



Varanasi Siva's Citadel

ASHOK DILWALI

COVER: An evening arati at the famed Dashashwamedha Ghat on Varanasi's sacred riverbanks; (above) Pilgrims worship at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers, where the Ganga begins, a photo from the newest edition of *India Unveiled*.

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2015 • THE HINDU YEAR MANMATHA, 5116

Bodhinatha Veylanswami

www.gurudeva.org

INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** Varanasi, the City of Siva and Sanskrit Comes to Life through the Voices of Her People **18**
- Cuisine:** World-Class Dishes, Decorous Service and a Lavish Raja's Decor Define the Royal Vega **34**
- Temples:** Lord Murugan's Sanctuary in Singapore **56**
- Sri Lanka:** Reflections on Great Souls and Service to God by Jaffna's Chief Administrator **64**
- Briddhashram:** An Oasis for the Aged near the Grounds of Kathmandu's Pashupatinath Temple **66**

LIFESTYLE

- Insight:** Explore with Us the Life and Teachings of the Philosopher Sri Ramanuja **36**
- Philosophy:** Ramanuja's Vedantic Interpretations **50**
- Books:** A One-Woman Publishing Industry **55**
- Travel:** Our Reviewer's Verdict on the Sixth Edition of *India Unveiled* **58**

History: The Reverence for Hindu Thought among America's 19th-Century Transcendentalists **60**

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** Hindu Studies in Higher Education **9**
- Publisher's Desk:** On the Art of Listening **10**
- Letters** **12**
- From the Agamas:** Sage Matanga's Revelations **17**
- Traditions:** Discovering the Inherent Equality of Traditional Hindu Marriage Vows **52**
- Minister's Message:** A Snapshot of Hinduism in Guyana from Swami Aksharananda **68**

DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** **6**
- Quotes & Quips** **14**
- Digital Dharma** **86**

Advertisements and Announcements

Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, letters@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), July/August/September, 2015, Volume 37, No. 3. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-877-255-1540; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-240-3109; subscribe@hindu.org; advertising: 1-888-464-1008, ads@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy, a nonprofit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. USA subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$499/lifetime. Contact us for international rates. In Malaysia: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Kovind Enterprise, No. 17, Jalan Ungu U9/29, Sunway Kayangan, 40150 Shah Alam. Tel: 016-380-2393; E-mail: silvarajos@yahoo.com. In Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Blk 210 #06-326, Pasir Ris Street 21, 510210. Tel: 9664-9001; E-mail: dsam55@gmail.com. For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail letters@hindu.org. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

© 2015 HIMALAYAN ACADEMY, 107 KAHOLALELE ROAD, KAPAA, HAWAII 96746-9304 USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



www.hinduismtoday.com



Brazil BRL 14
Canada CAD 10

India. INR 115
Malaysia MYR 14

Mauritius MRU 115
Singapore SGD 10

Trinidad TTD 48
UK. GBP 5

Elders' Oasis

A former pilgrims' resthouse near Pashupatinath Temple in Nepal is converted into a home for the elderly, staffed by local and international volunteers. Page 66...

The residents and volunteer staff of the Pashupatinath Briddhashram, blessed to be only meters away from Nepal's most renowned Siva temple



GLOBAL DHARMA

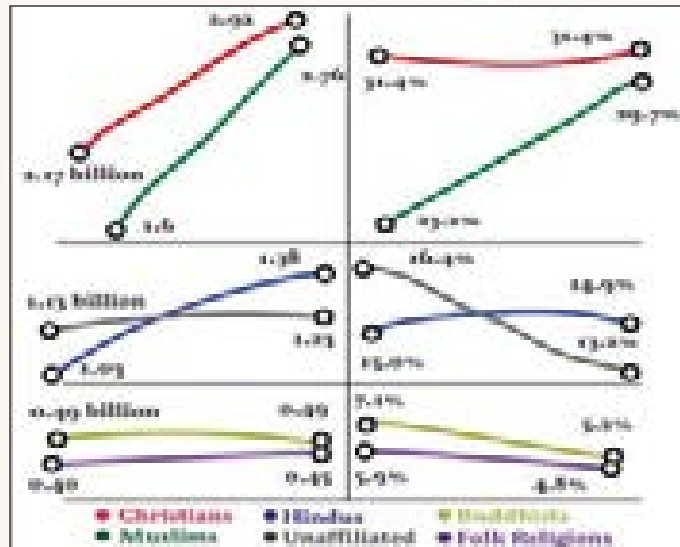
STUDY

World Religious Projections

ACCORDING TO RECENT DEMOGRAPHIC projections from the Pew Research Center, the world's religious populations could be in for some intriguing changes over the next 35 years. The projections attempt a preview of

what the world would look like in 2050 if current trends were to continue uninterrupted. Taking into account the current size and geographic distribution of the world's major religions, age differences, fertility and mortality rates, migrations and patterns in conversion, the projections show a variety of shifts.

One such shift is that while India will maintain its Hindu majority, it will out-run Indonesia in having the largest Muslim population in the world. In the US, Christianity will drop from 75% of the population to around 66%, and while it is expected



Global faiths: (left) A Hindu woman prays; (above) this chart shows 2015-2050 projections for the number of religious adherents (left column) and for the major religion's global percentages (right)

to retain the highest population worldwide, the Muslim population will become a close second. If the global population rises

to the projected 9.3 billion, the Hindu population is expected to increase 34% to nearly 1.4 billion people.



Raising the bar: The new history standards will encourage accurate information on Hinduism and Indian history in textbooks

FOOD

Tantalizing Flavors

RESEARCHERS AT THE INDIAN Institute for Technology in Jodhpur recently set out to discover just what it is that makes Indian food so tasty. According to a recent article in *The Washington Post*, the research team has discovered a key reason why Indian food is unique.

The team explored more than 2,000 recipes, breaking them down to their ingredients, then comparing how often and to what intensity the ingredients share flavor compounds. On average, ingredients will have

about 50 flavor compounds, such as acetal, a refreshing, fruity flavor that you'll find in apple and orange juices and raw beets.

It was discovered that Indian food does something radical with flavor which is quite different from what is commonly done in Western cuisines. In the West, foods are often made using ingredients that have overlapping flavors. Indian cuisine however, appears to fly in the opposite direction, combining ingredients with decidedly different flavor compounds.

USA

Enhancing Education

THE VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION approved new history and social science standards in March, improving the way Hinduism and the history of India will be taught in public schools. The change was in large part due to the work of the Hindu American Foundation. The Board's vote paved the way for a new curriculum frameworks revision in the

state and subsequent textbook adoption. Previous Indian history standards placed emphasis on the caste system and Aryan migrations. The new standards will place emphasis on locating India in time and place, including its origins and early development. The Aryan migration will be presented as a debatable concept.



A complicated palate: Indian food has been found to have a complexity of contrasting flavors, unique among cuisines

EUROPE

Temple Openings

THERE HAS BEEN A RECENT flurry of Hindu temple consecrations in various European countries. The Hindu Temple of Alesund in Norway, the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir & Cultural Center in Scotland, the Krefeld Hindu Temple in Germany and the Hindu Temple of Zizers in Switzerland have all celebrated their official openings.

The Vinayagar temple in the small town of Alesund has become Norway's fourth Hindu temple. More than 350 Tamil residents living in the area had gone a long time without a central place of worship for their community. The town and its leaders are supportive of the new

temple. One Lutheran leader stated, "This is about having respect for diversity. Christians here have found such diversity very beneficial, and so has our society at large."

After three decades of gradual improvements and community support, the Hindu Mandir and Cultural Center, Edinburgh's first Hindu temple, has officially opened for worship with the appointment of a full-time priest. The center will also host classes for children, including music, language, dance and traditional worship.

In Germany, the Krefeld Temple concluded its renovation with a four-day festival. The



Strengthening Hindu communities: Over 1,300 people join to celebrate the opening of the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir & Cultural Center, the first of its kind in Edinburgh

interior of the former textile building has been decorated and painted, and 14 stone carvings, including several Deities, have been installed. The community's 300 Hindu families from the surrounding area can now attend the temple.

On March 8, the Hindus of

Zizers, Switzerland, completed the renovation of an industrial building to serve as their first temple. The inauguration was led by a Sri Lankan priest and included songs, prayer and dance with the traditional consecration. The temple will serve about 150 local families.

USA

Mataji Passes on at Age 88

ON FEBRUARY 20, 2015, Ma Yoga Shakti Saraswati attained mahasamadhi in California at the age of 88. Mataji, as she was affectionately known, created and sustained four ashrams located around the world and was given the title of Maha Mandaleswar during the 1974 Kumbha Mela at Haridwar. HINDUISM TODAY honored her as Hindu of the Year in 2000.

Suhag Shukla echoes the thoughts of Mataji's devotees in

a *Huffington Post* article: "She, amongst others, in following a higher calling, had entered the traditionally male-dominated world of Hindu ascetics. She was an embodiment of maternal, wisdom-filled love to all those who approached her."

Ma Mokshapriya Shakti—ordained disciple and successor of Mataji, who has served her guru since 1978—said that Mataji's ashes will be brought to Haridwar, India.



A woman of vision: Ma Yoga Shakti quietly traveled around the world, teaching yoga, singing bhajana, advising and uplifting all

HEALTH & WELLNESS

A Second Chance

MARK BERTOLINI, THE 58-year-old chief executive of Aetna—one of the largest healthcare insurers in America—almost died in a skiing accident in February of 2004. In the years following his near-death experience, he set about overhauling his personal health regimen. He has also reshaped the culture of his company with a series of unorthodox changes.

Attributing his own recovery to yoga, Mr. Bertolini saw an opportunity to improve Aetna

by introducing free yoga and mindfulness/meditation classes. At the end of a three-month test period, participants reported significant reduction in perceived stress and sleep difficulties. In addition, measures of heart rate variability and cortisol levels decreased.

To develop the curriculum, Aetna enlisted the American Viniyoga Institute, which advocates a form of yoga involving breathing techniques and gentle poses. To develop the meditation

program, Aetna turned to eMindful, a Florida-based company that takes its inspiration from the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, an avid proponent in the mindfulness movement.

To date, over 13,000 workers have participated in the classes.

"Yoga has made me question what I do and how I look at the world," Mr. Bertolini said. "It's made me consider my influence and how I treat people." Case in point: in January, 2015, Mark gave his lowest-paid employees a 33 percent raise.



Unorthodox leadership: Mark Bertolini, chief executive of Aetna

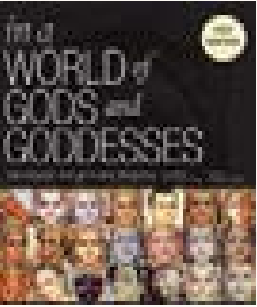


BOOK REVIEW

Gods and Goddesses

EXPRESSING HIS SPIRITUAL-ity through art, Indra Sharma's (1923-2006) unique masterpieces inspire peace and reflection in the viewer. A new edition of his book *In a World of Gods and Goddesses*, first published in 2001, contains sections on major Hindu Deities and classic Vedic texts. The book includes smaller, reformatted art and accompanying descriptions with text from James H. Bae, a practitioner of Hindu yoga, and a forward by Indian sociologist Dr. Yogesh Atal.

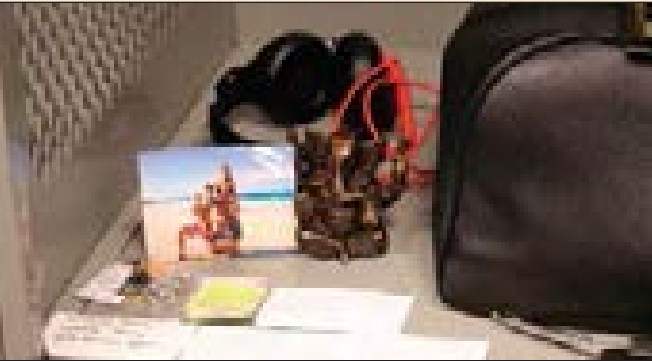
By combining contemporary and traditional artistic styles, Sharma creates images of



Indra Sharma: "For me, painting is my prayer, painting is my puja, my ultimate joy and peace with nature"

Hindu Gods and Goddesses that are altars of worship. Sharma has produced several hundred masterpieces over the past five decades, and a generous selection of these is presented here to preserve these timeless paintings for posterity. With painstaking detail put into each illustration, these beautiful works of art highlight the intricate mythol-

ogy and beauty of the Hindu pantheon. As quoted by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, "Indra Sharma has been an emissary for Hinduism's rishis and the beings of the Devaloka, bringing their darshan through his paintings."



SPORTS

Remover of Obstacles

DURING THE 2015 SUPERBOWL, professional American football player Tom Brady of the New England Patriots—considered one

.....
Ganesha's help: *The remover of obstacles silently assisting in the professional quarterback's locker*

of greatest quarterbacks of all time, earning over \$30 million in 2014—had a small Ganesha murti in his locker. When a visitor expressed curiosity about the statue, Brady responded definitively: "The remover of obstacles." His team won the game.

BRIEFLY...

MORE THAN 220,000 CHANTERS

were brought together on January 31st, 2015, by Ganapathy Sachidananda Swamiji in Tenali, India, to chant for world peace. The participants repeatedly chanted verses of the Hanuman Chalisa, praising Lord Hanuman, who manifests energy, happiness and protection. *The Guinness Book of World Records* has recognized the event as a world record for the most people ever chanting at once.

HINDUISM TODAY AND KAUAI

Aadheenam are pleased to announce the posting of key *Saiva Agamas* translated into English by Dr. S.P. Sabharatham Sivacharyar of Chennai. His

works finished works during the past few years include: (1) part one of the *Kamika Agama's* Purva Pada and most of part two of the Uttara Pada; (2) the Vidya Pada of four *Agamas: Raurava, Pauskara, Mrgendra* and *Matanga*; and (3) the Yoga Pada of the *Sarvajnanottara Agama*. Each of these *Agamas* is a key scripture of Saiva Siddhanta, and this is the first time these sections have been translated into English. Visit bit.ly/saivaagamas to see them online.

ACCORDING TO A 2014 STUDY

done by the Barna Group, 1.2 million people will leave the Catholic Church this year. This will coincide with over

THE 2015 UNITED STATES

Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee has submitted its recommendations, which are intended to inform the USDA's official 2015 dietary guidelines (to be released later this year). According to the chapter on food sustainability, an organic, vegan diet has the highest potential health benefits and provides food security while sustaining natural resources for future generations. A vegetarian diet is one of three recommended for overall health.

INDIA'S UNION SCIENCE AND

Technology minister Harsh Vardhan announced in Febru-

ary his theory that physicians in India used ayurveda to immunize against smallpox hundreds of years before the vaccine was made widely understood by Edward Jenner in 1796. The facts will all remain facts," the Minister quipped, not wanting to boast about the sophistication of Indian medicine so many centuries ago.

Global Dharma
news provided by
**HINDU PRESS
INTERNATIONAL**

Subscribe to a free daily
news summary about
Hinduism worldwide at
hinduismtoday.com/hpi



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

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



Founder:
Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:
Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Editor-in-Chief:
Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami
Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami
Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami
Production Manager: Sannyasin Brahmanathaswami
Subscription and Distribution Manager: Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami
India Editor: Sannyasin Senthilnathaswami
Advertising Manager: Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami
Assistant Editors: Sadhaka Rajanatha, Sadhaka Jayanatha
Correspondents: Rajiv Malik, Delhi; Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru; Mangala Prasad Mohanty, Odisha; Lavina Melwani, New York; Sally Acharya, Nepal; Paras Ramoutar, Trinidad. *Copy Editor:* Chamundi Sathanathan. *HPI Staff:* Chandra Sankara. *Sanskritist:* Dr. P. Jayaraman. *Consultants:* Dr. S.P. Sabharatham Sivachariyar, Sheela Venkatakrishnan. *Artist:* Rajeev N.T. *Photo Contributors:* Thomas L. Kelly, Dinodia, Dev Raj Agarwal, Vel Kadressen, Mu Devarayan, Indivar Sivanathan. *Webmasters:* Tim Mize, Dharmalingam Siddhan, Andre Garzia. *Distribution:* USA: Ingram Periodicals, New Leaf, EBSCO Subscription Services, OneSource, Ubiquity, Europe: SWETS Subscription Service. Malaysia and Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications. India: Central News Agency Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP. Trinidad: Pandit Narendra & Ashwinee Ragoonanan. *Printer:* Quad/Graphics, Waseca, Minnesota.

IN MY OPINION

Promoting Hindu Studies

Supporting and teaching Hindu Dharma through the application of higher education

BY RITA D. SHERMA

SINCE INDEPENDENCE INDIA has followed the route to excellence in science and technology. This is commendable, but the price paid has been the diminution of the humanities, which are essential for reflections upon and resolutions to many of humanity's critical problems through the application of new ways of thinking, feeling and acting. This approach, of transforming society and the human consciousness from the inside out—and not only from the outside in—was once a hallmark of India's wisdom traditions. Disjunctions, such as secular versus sacred and science versus arts, were avoided. There was no brittle compartmentalization of knowledge systems. Spiritual knowledge and ethics informed psychology, medicine, the science of consciousness, knowledge of subtle energy and much more.

Today, higher education is the most powerful transmitter of knowledge to tomorrow's leaders. Currently the American university remains the modern standard-bearer for innovative, leading-edge education and its applications.

Religious studies in American higher education is a massive project of which even non-resident Indians are mostly unaware. Harvard, Yale and many other important universities in the United States started with divinity schools. Scholars of religious studies are called upon for information by the White House, US Congressional committees and private Senate hearings. Today most major religious traditions sponsor Institutes, endowed Chairs (named professorships) and religious centers across cultural and national lines and are strongly represented at the great American universities. However, this is not so for Hindus, due to a general lack of involvement and investment by the Hindu community.

The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California (GTU), is the only Interreligious Graduate Consortium in America. With a reputation for academic excellence, this



eminent institution has established the in-depth study of interfaith dialogue, collaborative research and service projects between the world's faiths, where each attempts to, as Swami Vivekananda said, "assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."

The GTU welcomes the viewpoint of scholar-practitioners (including monastic scholars) as those who have the deepest knowledge of a wisdom tradition and can, therefore, most effectively transform and deploy it towards the challenges we face as societies. The vision of Hindu Studies at GTU is to develop systematic recollection, preservation and application of foundational principles and insights of Hindu Dharma for world engagement. The aim of the Certificate, MA, and forthcoming PhD concentrations is to foster Hindu philosophy of religion, systematic and lived theology, Hindu yoga studies, and ethics with emphases on foundational sacred texts, epic literature, major philosophers, sacred music, spiritual practices, art and symbolism.

Hindu Dharma is not just a philosophy; it is a multidimensional source of art, architecture, music, dance, drama, poetry, psychology, medicine, astronomy, grammar, mathematics and the science of consciousness. Hindu Dharma has survived for millennia, but is in a weakened state. The disappearance of important texts, commentaries and definitive traditions; the absence of new scholarly interest in complex traditions such as *advaita vedanta* and *pratyabhijna*; and a lack of community knowledge about foundational paths such as *jnana* yoga, are a few of many sources of concern.

See bit.ly/gtuhindustudies and bit.ly/gtu-apply for more on GTU's Hindu Initiative.

PROFESSOR RITA D. SHERMA, PHD, is *Director of Hindu Studies at The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA. Email: ritadsherma@aol.com*

The Art of Listening

With the modern distraction of digital media, we must be more mindful than ever of person-to-person communications

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

SOUND IS REGARDED AS DIVINE IN HINDUISM, so it is fitting that listening has always held a central role in the faith. Our core scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, are referred to as *shruti*, which means "that which is heard," as they were originally heard by rishis as an aural transmission directly from God. In the early days of human civilization, prior even to writing, *shruti* was faithfully preserved without alteration (important because this is the word of God) by means of aural instruction from guru to shishya. This went on generation after generation for thousands of years. Considering the vast body of texts, it is remarkable that this was achieved, and more remarkable still when you know it was accomplished by requiring students to learn each verse in eleven different ways, including backwards.

Fortunately, this traditional way of learning the *Vedas* and *Agamas* by listening is still practiced in today's priest training schools. In a typical learning session, the teacher chants a verse once, then the students as a group recite it twice, striving to be faithful to the subtleties of pronunciation and rhythm they hear in the teacher's chanting. This is not a now and again thing. The recitations go on for long hours every day, and every day for years and years. Students begin young, as early as five, when memory is strong.

Anyone who has seen a great documentary knows how powerful the human voice is as an instrument for communication and sharing of knowledge, so much more effective than reading. Consider *pravachan*, the popular lectures given by teachers who have personally experienced the truths they are explaining. In these dynamic discourses, the teacher presents the essentials of the *Vedas*, *Upa-nishads* and other scriptures, and those who listen absorb those deep teachings with all of their senses from one who knows. In this sharing, this speaking and hearing, subtle knowledge is transmitted from knower to seeker in a way that cannot be matched by reading. Multiple levels of information are conveyed through such speech—inflection, emotion, emphasis, conviction and subtle intimations.

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, wrote on this idea: "Because sound is the first creation, knowledge is transferred through sound of all kinds. It is important that one listen to the highest truths of a sampradaya from one who has realized them. The words, of course, will be familiar. They have been read by the devotee literally hundreds of times, but to hear them from the mouth of the enlightened rishi is to absorb his unspoken realization, as he re-realizes his realization while he reads them and speaks them out."

I like to think of listening as an art. The idea is that to fully grasp the subject being presented requires attentiveness to the speaker and concentration on the meaning of what is being said. For



a mystically profound subject, intuition is also needed to deeply understand what the speaker means, a meaning that lies beyond his words. When attentiveness, concentration and intuition are all present, listening becomes an art.

This is as true today as it was 2,200 years ago when a village weaver wrote the ethical masterpiece *Tirukural*. He devotes a full chapter, ten couplets, to "Learning by Listening." Here are three of Tiruvalluvar's verses:

In Heaven, Deities feed from sacrificial fires. On Earth, men who feast on listening are their equal.

The most precious wealth is the wealth acquired by the ear. Indeed, of all wealth, that wealth is paramount.

If not pierced by acute listening, ears may hear and yet remain deaf.

As we all know, the art of listening faces a new challenge in our modern age: digital distraction. Computers and mobile phones, and the constant stream of stimuli they offer, profoundly challenge everyone's ability to focus, listen and learn. A *New York Times* article entitled "Growing up Digital, Wired for Distraction" addressed the issue:

"Researchers say the lure of these technologies, while it affects adults too, is particularly powerful for young people. The risk, they say, is that developing brains can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks—becoming less able to sustain attention. 'Their brains are rewarded not for staying on task but for jumping to the next thing,' said Michael Rich, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and executive director of the Center on Media and Child Health in Boston. And the effects could linger: 'The worry is we're raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently.'"

That was written in 2010. Since then the number of smartphone users in the US alone has tripled. In any public place, it seems everyone is carrying a phone and accessing it often. It could be called device addiction.

The *Times* article goes on to say that researchers have found that students' use of technology is not uniform. Their choices tend to reflect their personalities. Social butterflies tend to be heavy texters and Facebook, Twitter or Instagram users. Students who are less



Time together: A family gathers around the challenges of the game of Jenga. It is such simple human interactions that create strong bonds and open channels of communication.

effort to preserve their culture and perpetuate their religion. One documentary tells the story of an Amish family that eliminated all possibilities for modern distractions, including digital, by having no electricity in the home. For most of us that would be too radical. A more balanced solution for Hindu families is to establish set times for digital study and enjoyment and other times for healthy in-person communication with family members and friends (with digital devices turned off).

Recently a young Hindu couple proudly told me that digital devices are banned from the dinner table in their home, a simple rule that is enriching their interactions and strengthening their relationships. A number of families have reined in digital distractions by requiring that their children's computers remain in the living room, where family members can provide oversight. Others have found tools to restrain where their children can go online.

For his devotees, Gurudeva designated Monday as Family Home Evening, a time for sharing among family members. "On Monday evening, Siva's day, the family members get together, prepare a wonderful meal, play games together and verbally appreciate one another's good qualities. They don't solve any problems on that day. They just love each other, and everybody has a voice, from the littlest child to the oldest senior." The television and all digital devices are turned off. It's a time for listening, real listening. Being a good listener can lead to being a good conversationalist—another fine art jeopardized by digital distraction.

I developed a simple sadhana called Supportive Conversation to strengthen bonds with a family member or friend. Here it is.

1. Stop what you are doing when approached; smile, face the person, extend a kind greeting and give him or her your full attention. Put down or turn off your mobile device.
2. Listen carefully. Do not interrupt. Concentrate on what is being said. If it is troublesome to you, remember the adage "seek to understand before seeking to be understood." Get engaged and show support by responding sincerely and constructively.

3. Especially if the person is sharing an emotional experience, ask him or her to recount the event. Be patient, listen with all of your senses. If you feel it is taking too long, affirm mentally that you have all the time in the world.

4. Practice empathy; put yourself in the other person's place. If you were speaking, you would want others to fully listen. Remember, you don't have to provide solutions, just a caring ear. Your hearing the story is enough.

Perhaps the art of listening will enjoy a comeback with the help of digital media, as the word spreads virally on what we miss without it. Listening is how we most naturally learn. It is a skill that needs to be perpetuated, even honed, from generation to generation. Parents need to carefully guide their children's development, to avoid digital distraction, develop the listening art and hopefully, if all goes well, awaken intuition and compassion for others. Adults need to make sure they themselves are not indulging excessively in a digital world. This will insure that the knowledge and practices of Hinduism continue to thrive in this digital era.



LETTERS

Same-Sex Marriage

I came across a certain article from Reuters and was immediately moved to write HINDUISM TODAY. "Nepal sexual minorities back panel's call for legal same-sex marriage" (reut.rs/1EkN7TP). After reading the article, it got me thinking. Nepal, demographically the most Hindu nation on earth, has taken up the issue of LGBT civil rights, and at the same time India—to the shock and dismay of many in the West—has actually re-criminalized homosexual relations. Gay sex is now punishable by up to ten years in jail, a severity of law that has drawn the censure of the UN. Meantime, around the world, from the United States to Ireland, Italy, Japan, Australia, Vietnam and others, the issue of same-sex marriage and civil union has come to the forefront of public consideration. The question of LGBT civil rights is an issue that is bound to remain contentious among Hindus. Nevertheless, the topic deserves significant and ongoing exploration. Beginning this year, or at least next year, I hope to see recurring HINDUISM TODAY articles on a subject that now refuses to be swept under the carpet.

KYLAS NAGAARJUNA
EUGENE, OR, US
KYLAS7@AOL.COM

A Master Carver

I commend Mr. Kesav Mallia for the article "Bringing Gods to Earth Through Stone—the story of Perumal Sthapati" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2015). There is no doubt Mr. Perumal Sthapati has a gift for intricate stone carving. All the stone vigrahas for the Hindu Temple of St. Louis were carved by Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati and associates. Our temple was inaugurated on July 6, 1998, when Dr. Ganapati Sthapati and his assistant Mathu Selvanathan were present during the Kumbhabhishekam and Pranaprathistha celebrations. In the article it is mentioned that Mr. Perumal Sthapati carved all 20 vigrahas for the Hindu Temple of St. Louis. To my knowledge, multiple carvers were involved in the preparation of the vigrahas. It would be difficult for one person to carve all the vigrahas, as it takes an enormous amount of time. It is stated by the author that it may take three months to carve one three foot murti. I was the chairman of the temple at that time and I visited Mamallapuram to see the progress of the vigrahas. Many people were working on the different murtis under the direction of Ganapati Sthapati, who was a strict disciplinarian.

G.V. NAIDU
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
GVNAIDU38@GMAIL.COM

The article did use the word "created" rather than "carved," but still the implication can be taken that Perumal Sthapati did all the work himself. We do believe it correct that Perumal oversaw the carving of the 20 murtis, as he was Ganapathi Sthapati's chief sthapati for murtis.

Facts for Future Readers

With reference to your article "Bringing Gods to Earth Through Stone," and specifically in reference to the sidebar "India's Statue of Liberation," I would like to state that the master builders of the two monuments at Kanyakumari—Vivekananda Memorial and Saint Tiruvalluvar statue—were sthapatish S.K. Acharya and Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati respectively. Since I was closely associated with both of these chief sthapatish from the inception to completion of these two projects, I feel it is my duty to inform the editor of HINDUISM TODAY and its readers of this fact.

DR.S.PADMANABHAN
KANYAKUMARI, INDIA

Temples and Community

I am deeply touched by the efforts of your magazine to create a positive impression about Hinduism. As a practicing Hindu, I believe we do little good for our communities, unlike other religions. I hope that temples across the country are more kind and sympathetic to the poor. I see construction workers who are laying roads in front of the temple in my area working every day in the sun. But believe me, temple authorities have never offered food or any kind of comfort to these workers. Is it not the duty of the house of God to treat everyone with kindness? Wouldn't it be appropriate on the part of temples to do something to benefit these workers toiling in the sun? Can we not have charity associated with temples? I sometimes admire the way a church takes care of its believers, how it makes them feel important and cared for. Is it not to be expected that the temple priests, too, be more empathetic to the sorrows and troubles of the temple-goer? It's time the temples changed and became more broad minded in their dealings with those around. I realize that only pointing fingers will not help. It's something we all have to work together to improve.

SREELEKHA PREMJI
BANGALURU, KARNATAKA, INDIA
SREELEKHA.PREMJI@GMAIL.COM

A New Line of Priests

I have met several temple priests whose children do not plan to be priests. I do not know how many hereditary priestly lines there

are, perhaps plenty; nor do I know the traditions and standards of selecting and training priests. However, I am concerned that our hereditary priest lines may dissipate and reach an insufficient number to meet the needs of our temple communities. If this is a concern to the community, are we able to broaden our selection and training of priests and priestesses to additional ethnic and family origins?

TEJASINHA SIVALINGAM
WHITTIER, CA, US
EFFULGENTLION@GMAIL.COM

Religion, Way of Life?

I am always puzzled when I hear someone say that Hinduism is a way of life, not a religion.

Is there any religion on earth which does not aspire to be a way of life for its adherents? Most, however, only achieve this goal in a small percentage of their followers. Hinduism actually succeeds in this—but that does not mean it can be dismissed as *only* a way of life.

Like any religion, Hinduism consists of not only practices and lifestyles but a belief structure. Beliefs vary widely from one religion to another. No other religion, for instance, recognizes the four great truths held in common by all Hindu sects—karma, dharma, reincarnation and the all-pervasiveness of Divinity. (In fact, for some religions these beliefs are considered heretical or even blasphemous). And because Hinduism sees Divinity as all-pervasive, it has no affinity for such beliefs as "intrinsic evil," "mortal sin" or "hell everlasting."

CHAMUNDI SABANATHAN
KAPAA, HI, US
CHAMUNDI@SONIC.NET

St. Lucian Hindus

Thank you so much for this lovely historical walk of Hinduism in St. Lucia. My grandmother was Hindu, and I'm essentially a "Dougla" as you mentioned in your article. I long to know more about my grandmother's religious practices before she was forced into Christianity. Thank you again for this lovely article. Wonderful.

THERESA LANON
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA
TLANON29@HOTMAIL.COM

Truth Is One

I want to thank you for your excellent summary of World Religions (Oct/Nov/Dec 2014). In particular, millions of people practicing the transcendental meditation technique will appreciate your brief acknowledgement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's teaching the universal nature of Adhyatma. Maharishi's

Vedic Science embodies the *Rig Veda's* declaration: *Ekam Sad, Bahu Vadanti*—Truth is one, but expressed in many ways. As well as Maharishi Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*: *Yogaschitta Vritti Nirodhah*—Yoga is the most settled state of awareness. This supremely silent, settled experience is available to anyone, regardless of the religious beliefs they may (or may not) cherish. Many thanks for all of your efforts to promote Adhyatma and Adhideva.

ATMANAND DOUGLAS
UTTAR KASHI, UTTARAKHAND, INDIA
DOUGLASREXFORD@GMAIL.COM

Hindu of the Year

Our family received the latest issue of HINDUISM TODAY yesterday, and we were astounded to read that Prime Minister Modi has been selected as Hindu of the Year. Wow, that was a bold, out-of-the-box and amazing move the editors made; something only those who hold truth in the palm of their hands could do! I am delighted with the choice.

RAVI VISSWANATHAN
CARLSBAD, CA, US
RAVI.VISSWANATHAN@GMAIL.COM

Artificial Sacraments

As a Hindu woman, for years I have used Shingar liquid kumkum and a variety of brands of sticker bindis. However, lately I have begun to worry about the ingredients in the Shingar liquid and the adhesives used on the sticker bindis. I Google searched but could

find no list of the ingredients. I am worried that possibly carcinogenic or teratogenic ingredients could be used. If so, constant application every day over a lifetime could lead to cancers on the forehead. If any of your readers have any information about the ingredients in popular bindi brands like Shingar, Shilpa, etc, I request that they write to you with that information. Likewise, if anyone knows of any non-toxic, safe bindi brands and where to buy them, please come forward.

SAI RAVIKUMAR
EDMONTON, ALBERTA, CA
SAIPADMAVATHY@YAHOO.COM

Lost Language

Out of 389 licensed news channels in India, only Doordarshan news has 5 minutes for Sanskrit. The article source can be found at ow.ly/LoATH

NITIN KESAR
NEW DELHI, INDIA
EDITOR@NEWSGRAM.COM

Sacred Animals

I read with interest the Special Feature, "Behold Bharat's Blessed Bovine" (April/May/June, 2015.) It is gratifying that a Hindu tradition, unlike any other religion, honors cows. However, this tradition has misled many Hindus into believing that a cow is the only animal that is prohibited from being killed and that there is no harm in killing other animals. Nothing could be farther from the

truth. A spark of divinity manifests in every living being. Killing any living being that is capable of feeling pain for the self-centered needs of humans is totally unconscionable. Animals are not subhuman species created by God for our benefit.

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

Correction

In the article "Behold Bharat's Blessed Bovine" (Apr/May/June, 2015) the word *kathak* was accidentally used instead of *katha*. *Katha* means discourse and *kathak* is the name of a famous Indian classical dance performance.

On page 30 of (Apr/May/June, 2015), the photo of Swami Gopal Sharan Das is given the wrong credit. Golokdham.org/Rajat Goyal is the correct source.

To donate to the Padmetha Godham cow shelter please visit pathmedagodham.org

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

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

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

Looking After Whom and What Matters Most

If giving gives happiness, then giving through an estate plan gives great happiness

MANY HAVE IT IN THEIR HEARTS TO generously support HINDUISM TODAY magazine. But when the thought of responsibilities comes rushing back, the voice of restraint will often have the last word—understandably so.

But it need not be the end of the conversation. You can give and give generously, while sacrificing nothing of family budgets, plans and dreams. Simply make your gifts in the future, even in the far, far future, via your estate plan. Thus you and your family can be the philanthropes you yearn to be—without putting yourselves at a disadvantage.

If your beneficiary is a forward looking body with a clear and a long-range sacred mission, like HINDUISM TODAY, its trustees will be especially grateful for the gift you have placed in its future.

An estate plan is also full of advantages for those who create it, many of them financial. Besides being an opportunity to give, an



A family with an estate plan can rest content that they are taking care of those they love and the institutions they deem most worthy of their support.

estate plan has another spiritual dimension: it can become a testament to oneself, to one's family and ultimately to the world. "This

is who I am/who we are," it declares. "And this is what we stand for." It is a life mission statement that can be continually reviewed, adjusted and amended through the years. This aspect of estate planning is satisfying to many and it is one reason we encourage the practice, even for young people.

Please consider including the HINDUISM TODAY Production Fund in your esteemed estate plan. It is your best opportunity to help the magazine fulfill its mission of developing ever finer ways to disseminate Hinduism's golden teachings.

There are many ways to make planned gifts, some of which are quite advantageous to you, the giver. Find out more about these opportunities on our website, hheonline.org and subscribe to our Hindu Heritage Endowment and Production Fund newsletters at gurudeva.org/email-news.

Contact us at hhe@hindu.org or give us a call: 1-888-464-1008.

QUOTES & QUIPS

If you stick to your principles, life becomes meaningful. Otherwise you become a rudderless vessel that is at the mercy of the winds.

Swami Tejomayananda, spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission

Do you realize the sacred significance and the supreme importance of the guru's role in the evolution of man? It was not without reason that the India of the past carefully tended and kept alive the lamp of guru-tattva. It is therefore not without reason that India, year after year, age after age, commemorates anew this ancient concept of the guru, adores it and pays homage to it again and again, and thereby reaffirms its belief and allegiance to it. **Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963), founder of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

Hinduism is not a definite dogmatic creed, but a vast, complex and subtly unified mass of spiritual thought and realization. Its tradition of the Godward endeavor of the human spirit has been continuously enlarging through the ages. **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** (1888–1975), philosopher, statesmen and second President of India

Late I learned that when reason died, then wisdom was born; before that liberation, I had only knowledge. **Sri Aurobindo** (1872–1950), Indian yogi, guru and poet

The traveler has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), Indian poet and Nobel laureate

We belong to a moment in history when Hinduism is beginning to wake up, if not from a long slumber, then at least a long silence. Bloggers and readers are daring to challenge canonized academics about Hinduphobia. **Vamsee Juluri**, author

Hinduism has proven much more open to new ideas than any other religion, scientific thought and social experimentation. Many

concepts, like reincarnation, meditation, yoga and others, have found worldwide acceptance. It would not be surprising to find Hinduism the dominant religion of the 21st-century. **Klaus L. Klostermaier**, professor of religious studies at the University of Manitoba

In centuries to come, he will be remembered as one of the main molders of the modern world. **Arthur Llewellyn Basham** (1914–1986), historian and indologist, speaking about Swami Vivekananda

What are you going to do with the money you accumulate? Can you increase your lifespan even for a day? Give generously when you can. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), renowned Sri Lankan guru

To attain stillness of speech and thought at once is mauna. Mauna with speech alone is

but a state of dumbness. Only when speech and thought are alike in mauna are you in a state of perfection. **Tirumantiram** 1896

Knowing what's right doesn't mean much unless you do what's right. **Theodore Roosevelt** (1858–1919), 26th US President

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. **Martin Luther King Jr** (1929–1968), leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement

All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really one. **Black Elk** (1863–1950), medicine man of the Oglala Lakota tribe

The Hindu mind represents humanity's oldest and most continuous stream of conscious intelligence on the planet. Hindu sages, seers, saints, yogis and jnanis have maintained an unbroken current of awareness linking humanity with the Divine since the dawn of history, and as carried over from earlier cycles of civilization in previous

humanities unknown to our present spiritually limited culture. **Vamadeva Shastri**, Western-born Vedic scholar

Keep working to accept everything in life, including accepting that it's hard to accept some things. **Anonymous**

If you hate a person, you hate something in him that is part of yourself. What isn't part of ourselves doesn't disturb us. **Hermann Hesse** (1877–1962), German novelist

If you use your mind to study reality, you won't understand either your mind or reality. If you study reality without using your mind, you'll understand both. **Bodhidharma**, fifth-century Buddhist monk

If we get angry now and then, let's try and eliminate anger altogether. If we get impatient with people who seem to explain things at great length when it could be explained in a short way, let's learn how not to get impatient. Let us learn how to



accept that it is their nature. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

It is the unique and all-encompassing nature of Hinduism that one devotee may be worshipping Ganesha while his friend worships Subramaniam or Vishnu, and yet both honor the other's choice and feel no sense of conflict. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

DID YOU KNOW?

Mystic Medicine

S AID TO BE FOUNDED BY AGASTHYA BUT of unknown antiquity, Siddha is a traditional system of Tamil medicine that in many ways parallels ayurveda. This mystical system was verbally handed down through history, from master to disciple, throughout the ages.

It is believed the clarified intellect and heightened intuition of the Siddha practitioners resulted from their yogic practices. This enhanced their observations of the natural world, enabling them to use the many resources around them for medical treatments. Their findings on the characteristics of plants, metals, minerals and animal products, along with their knowledge of the properties of drugs and their purification, processing, dosages, toxicity, antidotes and clinical applications, were preserved for future generations in the form of oral verses.

Eventually this spoken tradition was transcribed on palm leaf manuscripts that still serve as the major repository of Siddha knowledge.

According to the Siddha system, the human body consists of the five primordial elements (earth, water, fire, air and space), the three humors (vata, pitta and kapha), and seven physical constituents. Food, the foundational material of the human body, gets processed into bodily humors (blood, bile, etc.), tissues and wastes. An equilibrium of the humors brings good health and their imbalance leads to disease. The five senses are said to correspond with the five elements. Ether is responsible for hearing, air for sense of touch, fire for sight, water for taste and earth for the sense of smell.

Siddha prescriptions are drawn from herbs, inorganic substances and animal products. One example of an herbal remedy, taken for stress and fatigue, is ingesting the



leaves and fruit of arogyapacha (*Trichopus zeylanicus*), literally "The green that gives strength." Known for its ability to improve stamina, boost the immune system and metabolism, arogyapacha is also prescribed for liver disease and stomach ulcers.

Current research of palm-leaf manuscripts by the Indian government may bring to light new methods for preparation of medicines, promising valuable contributions to the modern medical world.

BASICS

Giving Garlands to God

AROMATIC, COLORFUL, AWE-INSPIRING—a murti adorned with garlands publicly acknowledges the Deity's importance and creates a pleasing atmosphere for worship. In Hinduism, where flowers have a pivotal and traditional role in puja, the Gods are decorated with vestments, garlands made from fragrant and non-fragrant flowers, as well as religiously significant leaves, grasses, fruit and money.

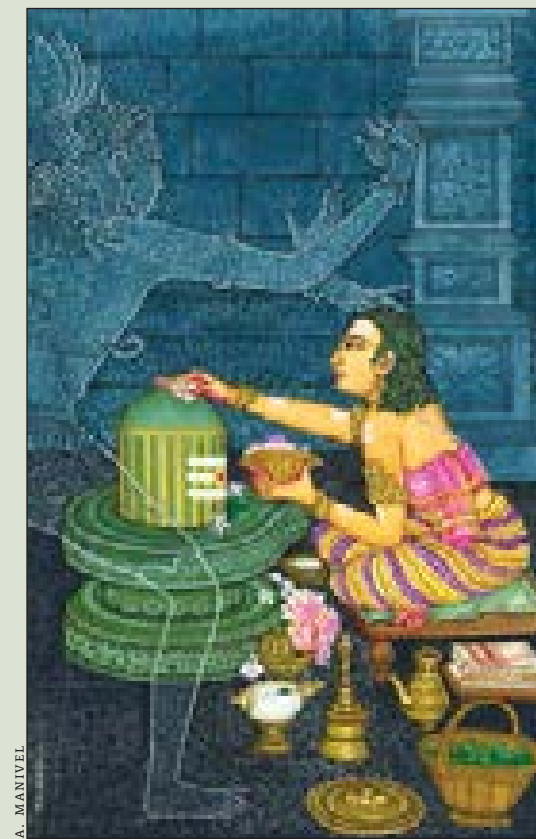
Garlands can be classified by style depending on the pattern and materials used. In Tamil language, the two main types are *thodutha* and *kortha*. *Thodutha maalai* "garlands of fiber"—are usually made with banana tree fibers. *Kortha maalai*, using Jasmine, lotus and other species, are made with needle and thread.

Historically, Hindu temples have had their own flower gardens, where plants and trees are grown specifically for garlands. Madurai Meenakshi, Tiruchendur and Akshardham temples still preserve

such gardens for everyday rituals. The garlands for Srirangam Ranganathar temple, a massive Vishnu temple in Tamil Nadu, are made only by temple *satttharars*—people who surrender their life to service and never marry.

Traditional rules for garland-making include not smelling the flowers, picking them only after bathing, performing *japa* or devotional singing while harvesting and never using flowers that have fallen to the ground.

When devotees see a garland-bedecked Deity, they are brought into a state of wonderment, allowing the Deity's vibration to energize and uplift their aura. Put your *prana* (vital energy) into what you offer. Prana exudes from your hands as you work creatively. Buying a garland is good, but making one is even better. When the priest puts your handmade garland on the murti, it's almost as if you are touching the Deity yourself.

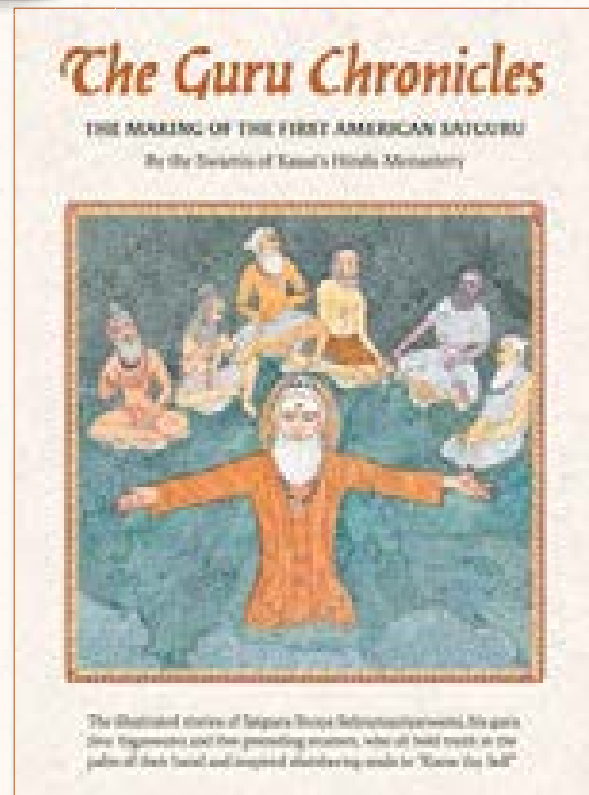


How Enlightened Men Live



NOW AN AUDIO BOOK!

Visit: himalayanacademy.com/tgc



"Just now I completed the reading of the most powerful *Guru Chronicles*. What a rewarding experience! The design, contents and presentation of the most powerful book to awaken, most wonderful to inspire and the most informative to instill constant devotion to the eternal Guru Parampara are indeed superb and praiseworthy." DR. S.P. SABHARATHNAM, CHENNAI

"Deeply captivating. The book has a musical magic, a beautifully lyrical story that happens at once in the past and the present, with the promise of an ever-deepening future of awakening for the reader. It brings so vibrantly to life the simple life and deep spiritual culture of India and Sri Lanka. S. Rajam's art adds to the musical quality, as his work is rhythmic and lyrical, too." GAYATRI RAJAN, CALIFORNIA



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.



FROM THE AGAMAS

Transference of Wisdom

Sage Matanga receives Siva's grace in the form of the *Parameshvara Agama*

The following is a lucid translation of excerpts from the Matanga Agama, chapter 1 of the Vidya Pada, in which Sage Matanga is blessed with the knowledge of the Agamas from Lord Srikantha following a period of intense austerity.

ON THE SIDE OF THE CHARMING HIMALAYAN MOUNTAIN, there is a peak known as Mount Kailas, which is inhabited by divine beings and siddhars. One of those siddhars was a great sage considered a lion among seers. Endowed with a divine and vibrant form, brightened and strengthened by constant penance, his name was Matanga.

Sage Matanga was established at Mount Kailas, firmly absorbed in one-pointed meditation on Lord Siva, his previous state of impurity incinerated by the fire of knowledge. As he was upon the verge of disentanglement from the bondage of ego and matured enough for moksha, the supreme Lord Srikantha manifested before him. Accomplished in yoga and having performed great penance, Matanga could see Srikantha's etheric form directly.

With great wonderment, beholding the Lord of the universe, Matanga exclaimed: "O Bhagavan! You are the Lord of tattvas! You are the Lord of all the worlds! The entire realm of matter, moving and unmoving, is charged with your divine presence!" Matanga then prostrated himself on the ground.

Hearing these utterances, the Lord, adorned with the gems of assurance and protection, lifted Matanga up, wiped away the fatigue of his tapas and cleansed him of all residual ignorance. Srikantha then spoke: "O Sage, supreme one among seers, ask of me any boon that you intently desire."

Sage Matanga, his inner self elated and his body exuding eagerness, implored: "O Lord of devas! Through your grace I have become accomplished in my goal of Self Realization. What wonder is there now? O Lord, by your mere presence I have attained the great fruit of *sivatva*—the power of all knowing and all doing—which is to be gained only through the supreme initiation. Now all that is to be known and to be practiced after receiving this *diksha* has become fulfilled merely through your gracious and kind words.

"Even so, for the benefit of the world, to which I wish to transmit the principles concerned with *diksha*, kindly teach me a scripture that, with succinct statements, grants both worldly enjoyments and final liberation, a scripture that deserves a prominent state, one which enshrines in itself the unique concepts of the Lord; a teaching embedded with gems containing the principles of human existence, which could destroy the roots of ignorance, enabling the reader to cross over the ocean of rebirth; a scripture that could make known the true state of supreme bliss, which is not susceptible to double meanings or impaired with inexplicable and ambiguous statements.

Finally, it must contain the embodiment of all concepts from other related scriptures and be capable of demonstrating the reality of the higher planes of existence. It should also not be spoiled by contradictory statements."

Having heard the request of Matanga, Lord Srikantha, whose form is the seat of pure consciousness and is eternally free from decay, pleasingly and affectionately elucidated to the great sage:

"There is a such a scripture, replete with investigations about the gem-like principles of human existence, rich in conclusions drawn with clarity that make known the Agamic tradition, which has emerged on the path of creation, been maintained by the Lord and transmitted through a competent and continuing lineage; a scripture composed methodically, associated with well-classified divisions, filled with auspicious laws related to the *padarthas*—the objects of experience. This scripture of such excellence, which is eternal, consists of four sections—*kriya, charya, yoga* and *jnana*. This scripture has come down directly from the Supreme Lord, who is eternally free from the veiling bondage known as *anava mala*—the individualizing veil of duality that enshrouds the soul.

"Originally this scripture emanated in the form of inaudible sound from the face of Sadasiva, the Lord of five cosmic functions—creation, preservation, destruction, revealing grace and concealing grace. Then, it attained the manifest and audible form of sound for the sake of preserving the lineage of the Guru.

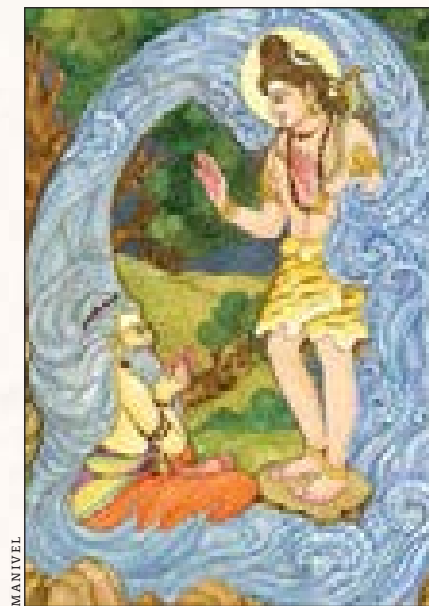
"This *Agama* was then revealed to Anantesvara by Lord Sadasiva, consisting of tens of millions of verses set in the *anushtup* meter (eight letters per line). Then Anantesvara, who is endowed with supreme *sivajnana*, revealed this *Agama* to me, Srikantha, which reducing the number of verses to one hundred thousand.

"Now, as you are my disciple, I will proceed to teach you this scripture, known as *Parameshvara Agama*, reducing the number of verses to three thousand and five hundred. This *Agama*, which has been thus abridged and grasped by

me, is not in any way diminished by this reduction, still clearly making known the subtle principles of life. It is also not impaired with too much brevity. Beyond all doubt, it contains all the established truths and expresses them clearly and brilliantly."

Thus it was that after worshiping Lord Hara with one-pointedness, Matanga received from Him the ocean of scripture called *Parameshvara Agama*. Here, now, is revealed that same ocean of scripture, rendered with clarity and replete with wisdom.

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



Revealing Grace: Siva imparts the *Parameshvara Agama* to Matanga



Prayag Ghat: Priests seated under the umbrellas perform the pind daan rituals for the ancestors of their clients while boatmen wait for customers to tour the nearby ghats

SPECIAL FEATURE

Varanasi: Oldest & Holiest City of Siva

Come with us to “Kashi” and hear its people describe the city’s unique place in Indian history, Hindu tradition and their own lives

KASHI, EVERYONE HERE WILL TELL YOU, IS NOT ON the Earth at all, but sits poised on the trident of Siva, eternally auspicious, ever above the vagaries of mortal life. Indeed, mortality could be its watchword, for dying here is said to grant salvation. Holiest of Hinduism’s seven holy cities, Kashi is unquestionably

one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on the planet, dating back to 800bce and likely much further. This report will not cover every aspect of Kashi’s complex life and history, but it will delve into its magic—largely through the voices of residents, from the priests of the famed temples to the attendants of the burning ghats.

The Ghats

Pilgrims flock to the steps leading into the Ganga



ARTICLES BY RAJIV MALIK

“IF YOU WANT A TRUE AND REAL EXPERIENCE of Kashi, spend your time on the ghats.” The saints and common residents of Varanasi alike offer this advice. They explain that Lord Siva Himself is believed to be walking and meditating along the river. No doubt, it is the ghats that draw pilgrims to this most holy of Hindu cities, to worship, to meditate, to bathe in the sacred river, to perform last rites and, for some, to depart this earthly life in hopes of liberation from rebirth.

At all times of day, photographer Arun Kumar Mishra and I took every opportunity to be on the ghats—the wide stone steps that allow easy access to the river. At 4:30am at Assi Ghat, hundreds of devotees were there ahead of us, making Sivalingams for the spe-

cial pujas that are performed in the month of Kartik, singing bhajans and conferring offerings to the river.

Unexpectedly, at the break of day everything came to a standstill. The rising sun cast glittering shades and colors on the river's flowing waters, and the sounds of the day played a symphony—the river, the temple bells, the ancient mantras eternally chanted.

Many priests set up temporary workplaces on the ghats, small platforms under large umbrellas where they help devotees perform their daily pujas. At Assi Ghat, for example, six to eight priests are regularly present. Many priest families have worked on these ghats for generations, serving the same families generation after generation. Serving anyone who arrives for worship, most require no fixed fee; anything offered by the devotees is

welcome.

Young priests attend school later in the day, then return in the evening. Sanjeev Kumar Dubey, at Goswami Tulsi Ghat, just 16, comes early in the morning, attends to several dozen clients, then goes to school at 10am.

Priest Siva Kumar's family is originally from Thanjavur in South India. His great-grandfather settled here in 1902. Siva Kumar serves as part of a pilgrimage program that links Rameshvaram, Varanasi, Gaya and Prayag. He explained, “Previously, for the liberation of the ancestors, one had to go to 54 places of pilgrimage and perform the *pind daan*, etc. This new system is a shortcut for serving the same purpose. Our pilgrimage is called Setu Yatra. We have priests in Rameshvaram, Gaya and Prayag who perform and conduct all the requisite rituals and pu-

jas.” The yatra, he said, is highly popular with South Indians, especially Tamils.

For some pujas, the devotee stands in the midst of the holy Ganga while the Vedic mantras are chanted by the priest. Most devotees come to make the *pind daan*—offering food and prayers to their ancestors. Adi Sheshan, one of Siva Kumar's clients, is a 75-year-old from Chennai, here with his sister-in-law. Over the last six days, with Kumar's help, they have done pind daan for 64 people—ancestors, parents, relatives and friends, all at a cost of about US\$400.

Pilgrims and tourists alike avail themselves of a boat ride along the ghats. Gliding along the calm river, they imbibe the majesty of the ghats, and the grand and famous old temples and other buildings along the shore. It was for me a most enjoyable and uplifting

experience.

Varanasi is a huge center for learning, home to thousands of institutions, including Banaras Hindu University, one of the largest in Asia. Many students congregate on the ghats in what rare free time they have. They use the ghats as a picnic spot to chat with peers, or take a boat ride and enjoy the picturesque and serene environment.

Saints and sadhus are abundant here; but, unlike Rishikesh, this is not known as a place to interact with them. As Dandiswami Jiten-drananda Saraswati told us, “The saints here in Kashi are pursuing their own sadhana as they march towards *brahma tattva* (liberation). They hardly have any interest in meeting anyone.” Interaction is possible, though, and many sannyasin *akharas*, or orders, have facilities here, or one may encounter a sadhu

along the ghats.

Come evening, a huge Ganga Arati ceremony is conducted by the Shri Ganga Seva Nidhi organization at the famed Dashashwamedha Ghat, as shown on the cover of this issue. Athletic young priests make the various offerings with the choreography and grace of a dance troupe (see bit.ly/Kashi-Aarati). This recently developed ceremony is far more elaborate than those performed in Rishikesh or Haridwar.

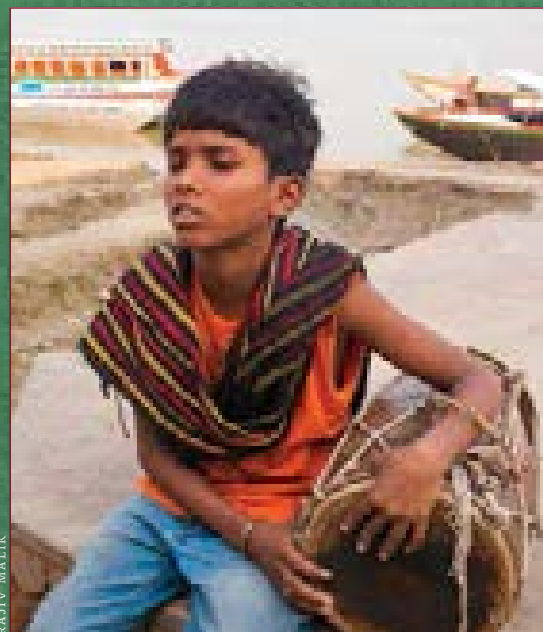
There are 87 ghats here, along five kilometers of river. Most of them were built after 1700 under the Maratha Empire. In addition to worship, they provide access to river transportation and a place for bathing and laundry.

For some absolutely spectacular, navigable, panoramic birds-eye views of the ghats of Kashi go to bit.ly/KashiPano. 

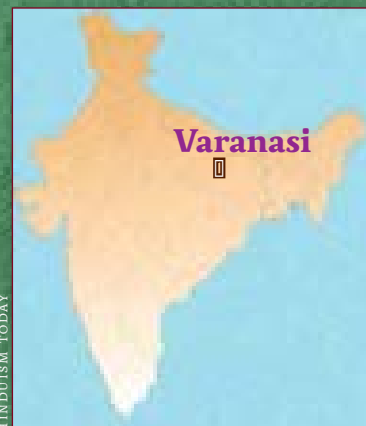
Ghat Sadhana: Ancestor Worship, Ganga Offerings, Meditation and More



DINODIA.COM / ARUN MISHRA



RAJIV MALIK



HINDUISM TODAY

(top) A panorama of the ghats; (below, left to right) Bharat Pandey, 32, blesses a devotee; Arun Vihwakarma, age 8, performs bhajans for pilgrims; location in India; priest Siva Kumar leads a family in worship



DINODIA.COM / ARUN MISHRA

The City's Temple Heart

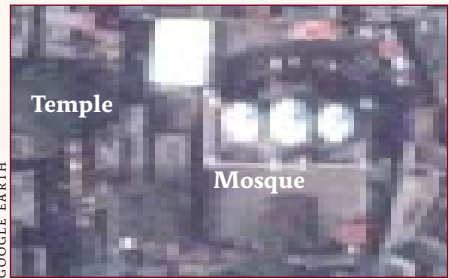
Thrice destroyed, today Kashi Vishwanath stands foremost again among Varanasi's sacred places

VARANASI IS HOME TO AN ASTOUNDING 23,000 temples. Most famous is Kashi Vishwanath Siva Temple, which today has a security system such as I had never seen before. Not even a pen, much less a mobile phone or camera, was allowed into the temple. Hundreds of shops line the streets, with lockers where pilgrims can leave all their possessions before joining the long serpentine queue winding down the narrow (two-meter wide) street to the temple's unassuming entrance. Once arriving before the Sivalingam, one has only a matter of seconds before having to give way to the pilgrims coming along behind.

Kashi Vishwanath is first temple mentioned in the ancient *Skanda Purana*, something of an early guidebook to India's pilgrimage sites. A choice target for Muslim invaders, the prominent edifice was destroyed in 1194ce, then rebuilt 20 years later, only to be demolished again in the 15th century. Under the reign of the unusually tolerant Akbar in the 16th century, it was rebuilt once again; but Akbar's grandson, Aurangzeb, destroyed

it yet again in 1669, building Gyanvapi Mosque in its place. The present temple was erected a few feet from the mosque in 1780 by Maratha queen Ahilya Bai Holkar. The area remains today a potential flashpoint for Hindu-Muslim conflict—hence the security. The gold roof seen in the photo below was donated in 1839 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab. Its 820 kilos would fetch some \$33 million at today's gold prices—perhaps another reason for so many guards.

Unlike Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, there has never been any question that Gyanvapi Mosque sits on the site of a destroyed temple,



for it openly incorporates significant portions of the walls of the original temple. An archeological dig was required to prove a temple preceded Babri Masjid.

This is a powerful sanctuary. The Sivalingam here is set in a gold base in the floor some four feet square protected by a silver railing. Devotees are allowed to touch the Lingam, unlike in South Indian temples, while streaming through offering garlands and Ganga water. Attendant priests constantly remove offerings and move the pilgrims along. You can observe this kinetic scene live at: bit.ly/KashiLingam. Many among the pilgrims here come from South India.

Formal pujas in different styles are also conducted through the day, from 2:30am to 11pm. Shri Kant Mishra, one of the temple's main priests, told us the temple follows the *Shukla Yajur Veda*, with the priests performing five aratis a day. Twenty-one priests of various traditions handle the daily worship. The priests' children are taught the mantras at a young age in the temple's school.

He offered this advice to pilgrims: "Please understand that if you go to meet the president of India, you have to prepare by wearing graceful attire. If you go in torn clothes, the guards will not let you enter. Similarly, if you are going before God, you have to get prepared, not only being suitably dressed and

.....
Uneasy neighbors: Google Earth view of the mosque and temple

clean on the outside, but ridding yourself of worldly desires, anger and attachment on the inside. When you go before God so prepared, you will see how blissful the experience can become."

He also expressed a sentiment we heard repeatedly: the lack of desire to leave. "Once I went to Mumbai at the invitation of a Bollywood director and lived luxuriously in air-conditioned apartments and cars. After three days I missed Kashi and told him I had to go back or I would go mad."

Probably the second most popular temple here is Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple, built in the early 1900s by Pandit Madan Mohna Malviya, founder of Banaras Hindu University. The temple conducts daily and weekly worship as well as Ram Lila performances based on Tulsidas's *Ramacharitamanasa*. A classic music and dance festival is held each April. The chief priest, Dr. Vishwambar Nath Mishra, told us the surrounding area is known as Anand Kanan, Garden of Bliss. Today, with the forests gone, many monkeys roam freely.

The worship of Rama is strong here. Mishra explained, "Hanumanji is consider by us an avatar of Lord Siva; therefore, we do not see much difference between Him and Lord Siva. In South India there is a lot of dispute between Shaivas and Vaishnavas. However, if you believe in *Ramacharitamanasa* (authored by Tulsidas), Lord Rama clearly says that if you do not worship and revere Lord



Celestial city: Artist's depiction of Kashi perched on the trident of Lord Siva, with Parvati and Nandi nearby
.....

who have come to Kashi to die.

Other famous temples in Varanasi include that of Kalabhairav, a form of Siva as a fierce protector whose vahana or mount is the dog; the Kauri Mata Temple, popular with South Indians, where the pre-

ferred offering is cowrie shells; the Durga Mandir, built some 500 years ago; the 18th-century Durga Kund Temple; and the New Vishwanath Temple, built of white marble at Banaras Hindu University. At the latter, tourists and visitors from all religions are welcome.

The "Tilting Temple" at Scindia Ghat (next to Manikarnika) has its own tale. It is a Siva temple built 150 years ago by a man at the request of his mother. On its completion, the builder announced that he had thereby "repaid his debt to his mother for bringing him into the world and raising him." The temple's foundations over time gave way, and the structure tilted to one side—demonstrating, so the locals say, that the debt to one's mother can never be repaid. Considered a monument to hubris, it remains flooded by the river most of the year.

Temples: Kashi Vishwanath, Durga Kund and Sanchat Mochan Hanuman



(left to right) Kashi Vishwanath Temple was rebuilt in 1780 by Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar of Indore next to its original site as she declined to remove the mosque. The Gyanvapi Mosque, built in 1669 by Aurangzeb after he destroyed the original Kashi Viswanath temple, utilizing the Hindu temple's original walls; the picturesque Durga Kund Temple; devotees throng to the popular Sanchat Mochan Hanuman Temple.



The Bastion of Sanskrit

Dozens of traditional schools continue Varanasi's long-held position of eminence in the language

KASHI RETAINS ITS ANCIENT FAME AS A center of learning. According to Jitendrananda Saraswati, the city has seven universities, 40 degree-granting colleges and 1,600 Sanskrit *vidyalayas* (traditional schools and colleges).

Banaras Hindu University is one of the largest universities in all of Asia, with 35,000 students, 5,000 teachers and a 1,300-acre main campus housing more than 140 departments. Sadly, despite its name, BHU does not promote Hinduism, and it has only a few departments directly concerned with anything Hindu. The Sanskrit and related departments have 1,200 students, according to Dr. Chandramauli Upadhyaya, head of the Department of Astrology. Courses include *Vedas*, grammar, literature, law and philosophy. His department has 32 students studying for a doctorate in astrology. The only other course offerings on Hindu subjects are introductory elective classes.

The largest of the Kashi schools dedicated to Sanskrit is the government-funded Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya, or

Government Sanskrit University, which traces its origins to the Sanskrit College founded here in 1791 under the British East India Company. It has more than 2,000 students, 112 faculty, 22 undergraduate departments, 40 post graduate departments, 20 research centers and a library with 200,000 books, all on a campus of 67 acres. It runs on an annual budget of four million dollars. It is affiliated with more than 1,200 colleges and universities in India, meaning that it sanctions the degrees issued by each of them.

The university's website (ssvv.ac.in) states: "Sampurnanand is a seat of traditional/Oriental learning. Its sole purpose is to preserve and enrich *Shastras* and produce specialized scholars in each and every discipline relating to classic texts." Their course list includes the *Vedas*, Sanskrit and Pali languages, astrology, *Dharma Shastras*, philosophy (including Buddhist and Jain), history, economics, political science, linguistics and English. The university—and all the Sanskrit schools in Varanasi—engage a mix of traditional and modern teaching methods and subjects.

Dr. Devi Prasad, eminent professor of Sanskrit at Sanskrit University, told HINDUISM TODAY, "Society is not attaching due importance to the study of Sanskrit, nor are its teachers accorded the kind of reverence and honor that was there for them in the past."

Sthaneshwar Timalsina, a graduate of the Sanskrit University and now professor of religious studies at San Diego State University, California, expressed similar concerns: "Sanskrit has been turned to a subject of lip-service for short-term political gain by politicians across parties who consider the language merely as something needed to maintain priestly rituals. They do not recognize that it carries a philosophy able to give the world a new direction."

Dr. Upadhyaya reported that 80 percent of Varanasi's *vidyalayas* are on the verge of closure due to a steep reduction in government aid since the 1990s. Only those run by religious institutions or are otherwise independently supported continue to do well. Most have dozens to a few hundred students.

Unique among the *vidyalayas* is Shri Jigyasu Smarak Panini Kanya Mahavidyalaya, which admits only girls. It was founded in 1971, at a time when society was not much in favor of women studying the *Vedas*. But over time, that attitude is changing. Hundreds of this school's highly qualified graduates, women scholars and priests, are spread all over the world. In many parts of India they are running educational institutions

and gurukulams, imparting Sanskrit education, teaching scriptures and priesthood to women. In some places they work shoulder to shoulder with male counterparts, who initially resisted their participation.

The school accepts members of any caste, putting them through a rigorous routine of study, including basic martial arts, which is meant to give the girls self-confidence. Detractors have diminished over the years as the girls have proven their scholastic acumen and ritual skill, always executed with devotion. The school runs on donations, with just token fees for the students, which number about 100.

According to Acharya Nandita Shastri, they have ambitious plans to build a modern, multistory international hostel on the Panini campus where girls from all over India and the world will be able to live and study.

Another small but respected school here is Dharam Sangh Shiksha Mandal, which was established by the revered saint Swami Karpatri (1907-1982). He specified that the school not be dependent on government money, which he felt would bring with it the government's agenda. The school's current head, Dr. Jagjeetan Pandey, said they now have one hundred students. Pupils start be-

tween age 8 and 11. The mandal teaches up to postgraduate level, but does not issue degrees, which the founder feared would lead to government interference. The education, room and board are entirely free for the students. Subjects include *Vedas*, grammar, literature, justice and more.

Pandey shared, "We believe in Sanatana Dharma and the concept of reincarnation. Lord Krishna sends some people into this world who are here to serve the *Vedas* and our other ancient texts, and do not pursue a degree in business or engineering. What is

required by them can only be delivered through our traditional educational systems."

Many of Kashi's various institutions run a *vidyalaya*. Annapurna Temple started a school in 1916 that accommodates 250 students. They have trained hundreds of priests. Gyan Prakash, primarily concerned with preserving the traditional arts and crafts of Varanasi, runs a free three-year school for priests, ten students per year, alongside their secular education. Graduates are able to earn seven thousand rupees (\$111) a month upon graduation. That's \$1,332/year for someone just entering the workforce, which compares favorably with India's average yearly salary of \$1570.

The Vira Saiva Jangamwadi Math's 50-student gurukulam imparts 12 years of instruction. Graduates go on to be priests in Vira Saiva temples. The Math, founded in the 6th century, is one of the sect's five main teaching centers.

Sri Math, located at Panch Ganga Ghat, is a Vaishnava monastery in the lineage of the 14th century saint, Ramananda. It runs a gurukulam for 40 children and provides lodging for pupils studying at Varanasi's major educational institutions. All told, Varanasi remains the grand center of education it has been for untold centuries.



Sampurnanand: The main building of Government Sanskrit University's campus in Varanasi, largest of all Sanskrit schools

Sanskrit Learning All Around



(left to right) Students of the gurukulam at Jangamwadi Mutt, a Vira Saivite institution; close up of pranayama part of chanting practice; Acharya Nandita Shastri of Shri Jigyasu Smarak Panini Kanya Mahavidyalaya lectures at the all-girls school; Panini's martial arts program is intended to instill self-confidence in the girls.



To Die in Varanasi

The hope for liberation from rebirth has inspired a retirement community and a hospice industry

TIME WAS WHEN INDIA'S ELDERS LIVED out their lives secure in the comfort of the joint family home, lovingly cared for by their children and grandchildren, and many still do. Nowadays, however, married sons increasingly set up their own separate households. If these are too tiny to accommodate the aging parents, they may be left to fend for themselves. Fortunate are such abandoned elders who gain admittance to a home for the aged run by a temple or other charitable organization—especially here in Varanasi, where, they believe, dying will bring liberation from rebirth. During my stay, I visited two such homes and one hospice, where residents expected to live

.....
Seeking release within: (below, left to right) B. Dhanlakshmi of Hyderabad in her room at Kashi Annapurana Bhavan; a woman named Somani at Manikarnika ghats; Mukti Bhavan; Bhairavnath Shukla, Mukti Bhavan's long-time manager

only a short time.

The Kashi Mumukshu Bhawan at Assi Ghat, established in 1920, is run by the Kashi Mumukshu Bhawan Sabha. Today it houses about 60 people, many of them married couples whose children are unable to care for them. The rooms are neat, clean and airy, and the home is on the campus of the Sabha's Sanskrit college and gurukulam. Residents have access to ayurvedic and homeopathic dispensaries and free meals.

The Kashi Annapurna Annakshetra Trust runs a home for the aged in the Mishir Pokra area of Kashi, housing around 12 senior citizens. Many of those I saw were over 80 and had been abandoned by their family members and relatives. Though run in a relatively small compound, the old-age home was taking care of the residents in a dedicated and meticulous manner.

R.V. Vishwanathan, the 48-year-old manager, explained that the facility is open to anyone of any caste. "We have a committee who closely scrutinizes each case and admits the old people who are most needy and

deserving." Kamla Chakarvarty, 97, a resident and widow originally from Bangladesh, shared, "They are taking good care of me here. I'm ready to leave this world and pray to God to grant me liberation."

Annapurna Temple's head priest, Rameshwar Puri, amplified, "We not only take care of these old people while they are alive but also take care of their final rites at the Manikarnika Ghat when they leave this world. However, I must make it clear that while we definitely do our best to serve them in all possible ways, they very much miss the kind of love and intimacy they can get only from their own children and grandchildren."

The trust has constructed ten rooms with attached bathrooms and kitchens. These are allotted to elderly couples through a lottery system. Winners of the lottery pay a one-time amount toward the cost of construction and can then live there free for the rest of their life, paying only for electrical and water usage.

At Manikarnika Ghat three elderly women were introduced to us by a shady looking character who, we were later told, offers his help to families who come to cremate a relative, as well as to tourists and photographers. Each of these women told us a pitiable story of how they were mistreated by their families and compelled to take shelter here at the ghat. We were so touched as to give each some money, but later realized part of that money would doubtless be claimed by the man who

introduced them to us, as he appeared to be capitalizing on their plight.

Nearly all of the elderly people we met appeared in decent health, so would not be allowed admittance to Kashi Labh Mukti Bhawan, the hospice located half a kilometer from Manikarnika Ghat. This home is only for those who are expected to live no more than 15 days. Hospice care worldwide, after all, is only intended for those close to death, for whom any further medical intervention would be pointless. In the US, for instance, where the Medicare program insures older citizens' medical costs, hospice admittance requires certification that your life expectancy is less than six months. If you outlast that time, you can only remain on hospice care if your physician once again certifies you are expected to die within six months.

Bhawan manager Bhairavnath Shukla ex-

plained the project was set up by Shri Vishnu Hari Dalmia in 1958 to offer a place for pilgrims to die peacefully in Kashi. The Dalmia family trust covers all expenses. About 250 people a year come through the gates here, but there were no residents when I visited. Shukla said this is not uncommon, given the brief remaining lifespan of each.

According to Shukla, "We offer all possible help to those who are sincerely interested in the attainment of moksha, liberation, which may be one in hundreds of thousands. We advise the family to not waste their time in worldly matters, nor in last-minute medical treatment, but to engage themselves in worship so their loved one moves toward liberation. People at this level of seeking liberation have a very committed set of relatives who are by their side at this critical time. Such is the spiritual charisma of these souls that

even you and I will do whatever we can to help them. I get something from serving here that is difficult to express in words. Many seeking liberation had darshan of God and shared their vision and experiences with me." This sharing of miraculous experiences—such as seeing into the next world—is so common to hospice workers of all religions that it has a name: "the gifts."

"Please listen to my words carefully," Shukla continued. "I have attended the deaths of 15,000 people who came here seeking liberation. This gives me the capacity to understand the person who is truly seeking liberation. Many people leave their body in Kashi, but because they are not free from attachments, they will be reborn. Rare is the seeker who has broken all attachments, who has no reason for coming back, and hence will not be reborn."

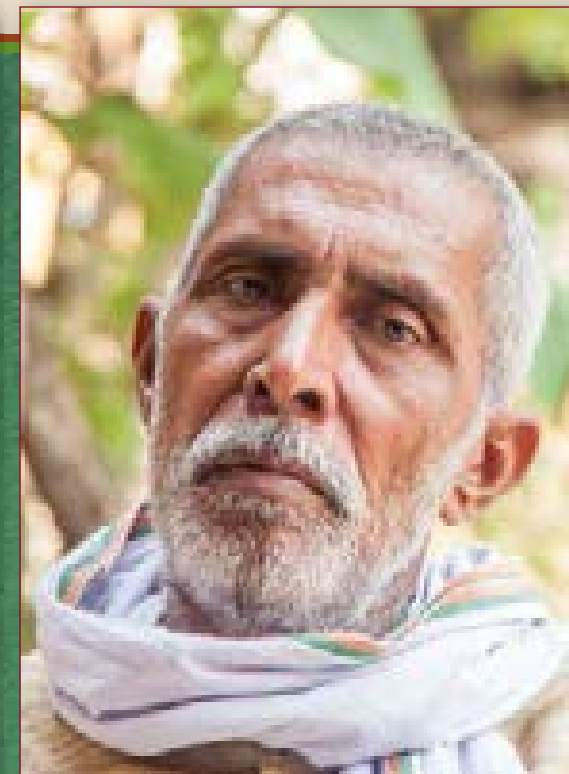
How Does Expiring in Kashi Ensure Liberation?

THE WELL-KNOWN SAYING, KASHYAM MARANAM MUKTIH, "DEATH in Kashi is liberation," attributed to the *Skanda Purana*, has generated considerable debate among local experts. Dr. Ram Narain Dwivedi, head teacher of the Annapurna Temple Gurukulam, summarizes the issue and conclusions: "*Kashyam maranam mukti* is the popular saying. But the *Upanishads* tell us that without knowledge, liberation is not possible. These ideas contradict each other. The scholars of Kashi sat together and concluded that even in Kashi, liberation could not be achieved just

by dying here. One must first attain knowledge. But, they reasoned, it is believed that after death Lord Siva takes each soul in His lap on Manikarnika Ghat and utters the Taraka ("that which helps one swim across") Mantra in his/her ear. This mantra alone conveys the knowledge or grace necessary for liberation, hence it is correct to say that those who die in Kashi will be liberated."

The Taraka Mantra is largely understood as being "Rang Ramaya Namaha," ("I bow to Lord Rama who is inside Agni, the fire"). Some think of it simply as "Rama."

Faithfully Awaiting One's Grand Departure



Manikarnika Ghat: On this evening seven or eight cremations take place simultaneously as mourners watch



The Famed Burning Ghats



(left to right) Mourners enter Manikarnika Ghat carrying their dead relative; Nandlal Prajapati, a potter from Dasipur village 15km away whose mother is being cremated, has had his head shaved; sandalwood powder is poured over a shroud; Lahiri Chaudhary of the Dom, who perform all aspects of the cremation work

The Ancient Rhythm of Cremation

Mourners, priests and chandalas join to perform final rites for the departed

IN KASHI, EVEN PASSING A DEAD BODY ON its way to the cremation ghats—normally an inauspicious event—is considered a blessing. This odd receptivity to death stems from two related religious beliefs. One is that by dying in Kashi one automatically attains liberation from rebirth. The other is that liberation comes when Siva Himself personally gives the Tarak Mantra to those cremated here. These two convictions bring villagers from up to 200 km away to cremate their dead—and bring devotees from far and wide to die in Siva's holy city.

In most places in India, cremation is not done after sunset; but here the main ghats—Manikarnika and Harishchandra—function around the clock, cremating up to a hundred bodies a day, and more in cold weather. In the photo at left, seven or eight cremation pyres are burning at once, and this is typical.

Day or night, the activity is hectic but organized. Grieving mourners loudly chanting "Ram Nam Satya Hai" ("The Name of Ram is Truth") arrive carrying the draped corpse of their loved one on a simple bamboo litter. The body is first immersed in the Ganga, then the pyre is assembled by chandala attendants, the mourners and a priest who has either come with the family or been hired locally. In the photo below, the family is pour-

ing sandalwood powder on the shroud before adding more wood.

Everything needed is available from nearby shops—wood, ghee, sandalwood powder, etc. While this is a business for shopkeepers, they do it in a spirit of service. They expect to be generously rewarded by those of means, but are also willing to help the poor cremate their dead with dignity.

The scene exhibits a peaceful, eerie, otherworldly rhythm about it. Taking solace in this auspicious place, mourners wail in grief. Bright flames shoot up from newly lit pyres. A haze of smoke laden with flakes of grey and black ash envelopes the area. The pyres of the rich are hardly distinguished from those of the poor. Mother Ganga flows past endlessly.

It takes three hours or more for a body to be cremated, and during this time the family waits nearby. There are tea shops at the ghats. One is next to the piles of wood used for the pyres, and open around the clock.

The main expense is us\$48 for about 280 kilos of wood. Donations to the priests, the chandalas and others may reach \$80 to \$160, with the well-off spending much more.

Cremation of a relative is not the only reason people come. The feared Aghori and Tantric ascetics, prudently left alone by others, come here to meditate. Ordinary Hindus

wanting to understand the nature of death sit off to the side or drift by in a boat at night to witness the surreal scene.

Key to all of this are the Dom, the chandalas who manage the cremation process. These are the original "Untouchables" of Hindu society, a stigma which, though lessening, still persists. Lahiri Chaudhary, a 23-year-old member of this clan, tells us that 200 or so families work the ghats. His family maintains the *dhuni* at Harishchandra Ghat, a fire said to have been kept constantly burning for 3,500 years. From its flames all pyres are lit. At the right moment, a member of the departed's family comes to them for the fire to light their pyre.

While not happy with the way his people are treated, Lahiri says things have improved. Now about half the people treat them with respect. Still, their children have difficulty getting established in any other profession. To him, though, this is a sacred duty, and he points out that only the Dom can do this kind of work with the dead, accept money for it and not be harmed in any way.

To those who disrespect the Dom, Lahiri says, "Our reply has always been that even they will finally land up in the cremation ghat one day where their bodies will be burnt with our fire and our help."



The Old City & More

If you're a lover of sweets and saris, this city is for you, but it also has some serious modern issues

MARK TWAIN VISITED HERE IN 1897 and proclaimed: "Benaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together!" His comment was no doubt inspired in part by Pucca Mahal, the nucleus of the modern city of Varanasi which itself fans out over 1,200 square miles and has a population of 1.2 million. Pucca Mahal is adjacent to Panchganga and Manikarnika ghats on the river side. Both Kashi Vishwanath and Annapurana temples are located here. The area is extraordinarily cramped: multi-story buildings front insanely narrow lanes which rarely see a ray of sunshine. There is hardly room for a three wheeler on most streets, let alone a car. Consequently, traffic is on foot, and residents and tourists alike throng the shops which offer food, drinks, saris, books, rudraksha beads, puja material and anything else you can think of.

Both the intelligentsia and the uber rich used to live in this area; the locals still tell stories of their elegance, élan and style. Now,

those better off have moved to less congested areas where they can park a car at their front door. But left behind is this spectacular shopping experience, not the least of which are the sweet shops selling thandai, lassi, kachauris, rabri, malai and more. Here one might wait half an hour to have an order filled.

The paan shops here are extremely popular—the well-known health risks of paan consumption notwithstanding. Umesh Chandra Chaurasiya (photo below) is the fifth generation of his family running his shop. He begins every day with an offering of paan at the nearby Kashi Vishwanath Temple. He says they import paan to Varanasi from all over India, depending on the season.

Frequent funeral processions pass through this area, with mourners wailing and loudly chanting "Ram Nam Satya Hai." Everyone makes way for these processions. Many stand still offering with folded hands a final namaskar to the dead.

Visitors are surprised by the respect accorded the wandering bulls here, all regarded as manifestations of Siva's mount, Nandi.

Should one lie down in a narrow road for a rest, traffic simply adjusts—no one would think of making the Nandi move. These bulls also wander from shop to shop and home to home taking handouts. One famously took up residence in a shop, sitting on the floor hours each day throughout the year.

The city is known for its lifestyle, termed Banarasipan, a key aspect of which is a feeling of equality among all residents. "We do not believe in someone being big and the other person small," explained Sadhu Bhairon Muni of the Bada Udasin Panchayati Akhara. An equally important aspect of the city's character mentioned by many people we interviewed is *mauj masti*, which means literally "fun and bliss."

Bhang, a cannabis preparation, is a significant aspect of Varanasi's mellow life in the spirit of *mauj masti*. Though technically illegal in India it is—inexplicably—sold here by government-run bhang shops. A small tablet costs just two rupees—three US cents—therefore it is within the means of even the poorest of the poor. It is often consumed in the evening mixed with *thandai*, a cold

.....
Inside Varanasi: (below, left to right) Paan merchant Umesh Chandra Chaurasiya in his shop; hot steaming milk is served with a variety of Varanasi's speciality sweets; a shop for famed Banaras silk saris; a typical narrow lane within Pucca Mahal

drink of milk, sugar, almonds and multiple other ingredients. People will then gossip over tea and traditional snacks until well past midnight. This night life is unusual and not something seen in other spiritual cities such as Rishikesh, Haridwar or Allahabad.

Varanasi today is beset with modern problems, largely the result of a threefold population increase since 1947. The most visible is the garbage that clogs the lanes and parts of the ghats. One would think this could be solved with a concerted effort by the municipal government, but for whatever reasons of politics or inefficiency, it has not.

The most serious nuisance is pollution of

the Ganga itself by the city's sewage. We interviewed an unexpected expert on this, the head priest of Sankat Mochan Temple, Dr. Vishwambar Nath Mishra, an electronics engineer by training. The situation, he said, had dramatically changed since his childhood when the river water could be drunk without concern. Now one could catch cholera, typhoid or dysentery from it, according to him. "Ganga is a living Goddess, but we have not given Her the kind of reverence, care and attention She deserves," he pleaded. He said the 1986 Ganga Action Plan launched under Rajiv Gandhi to address the problem was an utter and complete failure.

The Sankat Mochan Foundation, which manages the temple, has itself investigated the issue and proposed a pipeline to intercept all the sewage now entering the river within the city limits and transport it downstream for treatment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the member of parliament for Varanasi, and when he visited the city after the elections, he consulted with Mishra during a visit to the temple. "I suggested to the PM," Mishra recounts, "that he raise the issue at his huge public meeting later that day. To my utter surprise, his entire focus for the 90-minute speech was Ganga. For once, I feel something good will happen in the future."

Just How Ancient Is Varanasi?

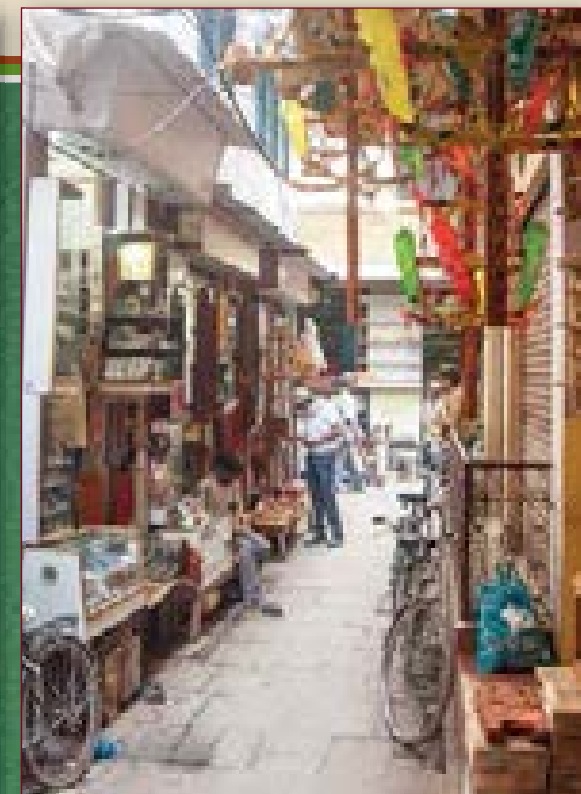
VARANASI IS UNQUESTIONABLY ONE OF THE OLDEST INHABITED settlements in the world, and a contender for the oldest in Asia.

We put the question of Varanasi's age to Dr. Vidula Jayaswal, professor emeritus of ancient Indian history, culture and archeology at Banaras Hindu University. It is not possible, she explained, to do an archeological dig on any scale in a living city, so information has come forth piecemeal. When the Varanasi railway station was being built in the 1940s a seal was found with the name "Varanasi" on it, and the level of the discovery dated to 800bce by archeologist Krishna Deva. She herself excavated the nearby settlements of Aktha, which yielded an age of 1800 bce, and Ram Nagar, which dated to 1750bce. It is known that in the sixth century bce Buddha came to Sarnath, which is just a few miles from Varanasi. At that time Sarnath was a major settlement, while Varanasi was a smaller town or prosperous village at the confluence of the Ganga and Varuna rivers.

Aktha has been identified by Jayaswal as identical to "Rishipattana" in the Buddhist texts.

We asked Dr. Jayaswal about any relationship with the Indus-Saraswati Civilization, which declined around 2100bce, as it is known that parts of the population migrated east to the Ganga basin. She sees no direct relationship, as there is no evidence in terms of pottery, script, toys or anything else. The pottery of this region is different than that of Indus. But at Aktha she did find ashram-type settlements with *kaccha* ("temporary") floors, wooden posts and temporary roofs comparable to the type of construction described in the Vedic texts. There were also fire altars and evidence of Vedic rituals being performed. Over time, she concludes, people moved from the area on the small Varuna River to the banks of the much larger Ganga, which offered long-distance navigation, thus turning Varanasi into a bustling center for trade.

Daily Life in the Spirit of "Fun and Bliss"





(counterclockwise from left) One of Pucca Mahal's thousands of Siva Lingam shrines; the "Tilting Temple" in the 1860s soon after it was built, and now, with its shifted and submerged foundations; a roadside food vendor around mealtime



1860s



2014



Scenes from Varanasi



(left to right) A bull wanders peacefully through the streets; sadhu living at Manikarnika Ghat reading the *Ramayana*; the betel leaf section of Phool Mandi, Varanasi's huge flower and vegetable market; a vendor of marigold garlands





FOOD

Gourmet Indian Dining for Vegetarians!

At the ITC Grand Chola Hotel in Chennai, world-class cuisine, decorous service and a lavish Raja's decor conspire to take healthy eating to celestial heights

BY R. KESAVA MALLIA, CHENNAI

THOUGH THE WORLD IS REDISCOVERING the richness and healthful merits of vegetarianism, it has been slow to provide meatless diners the same elite ambience offered to their meat-loving friends. Enter Chef Manjit S. Gill, Corporate Chef of the ITC hotel chain and arguably India's gastronomic guru, a lifelong vegetarian with a passion for his nation's food traditions and a mission to make India a gastronomic superpower.

Chef Gill and Gautam Anand, Vice President of the ITC Hotels Division, have created a restaurant at the Grand Chola Hotel in Chennai, one that would be the envy of any social or financial power player seeking to impress a client. And this elegant eatery serves no meat. Ever. Period.

Climb the wide Bollywood-style marble staircase and enter the world of Royal Vega. The hostess, decorously attired, ushers you in with a 70mm smile, offering jasmine garlands to the lady guests. Arati is gracefully waved before each guest. One feels regal.

Soft strains of sitar, flute and tabla guide you to the table. Appetizers grace a solid silver leaf beside your plate. The server offers two menus—red for the host, who pays the bill, and cream for the guests, sans prices.

Guests reviewing their meal on Trip Advisor found the staff remarkably attentive, the portions staggeringly generous and the prices a bit Himalayan.

Every page on the visually rich menu card, which completely changes every eight weeks with the local seasons, features royal ornaments. The menu is divided into ten sections, each labeled in Sanskrit with English and Hindi descriptions.

So, what's for dinner tonight? I scan the headings: Amiksha (paneer, fresh Indian cheese); Alukam (alu, potatoes); Dalika (dal, pulses, lentils); Ratna Garbha (kofteh, spicy marble-sized savories); Karhi (curd gravy); Ardra (tikiya, patty); Shalivarge (chawal, rice); Rotik (roti, bread); Dadhi varga (dahi, curd); and Mishtanam (mithras, sweets).

Let's Dine at the Palace Tonight

The restaurant's five opulent dining halls reflect the traditional spaces in which Indian courtiers dined. In those days people ate in separate groups according to rank and position. Thus the Royal Vega's five chambers: Rajadhiraj Takht where the king entertained dignitaries; Niwas, where the ministers dined; Rajvansh Chowki, a low seating area reserved for second-tier royals; Rajmata Chowki where the Queen ate; and Rajrani

Kaksh, a private dining area for ladies of the royal household. (The restaurant generously allows men to eat here, too.)

The Philosophy of Food

Chef Gill offers some background: "Gautam Anand and I researched the cuisine based on vegetarian traditions across the states of India coupled with religious beliefs and geographical factors. We studied the various elements which have contributed to the evolution of vegetarian food in India, like trade and ethnic influences. We delved into ayurveda and the science of spices in food, then forayed into the temple and princely cuisines of India. All these factors helped us in understanding their influences on vegetarian food preferences and how the present-day vegetarian diet has evolved. A great deal of research went into identifying the characteristics of each ingredient. Indian gastronomy is distinctive in that there are no standardized recipes in our tradition."

The cuisine is sourced from all regions, admitting no South-North duality. Each item is cooked anew; everything is completely fresh. Masalas are hand pounded, mirchis are stone ground. Desi cow ghee is the only oil used. Foods prepared here follow the six seasons and the six tastes. Ayurveda speaks



Worthy of royalty: (left) The restaurant showcases pan-Indian foods inspired by the kitchens of royalty, with spices aplenty and all six tastes; (inset) Founders Chef Manjit Gill in turban and Gautam Anand; (above) Executive Chef Ajit Bangera, Chef Varun Mohan and Chef Srinivasan (right) the regal Rajrani Kaksh room for the court's queen and princesses

of these tastes: 1) madhura or sweet; 2) amla or sour; 3) lavana or salty; 4) tikta or bitter; 5) katu or pungent; 6) kasaya or astringent.

Chef Gill, who authored *The Secrets of Indian Gastronomy*, explains: "Madhura, sweet, is ideally the first bite to every meal. According to our Vedic saints, the taste or shade of something sweet is indicative of a start, cooling down the system and increasing the appetite. This enhances the capacity of agni, giving strong digestive powers."

"The subcontinent experiences six seasons, and our food requirements are related to a particular season. Every two months (masa), commencing with Magha, the six seasons (ritu) revolve in order: shishira (cold and dewy), vasanta (spring), grishma (summer), varsha (monsoon), sharad (autumn) and hemanta (winter)."

Indian gastronomy states that the taste (rasa) of food is not incidental but an indication of its properties. Different tastes possess different effects. We correlate taste with the therapeutic properties of foods. For instance, there is a general belief that pungent food creates more heat, or agni, and that bitter

foods help reduce fever.

For this reason, bland foods may not be nourishing in spite of their vitamins and minerals. Without stimulating agni, there is insufficient power of digestion. Ayurvedic gastronomy has always included the science of cooking with the right spices.

It's All About the Chefs

Fine restaurants are about ambience, food and presentation, and these derive their authority and sophistication from the team of chefs—first to the creators like Chef Gill and Anand, and then to the daily team. Chef Varun Mohan leads the food production team, who are all required to be vegetarians. Chef Tamarai Manalan, a bachelor from Chennai, says, "Every day we use high quality ingredients made afresh. Working here is an amazing experience."

Chef Ram Lakhan and Chef Ompal, both from Uttar Pradesh and each with two decades' experience in cooking, are the load-bearing pillars of this kitchen. Ram Lakhan is skilled in bulk cooking, making pooris and masalas, while Ompal is the saucier and re-

sponsible for presentation on the plate.

Chef Manoj serves silently and always with a smile. Deaf and mute, he is the master baker who also crafts the savory pastes, chutneys and masalas. These are so good, they have become a signature of the restaurant.

Chef Archana from Bengaluru is the only lady chef. "Any innovative initiative to change the cuisine," she says, "involves everybody to contribute, willingly and spontaneously. That's what I like most here."

Before each workday begins, Chef Varun ties an apron over his coat and lights an oil lamp in the altar space. Only after prayers is he ready to go.

Sahil Raheja, the affable manager, mentions one more Royal Vega is opening in Kolkata at the ITC Grand Bangla. "Our guests have accepted the vegetarian cuisine wholeheartedly." The guestbook tells the tale. Tamil Nadu's well-known business magnate, Malika Srinivasan from the TVS family, wrote: "What a delightful dinner. The food was elegantly presented, the tastes mystical and subtle, the presentation regal and the service outstanding. Kudos to the entire team. Looking forward to being here again."

Visit: bit.ly/royalvega

A Taste of India's Princely Past: (left to right) The 600-room ITC Grand Chola; an all-vegetarian team; the Rajadhiraj Takht, the king's table; Rajvansh Chowki, the ministers' room; fit-for-a-king thali for those demanding dinner be served on a silver platter.



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

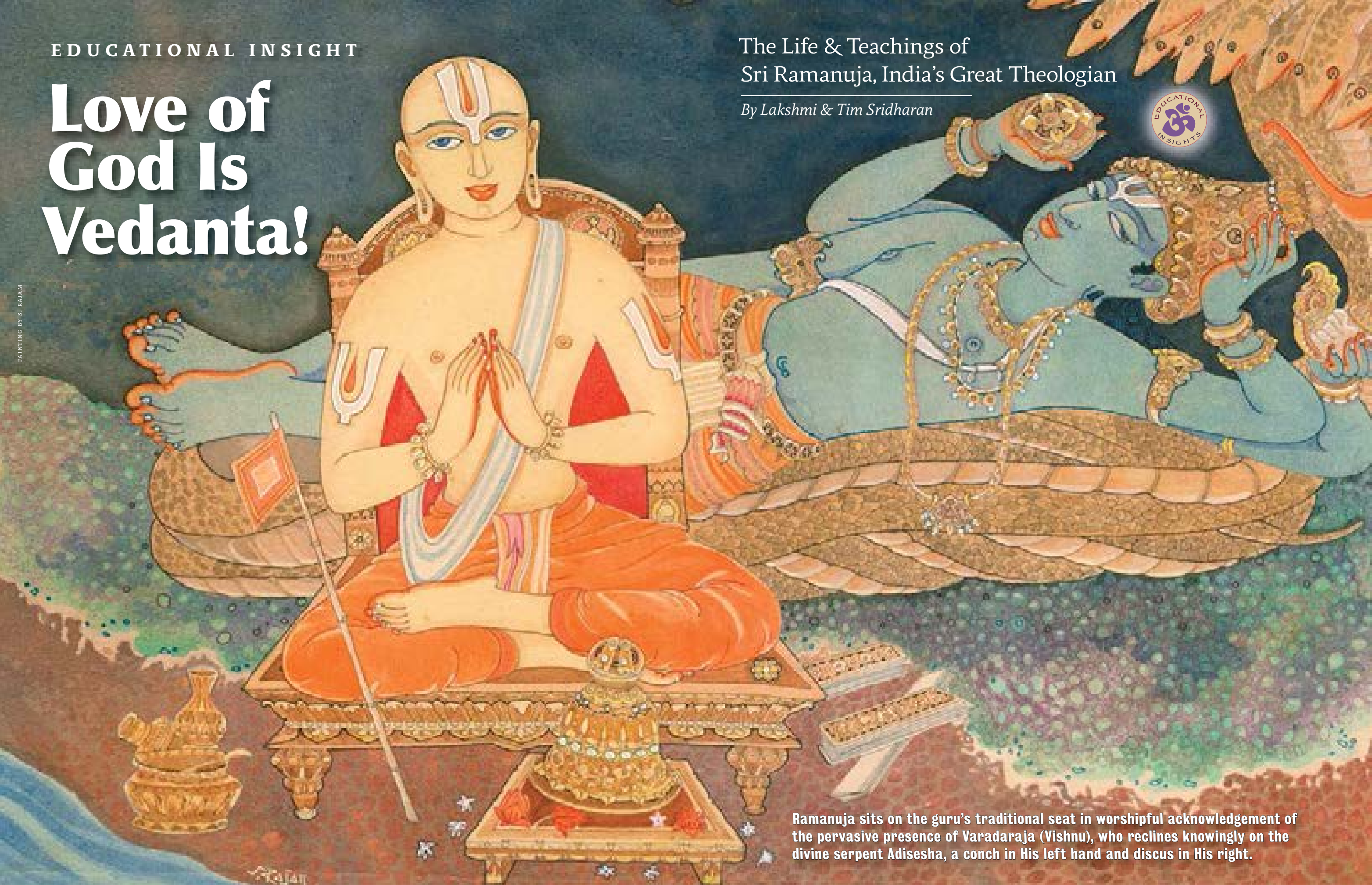
Love of God Is Vedanta!

The Life & Teachings of
Sri Ramanuja, India's Great Theologian

By Lakshmi & Tim Sridharan



PAINTING BY S. RAJAM



Ramanuja sits on the guru's traditional seat in worshipful acknowledgement of the pervasive presence of Varadaraja (Vishnu), who reclines knowingly on the divine serpent Adishesha, a conch in His left hand and discus in His right.

ASURI KESHAVA SOMAYAJULU AND HIS WIFE KANTHIMATHI, a young orthodox Vaishnavite couple living in Sriperumbudur (30 miles southwest of modern-day Chennai), yearned for a child. As so many young Hindu couples before them, the two regarded birth as a blessing held in the hands of God. Together they prayed ardently to the Varadaraja Perumal Deity in nearby Kanchipuram. Their heartfelt prayers were answered by the birth of a healthy, divine child—a son who, according to legend, was an incarnation of the serpent Adishesha (who had long ago incarnated as Rama's younger brother, Lakshmana).

Kanthimathi's brother, Thirumalai Nambi, struck by his nephew's noble appearance and brilliant aura, named him Ramanujan (brother of Rama). Also named as Ilaya Perumal ("younger God") by Nambi,

Ramanuja would grow up to become a great scholar, teacher, theologian, philosopher and social reformer. Born ten centuries before Mahatma Gandhi, he foreshadowed Gandhi's vision and ideals. He believed that the holy scriptures and Lord Narayana, God, are not the sole property of the brahmin community. Rather, everyone, irrespective of social status, has the right to learn the scriptures and worship Narayana. He believed that service to humanity is service to God.

Ramanuja and His First Teacher, Yadavaprakasha

Young Ramanuja had an extraordinary and precocious gift for grasping the meaning of the most difficult Sanskrit texts. He sought out the company of wise men, scholars and devotees. Ramanuja's family arranged his marriage at age 16 to a beautiful girl named Rakshambal, culminating in a week-long ceremony at which the whole town rejoiced. But the joy did not last long, as Ramanuja's father, Keshava, fell severely ill and died shortly after.

Following the traumatic demise of his father, the young groom left Sriperumbudur with his wife and mother and moved to the neighboring town of Thiruputkuzhi, near Kanchipuram, a well-known center of learning. Having studied Sanskrit and the *Vedas* under his father, he would now study advanced Vedanta. There, Yadavaprakasha, a renowned advaitic acharya, accepted Ramanuja and his cousin Govinda as his disciples.

There is a saying in Tamil, "*Guruvukku minjina sishyan*," praising the exceptional student who in some way surpasses his guru. Ramanuja was one such student. Yadava was strict in his beliefs, demeanor and expectations, demanding complete, unquestioning devotion from his disciples. Though faced with an

intimidating teacher's unbending ways, Ramanuja could not suppress his profound disagreement with Yadava's views.

For instance, he openly challenged the teacher on the meaning of "*Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma*" (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.1.1). Yadava's interpretation was, "Brahman is the whole form of truth, wisdom and infinitude." Ramanuja's gleaming was much fuller: "Lord has qualities such as truth and knowledge and has no beginning or end. God is eternal. However, those qualities alone are not Brahman."

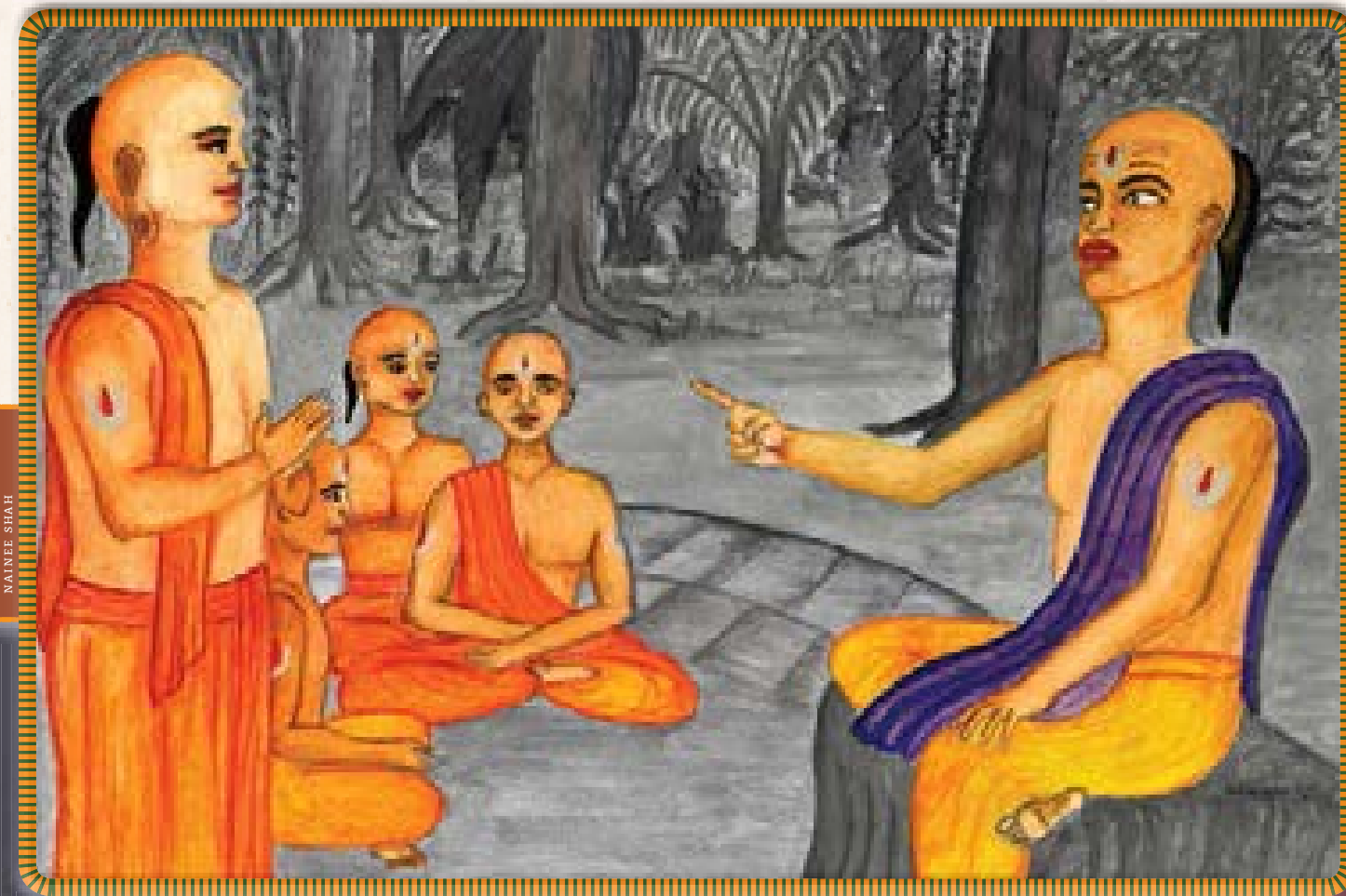
Yadavaprakasha was not impressed with his disciple's extension or interpretation of the text, but rather annoyed. He was afraid that his brilliant student was a real threat not only to his status as guru but also to his advaita philosophy. Concerned that, if allowed to thrive, the youth might found a rival school, the guru hatched a plot to kill Ramanuja during a pilgrimage to Varanasi that he would make with all his disciples. The plan was to drown Ramanuja near Manikarnika Ghat. According to *Life of Ramanujan*, Yadav rationalized this as a

"death which, taking place in the Holy Ganga, would be counted as an affair of merit, which they thought would not involve the actors in sin! What travesty of spiritual ethics by Yadava!"

Along the way, Ramanuja's cousin Govinda learned of the murderous plot and informed Ramanuja. Shocked and fearful of his teacher's intent, Ramanuja fled the party, hiking off into the Vindhya hills. Traveling through the forest, he met and was befriended by a hunter couple who said they were on pilgrimage south to Kanchipuram. He shared that he wanted to go to Kanchi as well, and they offered to take him there. They suggested a well they knew of where they could gather water and bathe. They camped for the night and the next morning hiked to the well. Ramanuja went down a hill to the well and drank of the cool water. When he returned with water for the hunter couple, he could not find them. The couple had disappeared. Weary and confused, he continued his journey. Approaching a town and seeing its temple towers, he recognized it as his beloved



Left: A view of the temples in Sriperumbudur. The largest tower is one of the gopurams of the Adhikesava Perumal temple. Right: Ramanuja has a heated philosophical debate with his first teacher, Yadavaprakasha (seated on bench), who scolds the impertinent student.



South India's Four Renowned Philosopher Saints

Hindu faith, religion, ethics, culture and traditions are strongly rooted in the vast body of ancient scriptures called the *Vedas*. Hindus revere these scriptures, compiled thousands of years ago, as revealed truth, or *shruti* ("that which is heard"). The first sections of the *Vedas* represent the *karma kanda*, emphasizing human life and worship of the Divine. The final portion of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, being philosophical by nature, represent the *jnana kanda* (wisdom), emphasizing philosophy. They are also considered the ultimate end of the *Vedas*; hence the term *Vedanta* (*Veda* + *anta*, meaning "end"). The *Upanishads* speak of the nature of reality, the world and the soul's path to liberation from rebirth.

In scripture it is proclaimed, "Acharya devo bavah:" "Acharya (guru) is God," implying that only with the guidance of an acharya can one comprehend and interpret the holy scriptures, lead a

righteous life and use jnana, or knowledge, as a vehicle to attain moksha. The four great acharyas of South India, who lived many centuries ago, are Shankara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka and Madhva. Each formulated his own interpretation of the relationship between the infinite God (Paramatman, Parabrahman, Purushothaman, etc.) and the finite atman (individual self), as revealed in the *Upanishads* and other texts. The three basic concepts in their philosophies are God, soul and world—the fundamental triad of existence.

These four acharyas were not contemporaries: Ramanuja (1017–1137 ce) could question the interpretation of Shankara (780–812) but not of Madhva (1238–1317) or Nimbarka (13th century). Nor were they of the same faith: Ramanuja, Madhva and Nimbarka were staunch Vaishnavites, while Shankara was of the Smarta tradition.

Shankara promulgated pure Advaita, a non-dualistic or monistic philosophy teaching the oneness of the soul, atman, with Paramatman, the Supreme Soul, or God, and focusing on Reality as transcendent. Madhva, at the other extreme, taught Dvaita, a dualistic and theistic philosophy, postulating an eternal distinction between atman and Paramatman. He regarded the Supreme Person as a great Being, a Personal Lord. Nimbarka taught Dvaita-Advaita, positing three equally real and co-eternal realities—Brahman, the souls (chit), and the world (achit). Brahman is the Controller (niyantri), chit is the

enjoyer (bhoktri) and the achit is the object enjoyed (bhogya). Ramanuja's philosophy, known as Vishishtadvaita, or "monism of the qualified," finds a middle ground, leaning towards monism yet disagreeing with Shankara's understanding on several points: the relationship between atman and Paramatman; the definition of Parabrahman as nirguna (without guna, qualities) and the concept of maya, which Shankara defined as illusion. Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita synthesizes the Advaita philosophy with the devotional practices of dualists and the alvar saints' path of surrender, *saranagati*.

Kanchipuram. Suddenly it dawned on him that the hunter couple were not human but divine beings. The Deity Varadaraja Perumal of the Kanchi Temple and His consort Perundevi had become his guides in the Vindhyan wilds and that night while he slept had miraculously transported him 1,000 miles to his destination.

When Yadavaprakasa arrived at Kanchi, to his astonishment and dismay he found Ramanuja there ahead of him. Feigning joy, he said, "Our grief at your loss in the wilds was great; but seeing you now, it has given way to boundless joy." Ramanuja reported to his would-be assassin that he had lost his way and gotten separated from the group, but was aided by a hunter couple who had magically transported

him to Kanchipuram while he slept under a tree. Hearing this account, Yadava stared at Ramanuja in fear and wonder, at that moment realizing that Ramanuja was not an ordinary man but a great soul to be looked upon with utmost regard. Ashamed of his evil intentions, Yadava invited Ramanuja to again grace his school with his presence.

Ramanuja resumed his studies with Yadava, but their relationship once again became bitter as philosophical differences kept them at odds. When Ramanuja could no longer endure his guru's intellectual tyranny, he left him. The following incident, narrated by Swami Tapasyananda in his book *Sri Ramanuja*, illustrates their divergent perspectives:



"One day Yadavaprakasha was interpreting the Upanishadic passage, *Sarvam khalvidam brahma, ne'ha nanasti kinchana*, 'All this is Brahman; there is no diversity here whatever.' He was interpreting it, justifying the doctrine of the oneness of the Atman and Brahman. Ramanuja differed from him and said the passage would have meant the oneness of all with Brahman if it were not followed by, *Tajjalan iti shanta upasita*, 'This universe is born in, sustained by and dissolves in Brahman; meditate thus on Him.' This qualification makes the earlier part mean: 'The things in this *samsara* are not existing severally, but as pearls strung on a thread; they are interpenetrated by Brahman and held as a unity without impairing their manifoldness.' This interpretation of Ramanuja generated a violent fit of annoyance in Yadavaprakasha. He asked Ramanuja to get away from his school. In obedience to the teacher, he took leave of him after worshiping his feet in all reverence."

This was a turning point in the young philosopher's life. Years later, Ramanuja defeated this former master in a debate. So potent was the victory that the once arrogant advaitin became a staunch Vaishnavite and a devotee of Ramanuja.

"Ramanuja was glad to leave this teacher of an impossible and absurd philosophy. Straight home he went, and informed his mother Sri-Devi of all that happened. 'Enough of thy studies, son!' said she; 'there is Tirukkacchi Nambi who is in great favor with Lord Varadaraja. Seek his advice and service, and abide by his will. That will do thee all the good.' Ramanuja at once sought Nambi and besought him to employ him in divine services in the temple" (as recounted in Govindacharya's *The Life of Ramanujacharya*).

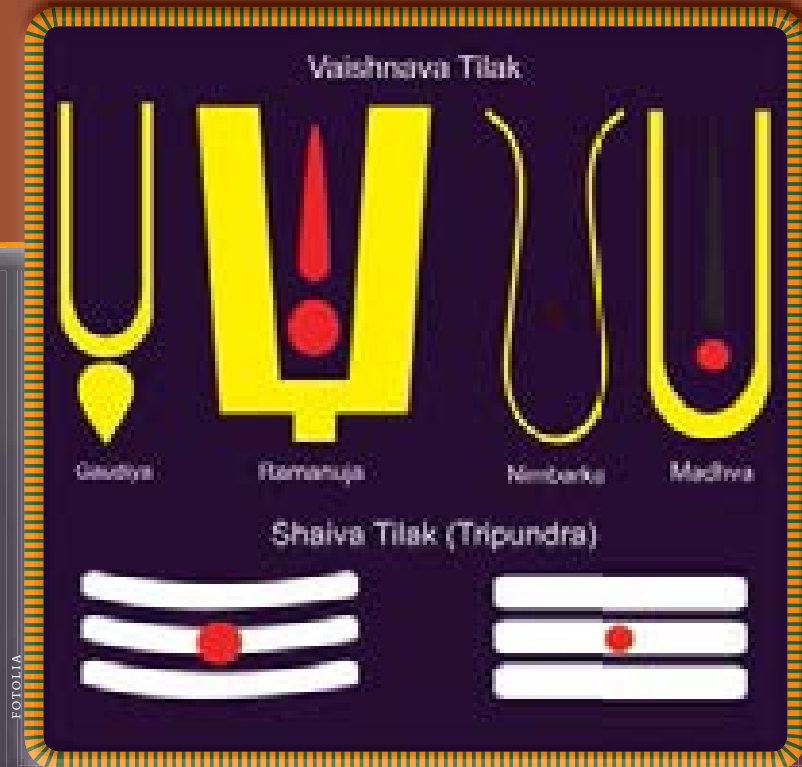
Ramanuja and the Great Yamunacharya

After leaving Yadavaprakasha, Ramanuja searched for a spiritual master. Meanwhile, the renowned Yamunacharya (917-1042) of Srirangam, now ailing, had been looking for an ideal student to become his successor. Yamunacharya was a scholar, a spiritual master and a powerful debater. As a mere child of twelve, he had defeated the most formidable scholar at the king's court, winning half the kingdom and receiving the title Alavandar ("ruler," "savior") from the queen. Yamuna later renounced the kingdom to become a sannyasin and acharya, fulfilling the wishes of his grandfather, the great Nathamuni. It should be mentioned that the Vishishtadvaita philosophy and the creed of Shri Vaishnavism were already well established in South India at this time, firmly embodied in important temples at Kanchipuram, Tirupati and other major towns. The prefix *Shri* refers to the Goddess Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu. Yamuna was in charge of the Ranganatha Temple and Vishishtadvaita Math at Srirangam, the main center of the Shri Vaishnavas.

It is believed that Ramanuja's break with Yadavaprakasha was due to the prayers of Yamunacharya. Having had heard of his saintly prowess, Yamunacharya foresaw him as his successor. Author Govindacharya narrates this prayer: "Yamunacharya now mounted up to the central shrine of Lord Varada (called Hastigiri). Standing before the Deity he prayed, 'Great Lord! grant me a boon. Thou art *Vara-da* (Boon-Granter). By thy favor, the deaf hears, the lame runs, the dumb speaks, the blind sees and the barren bears. I have sought Thee. Grant me that Ramanuja shall become the bearer of the torch of our faith."

As explained by Swami Tapasyananda, "It was his great ambition

Left: Ramanuja kneels beside Yamunacharya, who has just left his body. The thumb and two fingers on the right hand are clenched, which Ramanuja interprets as three wishes he must fulfill. Right: the distinctive sectarian forehead & body insignia of four Vaishnava denominations along with the tripundra tilak worn by Saivites.



Ramanuja's Philosophy & Theology

Ramanuja, in contrast with Shankara, asserts that the Upanishadic absolute Brahman is not a bare identity or a non-entity but rather a determinate whole, maintaining an identity in and through the differences—that the absolute, infinite Brahman manifests in every finite reality. He echoes the words of Prahlad, who defied his atheist father by saying God is in this pillar and even in the smallest of all things ("Thoonilum ullan, thurumbilan ullan"). Life is real, matter is real, and universe is real; these are not figments of imagination, not illusory objects, however transient they may be. Ramanuja's personal Deity is a composite of the divine characteristics described in the

holy Sanskrit scriptures and the Tamil Divya Prabandham. The Supreme has "a divine form peculiar to itself, not of the primal substance or matter (*prakriti*) and not due to karma."

To illuminate the acharya's brilliant outlook, we gratefully offer the following long excerpt from the book *Sri Ramanuja*, by Swami Tapasyananda of the Ramakrishna Mission.

The philosophy of Sri Ramanuja is the most pre-eminent among the Bhakti Schools of Vedanta, both because of the profundity of the doctrines it expounds and the balanced devotionism it teaches. Barring Bhaskara's Bhedabheda (identity-

in-difference) interpretation of Vedanta Sutras, Ramanuja's was the first comprehensive criticism of the Vedanta as expounded by Shankara some three centuries before him. The other schools of Bhakti Vedanta that came after him have only taken up his criticisms and teachings with minor re-statements to suit their theological leanings. The common object of all these systems may be stated thus: They seek to establish the supremacy of the Divine Personality, known under the different sacred names of Purushottama, Narayana, Vasudeva, Krishna, etc., and equate Him with Brahman, the Absolute of the *Upanishads*. For them, the Supreme Being is a Person with attributes, and there is no Absolute beyond Him. They also lay stress on the exclusive position of devotion and Divine grace as the only means to overcome the hold of karma on the jiva and enable him to attain salvation. Salvation or release from the hold of karma does not mean for them the mergence of the jiva in Brahman, but attaining to the status of an eternal servant of His, which alone can give unalloyed bliss to the jiva. Most of these teachings are mainly theological, but they require the backing of a consistent metaphysics to establish their credibility.

Among all the teachers of this devotional brand of Vedanta,

Ramanuja is the one whose metaphysical genius rivals that of Shankara himself. He was a master of Vedic lore and methodology of arguments and exposition. While in his subsidiary works he leans very much on the devotional writings of his school of Vaishnavism, in his main work, the *Shri Bhashya* or the commen-

to bring about a union between the emotional religion of the alvars and the Vedantic methodology of philosophic exposition which had become current in the scholarly world after the advent of Shankaracharya and his commentaries on Vedantic texts. He could not himself fulfill this work in his life, but towards the end of his life he came across Ramanuja and recognized in him the competent Vedic scholar who could do it." Overjoyed upon hearing of Ramanuja's separation from his former guru, Yamuna sent Mahapurna, one of his closest disciples, to go and bring the brilliant student to him from Kanchipuram.

Reaching Srirangam after four days of travel, Ramanuja and Mahapurna encountered a long funeral procession which they learned

was carrying the body of Yamuna to the cremation grounds. Despite his will to live until Ramanuja's arrival, the great Vaishnava saint had passed away.

Hearing this tragic news, Mahapurna and Ramanuja fell to the ground and wept. After a few moments, forgetting his own grief, Mahapurna led Ramanuja by the hand to Yamuna's side. "I have at least been able to see Yamunacharya," Ramanuja uttered. Falling silent, he scanned the body and discovered that the thumb and two fingers of the right hand were curled. Intrigued by the strange sight, Ramanuja wondered if the sage had some special message to express, and asked aloud to the gathering if the guru had told them of some important wishes that had been unsatisfied in his life. Mahapurna then explained to Ramanuja that, yes, indeed, his Acharya had many times expressed three aspirations:

1) To perpetuate the doctrine of *saranagati*, complete surrender to the personal Deity; 2) To write a commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* of Sage Vyasa to bring out the real Vishishtadvaita meaning within them; 3) To perpetuate the names of Parashara (author of *Vishnu Purana*) and saint Shadakopa (a poet-saint also known as Nammalvar).

Without hesitation, Ramanuja promised boldly that he would fulfill these ambitious goals. "Holy sage," addressing his figure, "if this is thy mind, I promise I shall carry it out, provided I have the health, provided thy grace is on me, and provided God grants my prayers." (Govindacharya).

And as he did so, the saint's curled fingers straightened one by one. At that moment, Ramanuja accepted Yamunacharya as his *manasika acharya*, "silent teacher." Witnessing these vows and the miraculous uncurling of Yamunacharya's fingers, the

Left: The murti of Sri Ramanuja inside the Adikesava Perumal Temple at his birthplace, Sripurembudur. Right: Standing at the base of a temple gopuram just moments after his japa initiation, Ramanuja shouts out to the masses the sacred and secret mantra Om Namo Narayana.

Non-dual One, which was always there unchanged as the substratum. He thus achieves the unity of all existence and the unchangeableness and unaffectedness of Brahman. This achievement leaves many problems unsolved and creates many others to be solved. He however gives a prima facie reality to the world of diversity from the practical point of view (*vyavaharika satta*), only to deny it absolutely in the end. An unmodified and attributeless Consciousness alone is the Ultimate Reality. Reality has thus for him two tiers—the apparently real and the truly real.

Ramanuja is totally hostile to this Advaitic interpretation of the unity proclaimed by this brand of Vedanta. Unity is not the sublation of all diversity but the subordination of diversity to unity. His system is called Vishishtadvaita, a term which, according to competent authorities, is not used by him anywhere in his writings, but came to be used later to differentiate it from the other systems of Advaita, just as Shankara's doctrine came to be called in later times Kevaladvaita. Both Shankara and Ramanuja considered themselves only as Vedantins, and for both of them their system is the Vedanta.

The term Vishishtadvaita is often translated as "qualified non-

whole assembly in one voice declared, "Sire, doubt not that the sage's grace is fully upon you; the very power and glory of his spirit will enter into you; you are the fit successor to him for furtherance of our faith. We all anoint you for the task." Once the funeral rites were performed, Ramanuja took leave of Mahapurna.

Yamunacharya's death was a severe blow to Ramanuja; he left for Kanchi without even seeing Lord Ranganatha. It is chronicled of Ramanuja that he often used to express to his holy assembly that "If I

had been permitted for one single day to be in the living company of Sri Yamuna, I would have constructed a staircase to Heaven and procured free admission to all thereto" (Govindacharya).

Transcending Social Barriers

Social structure in eleventh-century India was quite different from what it is now. Only members of the brahmin caste were allowed to perform puja in Hindu temples. And the lowest members of the



tary on the *Vedanta Sutras* of Badarayana, he exhibits himself to be a pure Vedantin, that is, the follower of the Upanishadic doctrine of Brahman, which of course is for him identical with Narayana, the Divine Person.

The Upanishadic Brahman is the unity which comprehends in Himself all the diversities of common experience and yet remains unaffected and unlimited by them. Shankara establishes that unity by reducing all diversity into a mere appearance like a snake superimposed on a rope in semi-darkness. According to him, the darkness of ignorance is the cause of illusory presentation of multiplicity. All the time the multiplicity is perceived, it is not actually there, and the unitary Consciousness had remained unchanged. On the light of knowledge arising, the illusory presentation disappears without leaving any residue beyond the



dualism." Scholars disagree with this translation. The compound (*sandhi*) is not *karmadharayan* but *bahuvrahi*, and its English translation will be the "non-duality of the qualified whole." Von Buitenin has elaborated it as "unity of the universe's spiritual and non-spiritual substances with, and in, a God whom they modify as His body." A more compact translation is "pan-organistic non-dualism." In this system, the world is ultimately true, the jiva is ultimately true, God is ultimately true, and liberation from bondage is also factually true. Thus, in effect, it is a totally realistic theism in which God and the Absolute are one and the same. The non-dual, all-inclusive qualified Whole is the Brahman of the Vedanta, according to Ramanuja.

While this metaphysical framework is established and argued

with relentless logic and philosophical methodology of Vedantic tradition, Ramanuja's system gets flesh and blood by his devotional ideologies of the passionate devotees of the Lord Vishnu (the alvars) that the Tamil land produced from the second to the eighth century. Thus Ramanuja's Vedanta becomes philosophical Vaishnavism. While he is a strict Vedantin in his methodology and way of scriptural exegesis, he identified the Upanishadic Brahman with Vishnu-Narayana; and this is his turning point from philosophy to religion. His Vaishnavism is indicated in his early major writing the *Shri Bhashya*, but becomes pronounced in his later writings. The account of Ramanuja's life given earlier makes clear how these two streams of thought, the Vedic and the Vaishnava, came to mingle in him.

social hierarchy, the untouchables, were not allowed to enter temple premises at all. Brahmins did not entertain non-brahmins in their homes. Ramanuja had no regard for the caste system, and he never ceased seeking instruction from those who were qualified to give it, regardless of caste.

After the cremation of Yamuna, Ramanuja returned to Kanchi where he devoted his time to serving Lord Varadaraja and associating with Kanchipurna, a saintly devotee he had known and respected from a young age, all the while paying little attention to his wife and his family duties. Though Ramanuja beseeched Kanchipurna to be his guru, the latter humbly declined and instead deferred him to Mahapurna for further training. Thus, one year after Yamuna's grand departure, Ramanuja was formally brought into the Vaishnava fold in a rite in which Mahapurna impressed the seal of Vishnu's conch on his arms. For the following six months in Kanchipuram, he studied with Mahapurna the sacred *Divya Prabandham*, 4,000 devotional Tamil verses composed by the twelve Alvar saints.



Theology

In fact, Ramanuja's mission in life was this—to effect a rational and natural mingling of the rapturous devotion of the alvars with the Upanishadic quest of the ontological and unifying ground of the changing world of the many. Bhakti, or devotion, requires two—the adorable and lovable God who is a Person as also the Supreme Being on the one hand, and the devotee who finds his fulfilment in service of Him, on the other. The Vedanta of the Upanishads mainly preaches the doctrine of the Absolute Being, who is the non-dual source, substratum and dissolving ground of the many that constitute the world of our experience. “That out of which all beings come, in which they all subsist, and into which they are withdrawn is Brahman”—this is the watchword of the *Upanishads*. Brahman is all-inclusive and all-absorbing, and is described by such epithets as Sat-chid-ananda (Existence-knowledge-bliss) and Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma (Brahman is Truth, Consciousness and Infinite).

Meanwhile, Rakshambal was understandably disturbed by her husband's indifference to their life together since his return from Srirangam. Unwavering in her brahmin orthodoxy, she was also irreconcilably opposed to his mingling with Kanchipurna and other non-brahmins. There were several incidents in which she insulted non-brahmins, including Kanchipurna, his wife and Mahapurna. Unable to endure this, Ramanuja, still somber over his guru's death, separated from her, sending her home to her parents.

Resolving that he had had enough of worldly life, Ramanuja undertook the rites for entering into the holy order of sannyasins at the Varadaraja Temple in the company of Kanchipurna, with the Deity, Lord Varadaraja, as his guru. Thereafter, staying for some time as head of the monastery in Kanchi, he began giving discourses on Vedanta and Vaishnavism to the many disciples who were drawn to his presence.

To complete his conversion to Vaishnavism, Ramanuja was encouraged by Mahapurna to seek initiation from Thirukottiyur Nambigal (a.k.a. Gostipurna) into formal recital of the sacred eight-syllable mantra, *Om Namō Narayanaya*. Nambigal taught Ramanuja the meaning of *Charama shloka*, the noblest of all passages in the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, he hesitated to give him mantra initiation. Ramanuja had to make eighteen trips seeking this initiation before gaining the confidence of the guru, who swore him to secrecy before imparting the mantra. “Ramanuja! Keep this mantra a secret. It is powerful. Share it only with disciples who have proven themselves worthy,” Ramanuja promised his guru that he would not share it—but it was a promise he could not keep.

Desiring that all souls might enjoy the eternal bliss of

Left: The Thirunarayanapuram Temple in Melkote, a sacred kshetra in Karnataka where Ramanuja resided for twelve years. Right: Ramanuja seeks the blessings of Lord Varadaraja in Kanchi,

Shankaracharya interprets this Upanishadic doctrine of the Absolute as the Non-dual Being in whom the world of the many is a mere appearance ascribed by Ignorance and not actually existing. For practical purposes, he gives a prima facie reality (Vyavaharika Satta) to the world of the many and to God, who is its cause. But this God (Saguna-Brahman) is distinguished from the Absolute, and His reality belongs to the same order as that of the world of the many that are said to be His creation. When Ignorance is overcome by proper metaphysical insight, the aspirant realizes that what he considered as his “I” is really the Absolute Brahman into whom the apparent world and its God too resolve. It is comparable to the appearance of a snake in semi-darkness, and its disappearance in its substratum, the rope, on the removal of darkness. Both the world and God conceived as its cause are sublated and are realized as having had no real existence.

Ramanuja totally differs from such interpretation of the Upanishadic doctrine which militates against the ultimacy of God and the supremacy of devotion. He criticises severely the theory of Ignorance and the compartmentalisation of Reality into Paramartha (ultimate) and Vyavaharika (relative or practical). To the question, what is the locus of Ignorance, there is no credible an-

swer from the Advaitin. If it is Brahman, Brahman becomes loaded with evil and becomes unworthy as a spiritual goal. If it is the *jiva* (individual spirit), the same defect persists, as the *jiva* in its real nature is one with Brahman according to advaita. If it is an entirely different category, dualism is the result. Besides, the *jiva* is caused by the *upadhis* (adjuncts) superimposed on Brahman, and these upadhis are the products of Ignorance. Thus Ignorance must precede the *jiva* and cannot therefore be conceived as located in it. To describe Ignorance as a category that is neither existent nor non-existent nor a combination of both is to speak a language unknown to logical thinking.

At Home in Srirangam

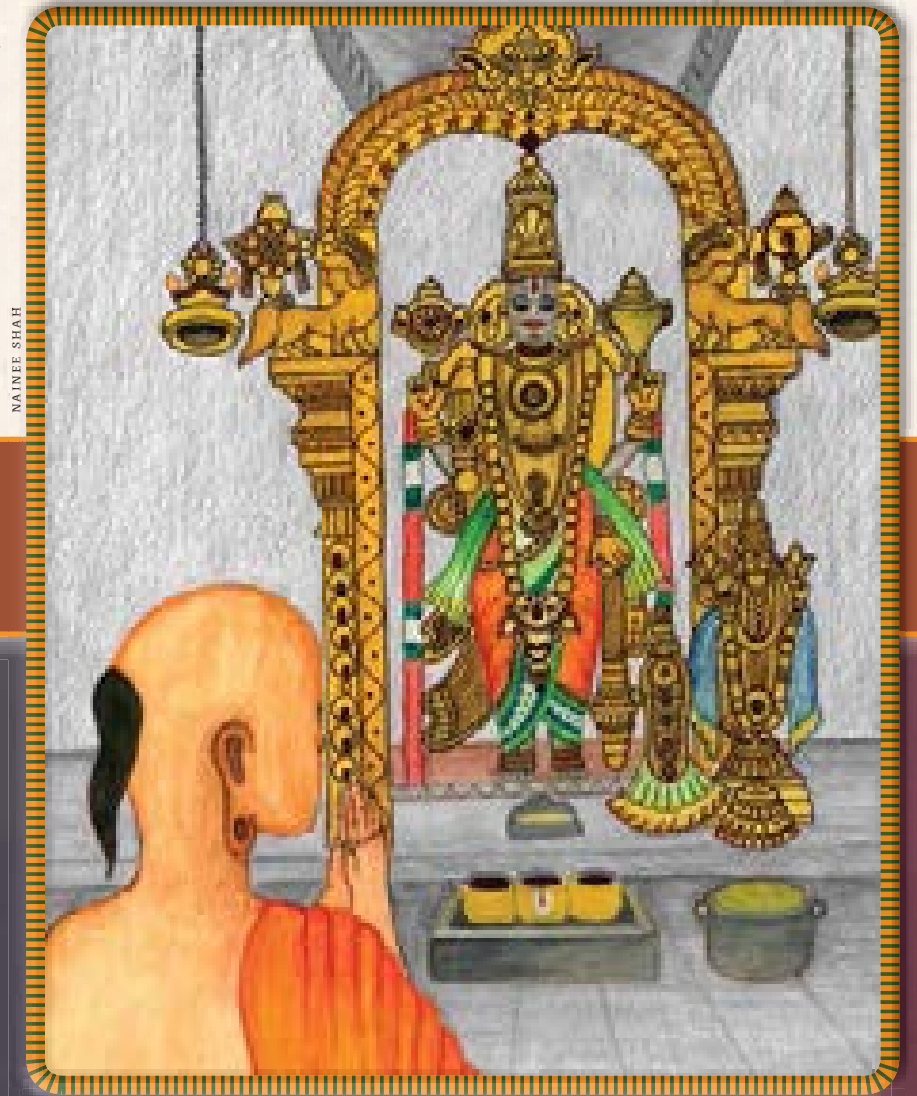
Ramanuja settled in Srirangam. After further training from Yamuna's disciples, he succeeded the great Yamunacharya as administrator of Srirangam Math and Temple. He conversed with the temple Deity, Lord Sriranganathan, more than once. During one conversation the Lord granted him the title Udaiyavar, owner—possessor of mukti (salvation) and Vaikuntha (Lord Vishnu's heavenly abode). In gracious response, Ramanuja requested the Lord to grant these blessings to all His devotees. While at Srirangam Yatiraja (as Ramanuja was known in later years) gave discourses on the hymns of the Alvar saints, preached his Vishishtadvaita philosophy and composed important philosophical works in Sanskrit. He also held debates with leading advocates of opposing schools of thought, defeating and winning them over to his way of thinking.

having renounced worldly life and taken initiation to enter into the holy order of Hindu sannyasins as a lifetime celibate monk.

Ramanuja directs a devastating attack against the doctrine of a sublatale God who is less than the Absolute or the Supreme Being, against the theory of Ignorance which is without a definite locus and which cannot be described as existent or non-existent or a combination of both, and against the compartmentalization of Reality into Paramartha (the ultimately real) and Vyavaharika (the relatively real), which means only that the latter

is illusory. As explained by *Vedic Knowledge Online*, “Thousands of people flocked to him every day to hear his lectures. He cleansed the temples, settled the rituals to be observed in them, and rectified many social evils which had crept into the community. He had a congregation of 700 sannyasins, 74 dignitaries who held special offices of ministry, and thousands of holy men and women who revered him as Guru. He inducted lakhs of people to the path of bhakti and a highly moral and disciplined life. He gave initiation to all people. He was now seventy years old, but was destined to live many more years, establish more maths, construct more temples and spread his teachings to many more thousands of people.”

Ramanuja's most significant literary work was his commentary on Badaranaya's *Vedanta Sutra*, the earliest known (ca 400 bce) systematization of Vedanta. Its aphorisms are extremely terse and



is illusory.

Ramanuja's greatness consists in bringing to bear his Sanskrit and Veda-oriented ideology and methodology on the purely devotional heritage of the alvars, and thus creating what is called Ubhaya-Vedanta [meaning two-fold Vedanta], which is significant in the whole world of philosophy, as also in the limited sphere of the Tamil land.

philosophically cryptic, without explanation. Closely referencing Bodhayana's seminal commentary of the *Sutra*, Ramanuja explained and interpreted the verses according to the devotional philosophy of his tradition.

As he commenced the work, entitled *Shri Bhashya*, Ramanuja told his disciples: "I can now refute the doctrines of these wrong-headed persons who think that the mere intellectual understanding of the great Vedic statements like 'That thou art' and 'I am Brahman' is enough for final beatitude of liberation. I have also to explode the views of those Jnana-karma-Samucchayavadins who admit the great efficacy of yajna, dana, tapas and karma along with the understanding of these statements. I have to establish that the purport of the *Vedas* and the *Vedanta* is the attainment of liberation through *dhyana*, *upasana* and *bhakti*. For all this, I shall begin writing the *Shri Bhashya*" (from *Life of Shri Ramanuja*, by Swami Ramakrishnananda, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai).

All-India Pilgrimage

Swami Tapasyananda provides a summary of Ramanuja's travels following his magnum opus. "After completing the *Shri Bhashya*, accompanied by a large number of his disciples, Ramanuja went on an all-India pilgrimage, which was also of the nature of a *digvijaya* [victory tour], confronting philosophers of other schools of thought and spreading Vaishnavism among them. He first visited all the holy centers of Tamil land and of Kerala and gradually moved northward—visiting Dvaraka, Mathura, Vrindavana, Shalagrama, Saketa, Badarikasrama, Naimisa, Puskara and at last the Sharadapitha in Kashmir.

The Pandits of Sharadapitha had acrimonious debates with him, but he was able to convert the ruler of Kashmir to his faith. Here Ramanuja had a vision of Hayagriva, one of the Divine Incarnations. Then he went to Kasi, where he stayed for some time and won over many learned men to his faith. Continuing south to Shripurushottama-Kshetra, now known as Puri, he founded there a monastery called Embar Math. The scholars of that place, who controlled the temple, refused to face him in debate for fear of defeat. He next went to Ahobila, situated on Garuda mountain, where he established a monastery. Next he worshiped Narasimha-Murti at Isalinga, and afterwards reached the temple of Venkatachalapati at Tirupati. There he settled, through his superhuman powers, a dispute on the question whether the image of the temple was of Siva or Vishnu, in favor of Vaishnavas. He then returned to Srirangam via his old residence of Kanchipuram where he did obeisance to Varadaraja."

Twelve Years in Melkote, Karnataka

Ramanuja's influence grew in the years to follow, and he gained a huge number of followers. Yadava and other advaitins, including the Chola king Kulothunga I (who considered him a threat to Saivism) continued to plot against him. The king intended to force this leader of Vashnavism to sign a declaration endorsing Lord Siva as the supreme God. When the king summoned Ramanuja to his court, Ramanuja's shishyas convinced him to flee to safety. He escaped to Melkote, in Karnataka, where he is credited with rebuilding and renovating the Thirunarayanapuram Temple. There he gained the favor of the Jain king Bitrideva of the Hoysala dynasty by curing his

daughter of an illness. Later, in a visionary dream, Lord Narayanan told him He was buried in the ground under a nearby anthill. Bitrideva helped Ramanuja recover the statue of the Lord, which had earlier been thrown out of the temple by Muslim invaders. Ramanuja reinstalled the sacred murti in the sanctum, where it remains to this day.

Ramanuja still needed an *utsava murti*, a Deity image made specifically to be paraded through the streets during festivals. This was needed in order to celebrate festivals properly. Once again the Lord appeared in his dreams, this time telling him the temple's original *utsava murti* of Cheluvananarayana was currently in the possession of a sultan in Delhi. Ramanuja, now 80 years old, made the tiring journey to Delhi and asked the king to return the murti. The king asked him to identify it, but it could not be found.

Ramanuja called out, "Adiyen Vareer Enthan Selva Pillai" ("Please come out, my darling child). Miraculously, the three-foot-tall Cheluvananarayana statue came running from the chamber of the princess and sat on Ramanuja's lap. Ramanuja brought Him back to Thirunarayanapuram—followed by the Muslim princess, who could not bear to be separated from her beloved Lord. She remained in Melkote serving Narayana to the end of her life. To this day she is honored at

the temple there as Bibi Nachiyar.

Ramanuja remained in Thirunarayanapuram for twelve years. As the administrator of temple activities, he devoted himself to community development and introduced several new festivals, including the Diamond Crown Festival. He involved the people of Melkote in all temple activities, daily pujas, rituals and annual festivals, embracing people of every caste and economic status in the service of Thirunarayana. He called the tribal people *thirukulathatar*, "family members of Goddess Lakshmi." He was loved and respected by one and all.

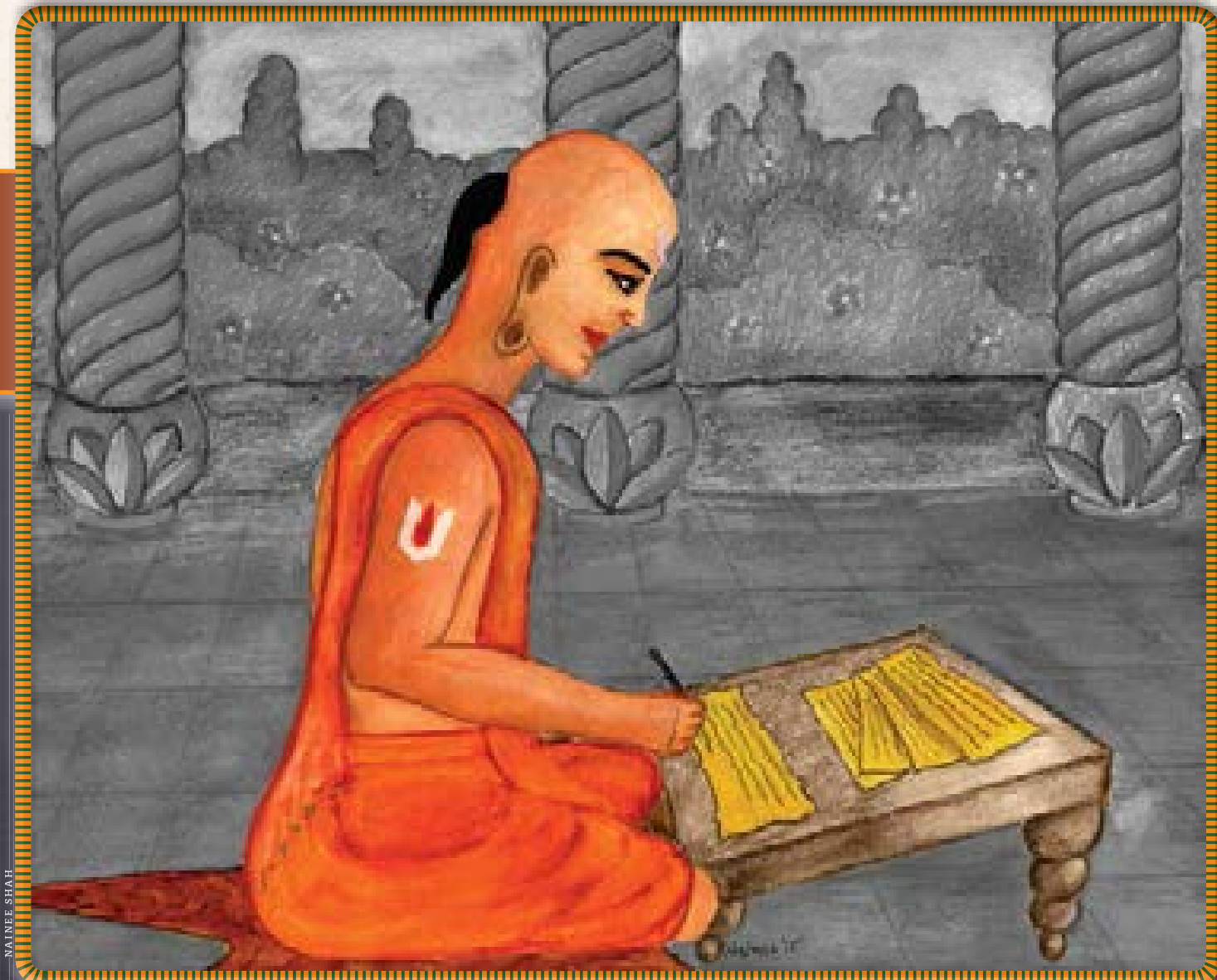
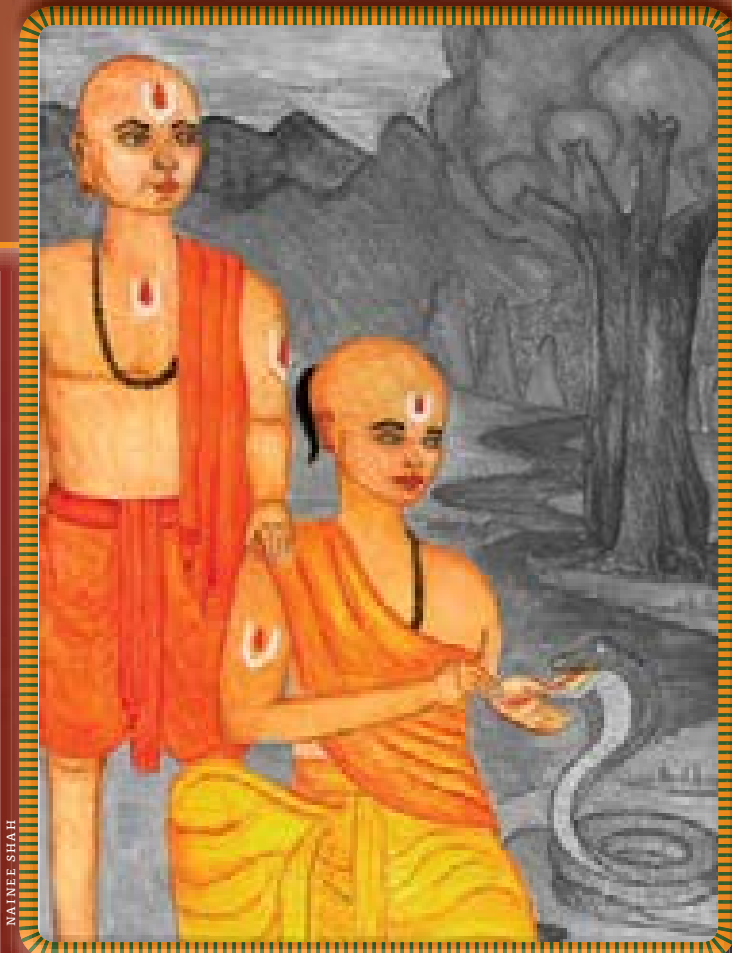
When the cruel king Kulothunga I finally passed away, Ramanuja desired to return to his beloved Srirangam. But the people of Melkote begged him to stay in Thirunarayanapuram. In response, Ramanuja created a bronze image of himself which was formally installed in a shrine in the temple. He also brought 52 Bhattars (priests) from Srirangam to perform the daily worship. To this day the priests carry out all temple activities according to the traditions set forth by him. There he is equally revered with the Deity Thirunarayana, and his birthday is grandly celebrated each year. Shri Vaishnavas seek blessings from the bronze Ramanuja murti before worshiping at the Deity sanctums.

Left: To Ramanuja's amazement, Govinda, fearless and full of compassion, removes a thorn that has pierced the tongue of a deadly cobra. Right: Ramanuja scribes his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, formulating a *Vishishtadvaita* interpretation of this terse summation of *Vedanta* written by Badarayana around 400 bce.

Nine Literary Works

Ramanuja wrote to fulfill the wishes of Yamunacharya and to fulfill the vision of Ubhaya Vedanta. His nine books are considered to be nine precious gems (*navaratna*) in the world of Vaishnavite Hindu philosophy. 1) *Vedanta Sangraha*, an exposition of Vedanta; 2) *Shri Bhashya*, a commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*; 3) *Vedanta Sara* (Essence of Vedanta), an appendix to *Shri Bhashya*; 4) *Vedanta Dipa* (Light of Vedanta), another appendix and commentary to *Shri Bhashya*; 5) *Gadhya Thrayam* (or *Vaikunta Gatyam*), a description of Vaikuntha (the abode of Vishnu); 6) *Shri Ranga Gadhya*, a prayer surrendering to the feet of Sriranganatha; 7) *Saragathi Gadhya*, an imaginary dialogue between Ramanuja, Lakshmi and Narayana; 8) *Nithya Grantham*, daily activities to be performed by Vaishnavas; and 9) *Gita Bhashya*, a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*.

All nine works were written in Sanskrit. Though Ramanuja spoke and discoursed in the Tamil language, he does not seem to have written anything in his native tongue.



His Final Message

Returning to Srirangam, the aged acharya continued to serve Lord Sriranganathan and all His devotees. As a polemicist and philosopher, he devoted the remainder of his life to proving the Vedantic legitimacy of the popular conception of a personal Deity with an approachable identity.

At the ripe age of 120, Ramanuja prayed to Sriranganathan for moksha, liberation. His parting words to his devoted disciples were:

“Worship holy men exactly as you would do in the case of your spiritual preceptor. Have sincere faith in the teachings of the great Acharyas of yore. Never be slaves to your senses. Be not satisfied with the acquisition of worldly knowledge. Go on reading repeatedly the

books dealing with the greatness of God and the wonders of His creation. If perchance you are favored with scintillating wisdom by the guru’s grace, then the attraction of the senses will cease for you. Learn to treat all your feelings with indifference. Enjoy the utterance of the names and glories of God’s devotees with as much relish as the utterance of God’s names and glories. Bear in mind that he who renders service to God’s devotees attains God speedily. Therefore, unless you dedicate yourself to the service of God and His devotees, you will not be saved, however wise you may be. Do not consider the life of a Vaishnava as a means for acquiring any selfish advantage. You must endeavor to realize the ideal.

“Devote a portion of the day, at least one hour, to the contemplation of the greatness of your spiritual preceptor and some time every day to the reading of the sacred writings of the alvars or the acharyas. Always seek the company of those that pursue the path of self-surrender to God and avoid the company of those that say, ‘There are other paths leading to salvation.’ Do not associate with people who are always in quest of filthy lucre and sense enjoyment, but mingle with the devotees of God to the extent possible. Whoever looks upon the sacred images of God as mere stones, his own spiritual teacher as an ordinary human being, eminent devotees as high or low according to the caste of their birth, the holy water that has touched the feet of God and has as a consequence acquired the power to purify and purge one of all sins as ordinary water, the sacred mantras as a collection of sounds, and the Supreme Lord of all the worlds as one not higher than the Devas—let him be considered an unworthy person fit only for purgatory” (from *Sri Ramanuja*, Swami Tapasyananda).

Left: This granite murti of Sri Ramanuja is enshrined in the Cheluvananarayan Vishnu Temple at Melkote. Right: Near the same temple, Ramanuja discovered and unearthed the parade murti of Lord Cheluvananarayana which was thrown out of the temple centuries before by Muslim mauraders.

tor, of the twelve great leaders of the Vaishnava cult of the North. They belonged to all castes and included a cobbler and a Muslim. The most illustrious of them was Kabir, who worked for the unification of Vaishnavism and Islamic monotheism. Another disciple, Ravidas, a cobbler by birth, initiated the celebrated Mira Bai into the meaning of bhakti. Sena, a barber by caste, converted the Raja of Bandogarh into Vaishnavism. Dana was a Jat, and Pipa a Rajput prince. In later days, great leaders of monotheistic devotion, like Tulsidas and Dadu, got their inspiration from Ramanuja’s teachings.”

From Ramanuja.org, we read, “Ramanuja’s supreme effort resulted in a systematic presentation of Vishishtadvaita. His genius also led to the development of a complete system which synthesizes the concept of God with the philosophy of the impersonal Absolute. The followers of Ramanuja are called Shri Vaishnavas. This term is not exclusive to Iyengars (a major sect among Brahmins of South India). Also among South Indians are a set of followers called Shattada Shri-Vaishnavas of non-Brahmin origins. Followers of Ramanuja (or at least those who include him in the lineage of their earlier acharyas) can be seen far and wide in different parts of India including Gaudiya Vaishnavas of Bengal and the Swaminarayans of Gujarat.”

Resources

Sri Ramanuja, His Life, Religion & Philosophy, by Swami Tapasyananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras

Life of Sri Ramanuja, by Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sri Ramakrishna at, Mylapore, Madras, 1959 (translated from Bengali by Swami Budhananda)

The Life of Ramanujacharya, the Exponent of the Vishishtadvaita Philosophy, by Akondaville Govindacharya, Kapalee Press, Madras, 1906

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lakshmi and Tim Sridharan were brought up with great emphasis on Hindu traditions, culture and values by devout Tamil Brahmin parents in Madras, Tamil Nadu, and now live in San Jose, California. In preparation for this article, they traced the life path of Ramanuja through Tamil Nadu and Karnataka during a visit to India in December of 2013. While this is their first joint venture in writing, Lakshmi has published many articles on a variety of subjects, including Indian tradition and culture.

Influence Today

Swami Tapasyananda provides this summary: “It is important to point out that Ramanuja’s devotional philosophy had in a way a much wider field of operation than South India or Tamil Nadu. Many sects of North Indian Vaishnavism also had their origin in his teaching. Ramananda (1300-1411), the fountainhead of monotheism and Rama cults of North India, was a follower of Ramanuja’s sect and was initiated into Vishishtadvaita. He went early on pilgrimage to the North and stayed there for several years. On his return, the caste-conscious Vaishnavas of the South could not entertain him in their community. He was a spiritual liberalist who did not recognize caste as a factor in spiritual competence. Therefore he settled in Benares, and was practically the guru, the spiritual stimula-

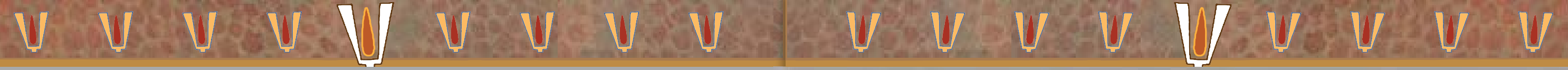


Vaishnava pathshalas and colleges all over India, as well as elsewhere, include Ramanuja’s philosophy in their curricula. Several Vaishnava organizations are propagating Shri Vaishnavism in Europe, Russia and North and South America. The tradition begun by Ramanuja of reciting *Divya Prabandham* continues in Sriranganadhar’s temple and other Vishnu temples to this day. Sriperumbudur’s Adhikesava Perumal temple at Ramanuja’s birthplace is one of the holiest places of worship for Shri Vaishnavites. Ramanuja is equally revered with the Perumal Deity there, and a bronze statue of Ramanuja is under the same roof as Adhikesava, Shridevi and Bhudevi. There is a small shrine to Ramanuja next to the temple. In virtually all Vaishnava temples

there is statue of Ramanujacharya, including Mukthinath, Nepal, where Ramanujacharya himself installed the main Deity icon, which is made of saligram.

Swami Vivekananda, who introduced Hindu thought to the Western world at the turn of the twentieth century, commented, “Ramanuja, with a most practical philosophy, great appeal to the emotions, an entire denial of birthrights before spiritual attainments and appeals through the popular tongue, completely succeeded in bringing the masses back to the Vedic religion.” (*The Historical Evolution of India*).

This speaks volumes about Ramanuja as a great visionary, a humanitarian, a philosopher and a guru.



PHILOSOPHY

The Brilliance of Ramanuja

India's philosophical nuances know no equal, and among them the Vedantic interpretations of Ramanuja stand tall and proud

BY PROFESSOR ARVIND SHARMA

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RAMANUJA IS KNOWN AS Vishishtadvaita Vedanta. Like other systems of Vedanta, it is based on the *Upanishads*, which are also called the Vedanta, because they constitute the end-portion of the *Vedas*.

Anyone who wants to evolve a system of thought based on the *Upanishads* faces a problem. The problem is that these culminatory books of the *Veda* contain two kinds of statements which, on the face of it, are contradictory. One set of statements identifies the universe (jagat) and the individual souls (jiva) found within it with the ultimate reality, called Brahman. Another set of statements, however, also found in the *Upanishads*, distinguishes clearly between these three—jagat, jiva and Brahman. This triad of Brahman, jiva and jagat—the ultimate reality, the individual beings and the universe—is central to Vedantic thought. Indeed, it is central to the metaphysical dimension of all religions.

The first task anyone faces when formulating a consistent philosophy based on the *Upanishads* is to reconcile these two sets of statements. It might be helpful here to recall how Shankara—to whom Advaita Vedanta owes its classical formulation—reconciles the two, the more clearly to see the uniqueness of Ramanuja's resolution of the problem. Shankara admits that both kinds of statements are found in the *Upanishads*, but argues that those statements which distinguish jagat and jiva from Brahman are preliminary and tentative in nature, and are superseded by statements that identify those two with Brahman. Thus non-duality (advaita), according to Shankara, is the final message of the *Upanishads*.

Ramanuja, taking a very different approach to the issue, starts out by examining the manner in which different items are related in the world. He finds that sometimes we speak of things as separable, and sometimes as inseparable. For instance, we say that some objects, such as a coat, belongs to one by stating, "I have a coat." In this statement, the person and the coat are separable. By way of contrast, we also say, "I am tall." Here we do not distinguish between ourselves and tallness; although tallness is an attribute of the body, and though we usually say, "I have a body," we say "I am tall." We refer to our tallness in a more intimate way than to the coat, as something inseparable from us.

Pursuing this point further, Ramanuja points out that while we refer to most things separable from us as separate from us, as when we say, "This is my coat" or "This is my house," there are two types of cases in which we refer to things as inseparable that are separable in principle. These are those which relate to (1) substance and attributes, and (2) body and soul. An example of the first would be our tendency to refer to a flower as a "red rose." Redness is an attribute, while roseness is a substance. They are therefore, in principle,



separable but are referred to inseparably in the expression "red rose" (or "blue lotus"). An example of the second would be our tendency to refer to ourselves by such expressions as "I am a man" or "I am a woman." If we accept that the soul and the body are separate entities, then our sense of "I" can only come from the soul, as the body without it is a piece of inert matter. The distinction between a man and a woman is a matter of physical features and belongs to the body. But we identify the soul with it when we say "I am a man" or "I am a woman." Ramanuja pays special attention to these relationships and refers to them by the

term *apirithak-siddhi*, or inseparability.

Ramanuja then goes on to extend the body-soul mode of relationship of Brahman, jagat and jiva. According to him, the jagat and the jivas constitute the body of Brahman, who represents their soul. He then argues that when the *Upanishads* describe jagat and jiva as different from Brahman, they are merely referring to an observable empirical fact. And when the *Upanishads* describe Brahman as identical with jagat and jiva, they are referring to their inseparability (and not identity, as Shankara would have us believe). This explains the term *Vishishtadvaita* as well, which stands for the non-dualism or inseparability of the qualified, or the embodied, as one. It is difficult not to be impressed by the originality and ingenuity of the resolution of the Upanishadic dilemma proposed by Ramanuja.

Another paradox in the *Upanishads* pertains to Brahman itself, which is sometimes described as *nirguna*, without distinguishing qualities or attributes, and sometimes as *saguna*, as possessing them. In Advaita Vedanta, this nirguna Brahman is identified with pure—that is objectless—consciousness. Ramanuja argues that objectless consciousness is a pure abstraction, as such consciousness as we possess is always consciousness of something. Therefore he opts for saguna as the ultimate form of Brahman, interpreting any reference to it as nirguna as meaning that it has "no evil qualities." The ultimate reality is not like an abstract principle but more like a concrete person. It is not an Absolute; it is God, who loves the devotees and whom the devotees love.

Ramanuja thus clarified the relationship of the triad of Brahman,



WIKIMEDIA: 1920S ART BY UNKNOWN ARTIST

jagat and jiva—and the nature of Brahman—in a new way. Small wonder, therefore, that Ramanuja's philosophy played a major role in the further evolution of the Bhakti movement.

Twofold Vedanta

Ramanuja also made an original contribution to the textual basis of Vedanta. As mentioned earlier, the *Upanishads* are fundamental to any structure of Vedantic thought. By the time of Ramanuja (1017–1137), however, the devotional hymns of the twelve alvars,

An innovative thinker: Ramanuja, in formal acharya attire, sits in his monastery worshipping Vishnu's golden sandals, wearing the orange sanniyasin vestments and white sacred thread, holding the danda, his body marked with the distinctive insignia of Shri Vaishnavism.

.....

the poet-saints devoted to Vishnu, had been compiled by Nathamuni into the text known as *Nalayira Prabandham* or *Divya-Prabandham*. These were, and are, considered deeply sacred by the devotees of Vishnu.

So, the question arose: how was this body of sacred literature to be related to the sacred body of literature known as the *Upanishads*? Ramanuja placed the two scriptures on par with one another and thus developing the doctrine of Ubhaya-Vedanta, or dual Vedanta. This was nothing less than remarkable and provides a contemporary model for how the various religious scriptures of the world may be ideally viewed in relation to each other.

The far-reaching implication of Ramanuja's move can be seen by placing it in a comparative context. Let us first carry out such an exercise in the limited context of the Bhakti Movement. One famous figure of this movement, Kabir, in his effort to harmonize two traditions, rejected the sacred texts of the two traditions involved, in his case the scriptures of Hinduism and Islam, an approach radically different from Ramanuja's, who accepted both the bodies of literature involved. In the broader context of the Hindu religious tradition as a whole, another body of sacred literature was often called the "fifth Veda," or described as, for instance, the Tamil Veda or the Sikh Veda. This approach is no doubt inclusive, but is still open to criticism as involving an element of residual condescension, for the Veda is still held up as the prototype in a sense. The parity established by Ramanuja is hardly open to this criticism. The comparison becomes even more stark when we take the Abrahamic traditions into account. Christianity accepts the Judaic scripture but subordinates it to its own final message; and Islam, while accepting the previous revelations of Judaism and Christianity, also alleges, even as it does so, that they have become corrupted over time.

By logically interpreting the *Upanishads* in light of an existing, but not so subtly evolved, Vishishtadvaita, and by placing the devotional literature of the alvar saints on equal status with the holy *Vedas*, Ramanuja gave Hindu thought a viable alternative to the dominant Vedanta views of Shankara and left his mark on Indian philosophy for all time. To this day his Vedantic reflections stand among the most respected, a contribution which no subsequent school could afford to ignore.

.....

Arvind Sharma is Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and author of *Visistadvaita Vedanta: A Study* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1978).



TRADITION

Upholding Hindu Marriage

While some charge that Hindu marriage is paternalistic, it is actually a balanced and culturally rich observance, puissantly preserving our heritage

BY ADITI BANERJEE

AT ONE POINT IN THE RAMAYANA, RAMA AND SITA VISIT A FEMALE sage in the forest during their banishment. Referring to this story, Swami Vivekananda commented: "Sita approached this sage and bowed down before her. The sage placed her hand on Sita's head and said: 'It is a great blessing to possess a beautiful body; you have that. It's a greater blessing to have a noble husband; you have that. It is the greatest blessing to be perfectly obedient to such a husband; you are that. You must be happy.'"

"Sita replied, 'Mother, I am glad that God has given me a beautiful body and that I have so devoted a husband. But as to the third blessing, I do not know whether I obey him or he obeys me. One thing alone I remember, that when he took me by the hand before the sacrificial fire—whether it was a reflection of the fire or whether God Himself made it appear to me—I found that I was his and he was mine. And since then, I have found that I am the complement of his life and he of mine.'"

A recent flurry of articles and blog posts has called for Hindu wedding vows and rites to be rewritten in the name of gender equality—the underlying premise being that the Hindu form of marriage is inherently misogynistic. Critics allege that it demeans the woman, putting her into the role of a domestic maidservant intent on pleasing her husband with no corresponding requirement of him.

There is enormous intricacy and subtlety in the rites of Hindu

marriage and there is also significant variation across different regions, Hindu traditions, spiritual lineages and socioeconomic groups. However, the core of the ceremony is the *saptapadi mantras*, the seven vows spoken by the bride and groom as they circle the consecrated fire. The groom leads the bride around the fire for the first three rounds and the bride leads during the last four. Even in this, the Hindu marriage rite recognizes the inherent equality in stature of the bride and groom—just as in life, sometimes the husband leads, and sometimes the wife.

The vows themselves are as follows: "Let us walk together, hand in hand, the seven steps, symbolic of these aspirations: 1) May we take the first step together for nourishment; 2) May we take the second step together for vigor; 3) May we take the third step together for thriving wealth; 4) May we take the fourth step together for comfort; 5) May we take the fifth step together for children; 6) May we take the sixth step together for the many seasons; 7) May we take the seventh step together for everlasting friendship.

"May you be my unwavering partner; let us have many auspicious progeny who shall see long lives of more than eighty years."

These vows are extraordinarily rich and multifaceted, reflecting deep psychological and sociological insight into the various needs and phases that a married couple goes through. There is no misogyny here. However, there is variation in the exact customs followed across regions and sociocultural groups according to various *Grihya Sutras* which detail domestic, religious ceremonies. In

certain variations of these vows the bride promises to cook for and please the groom, and this is the main grievance of those who accuse Hindu marriage rites of being misogynistic. Rather than getting entrapped in debating whether the interpretations in these sutras are authentic or interpolations, it is more helpful to go deeper in the Hindu philosophy of marriage and gender roles to understand how profoundly revered and important the role of the wife and mother is in Hinduism. As Swami Vivekananda said, "In India the mother is the center of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the *Vedas*. Our God is both personal and absolute; the absolute is male, the personal, female. And thus it comes that we now say: 'The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.'"

In the Hindu conception of marriage and womanhood, as reflected in the *Shastras* (religious treatises), the bride is not at all a maid-servant—rather, she is the one who reigns over the household. The Sanskrit term for a wife—*grihini*—means "the owner of the house," whereas the term for husband—*grihasta*—means "a mere resident of the house." In Tamil, too, the wife is known as *illaal*, "one who owns the house," whereas the husband is *illarattaan*, "one who performs the dharmic rites in the house."

The conception of the wife as reigning over the household is found in the *Vedas*. In the *Rig Veda*, we find these beautiful quotations:

"May you be happy as a wife and prosper with your children in your home. Be vigilant as the central authority in ruling your household. Be closely united in marriage with your husband. So shall you, full of years, address your company." 10.85.27

"O Bride! May your father-in-law treat you as a queen. May your mother-in-law treat you as a queen. May the sisters and brothers of your husband treat you as a queen." 10.85.46

Certainly the emphasis here is on the woman's role in the realm of the home and family. But the modern characterization of this role as secondary to the role of men in the workplace is based on the sexist and largely Western cultural premise that the domain of the home is inferior to the domain of the workplace or that the work of a woman at home is somehow less important than what a man does in the office.

Unlike critics who seem to believe the work a woman does at home is demeaning, our acharyas and rishis held women in great reverence, not just for the invaluable importance of her role in her household, but also for the value of that role for society as a whole.

Moreover, the wife's position was not merely one of pleasing her husband. As said in the shastras: "It must be noted that a wife creates well-being for the world even as she does the work of cooking or as a source of sensual gratification for her husband... It is not that she cooks for the husband alone. She has to provide food every day to the guests, to the sick and to the birds and beasts and other creatures. This is how she fulfills the purpose of *atithyam*—serving unexpected guests—and *vaisvadevam*—serving sentient beings." In Hinduism, the role of cooking and feeding is not that of a lowly servant; it is rather seen as a divine role, a manifestation of Annapurna Devi, the Goddess of food and nourishment, from whom even Lord Siva receives food gathered as alms through begging.

This unique role that woman has as a caregiver for society as a whole is recognized even today. Lauded philanthropist Melinda Gates (wife of Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft) explains that when it comes to development aid and philanthropy, it is more effective to invest in women rather than men: "When I first began focusing on family planning, it became clear that if you want to make life better for a community, you should start by investing in its women and girls. When I talk to women, a universal desire is to bring every good thing to our children. Women tend to spend their resources on their families—prioritizing things like healthcare, nutritious food, education and all the building blocks of a thriving society. The way I think about it, is that when we invest in women, we invest in the people who invest in everyone else."

In traditional Hinduism the wife plays a fourfold role: she is *ardhangini* (the other half of her husband, metaphorically speaking); *sahadharmini* (partner in the fulfilment of dharma and righteous pursuits); *sahakarmini* (partner in all acts and actions), and *sahayogini* (partner in all ventures). The late Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Sri Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami, explained that one of the three objectives of marriage is "to create a means for women and men to be freed from worldly existence. A man who is not yet fully mature inwardly is assisted in his karma by his wife. By doing so, by being totally devoted to her husband, she achieves maturity to a degree greater than he does." Swami goes on to explain that in return for the indispensable help she renders to

Sacred rites: (opposite page) *Kanyadana*, "giving of the maiden," a high point of the marriage ceremony, which acknowledges the wife as the most precious gift in the husband's life; (below) newly married bride and groom; joining lives in a traditional ceremony



her husband in carrying out his dharma and evolving spiritually, half of whatever positive karma the husband attains is transferred to her. On the other hand, none of the burdensome karma of her husband inures to her. Swami also states that none of the wife's accrued positive karma is transferred to the husband.

Nor does the Hindu form of marriage neglect the needs and desires of the woman. Agastya and Lopamudra are one of the most venerated couples in Hinduism; both were philosophers par excellence, and Agastya was a revered sage and hermit. Lopamudra once grew tired of her husband's austerity and wrote a two-stanza hymn, asking for his attention and love. The hymn made Agastya realize his duties towards his wife. In the modern age, we have the example of Sri Ramakrishna and his wife, Sarada Devi. Although Sri Ramakrishna was intent upon a life of celibacy and spiritual penance, on his wedding night he offered to carry out his husbandly duties to Sarada Devi in a conventional sense and to give up his celibacy for her in recognition of the duties a husband owes to his wife.

It is also important to note that Hinduism does not promote a cookie-cutter mold of marriage. Ours is a tradition that venerates women who were unconventional wives. For instance, we honor the *Panchakanya* (Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita or Kunti, Tara and Mandodari), venerated as the five ideal Hindu wives, yet each in her own way led a very unconventional married life. A celebrated verse that many Hindu children learn from their mother or grandmother:

"Remembering the five holy maidens—Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari—will destroy the greatest sins." Our most idealized wife, Sita, lived as a single mother estranged from her husband, and in some versions of the *Ramayana*, refused to take Rama back.

We live in a world where women spend more and more of their time outside the domain of the home. This is not a trend that will or can fully reverse in the near future. We cannot turn back the clock and move back into a world where women were primarily stay-at-home wives and mothers. In this context, where women do need to advance and succeed in the workplace, it would be unfair and impractical to expect all women to fully carry out their traditional roles in the household. Accordingly, we do need to re-examine roles and responsibilities in the household and be equitable and reasonable in terms of what we expect of women and men. The conception of marriage in Hinduism does not preclude a husband and wife from arranging and rearranging between themselves their roles within and without the household in new ways.

But we must reflect seriously on all of the important roles played by a married couple in the Hindu conception of society and how those roles and responsibilities may be carried out equitably in today's world. We have to ponder how married couples in this society can transmit to their children the traditions, practices and values that comprise our spiritual and religious culture. We must ask how we can provide to our families the lovingly prepared, fresh, home-made food and nourishment that is the cornerstone of individual and familial health and well-being in ayurveda and yoga. We must also look at how to carry out our duties in the context of the *panchayajna*,

the five-fold duties towards the world that each human being owes. These duties include: Brahmayagna, learning and sharing Vedic knowledge; Pitriyagna, honoring ancestors and forefathers; Devayagna, propitiating the devas through worship; Bhutayagna, feeding and honoring animals; and Manushayagna, serving human beings by feeding them, etc.

Nor can we abandon the *vratas*, our spiritual practices and observances that have been the bedrock of traditional Hindu society, cementing and consecrating the bond between families. For example, while critics call for abolishing *karva chauth* as a one-sided vrata where only the woman fasts for the well-being of her husband,

nothing stops the husband from also fasting on that day—and many men do so nowadays. That would be a much healthier alternative than simply stopping the observance altogether, as this is a vrata that strengthens the marital bond and also the bond between the bride and her new family. The integration of worship with the marital relationship in Hinduism makes Hindu marriages uniquely sacred and powerful.

The inherent flexibility and diversity embraced by the Hindu institution of marriage does not mean that the rites and mantras of marriage should be arbitrarily changed to suit the politically correct trends of the day. While Hinduism encourages diversity of practice and customs, there are some core values that underlie all of this diversity. Ultimately, marriage is not just about love and desire but, more importantly, about upholding dharma. It does this by providing for the spiritual evolution of the couple, strengthening the familial bonds that are the bedrock of a healthy society, and through the performance of the husband's and wife's respective duties, caring for all sentient beings in one's community.

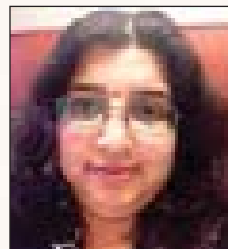
It is this world view that is embedded in the Hindu marriage. These marital mantras and rites encode the blessings and spiritual power of our ancestors and devas, and our rishis and acharyas, who are invoked through the marriage ceremony to witness and bless the couple. There is a current of energy, of blessings and power in these mantras and rites, which transforms a marriage from a social contract and emotional bonding to a sacred covenant that is strong and lifelong (or, rather, seven lifetimes long).

Such mantras and rites are not to be tampered with lightly. While no rite in Hinduism is eternal and unchangeable, they cannot be changed by anyone at will or fancy. Only people of enormous power of practice and spiritual attainment, known as *mantra drashta rishis*, are empowered to change the dharma *Shastras* to be suitable for a new day and age.

ADITI BANERJEE, 34, is an attorney from New York. She serves on the Board of Directors of the World Association for Vedic Studies and is a writer and editor who has written widely on Hinduism and the Hindu-American experience. Email: banerjeea@gmail.com



Words from Swami Vivekananda: "The position of the mother is the highest in the world, as it is the one place in which to learn and exercise the greatest unselfishness. The love of God is the only love that is higher than a mother's love; all others are lower."



BOOK REVIEW

Heavenly Mantra Books

Daughter of Giri Trading Company founder establishes publishing house against all odds

By R. KESAVA MALLIA, CHENNAI

CHENNAI-BASED MEENAKSHI BAALU, founder of Sri MB Publishers, is looking to inspire lovers of God across India through her books of mantras, shlokas and puja rites. Most are available with the original Sanskrit or Tamil, some with English transliteration and translation—and each of these little treasures of Hindu knowledge comes at an affordable price.

For example, *Sakala Devataa Gaayatri Mantras* (English-Tamil-Sanskrit with English meaning), translated by P. Ramachandra Sekar, has 52 Gayatri mantras, each with an image of the respective Deity. *Rudram, Chamakam* and *Purusha Sooktham* are perhaps some of the most widely known and recited Vedic mantras in India. Along with *Laghunyasa*, this set of books in Sanskrit with English transliteration also includes an English translation.

Meenakshi first flashed on mantra books at the age of 17. She was working at her father's shop, Giri Trading Company, the notable purveyor of religious books and puja articles located just outside the Kapaleeswarar Temple in Mylapore, Chennai. Young Meenakshi observed many a foreigner evincing interest in mantra books, especially those with transliterated Sanskrit. Twenty years later, in 1997, Meenakshi published her first book, *Vishnu Sahasranamam*. It was her opening foray into the world of publishing.

In 2000, following the demise of her father, after whom the shop was named, she took on more duties in the family business, learning printing, publishing, audio-video production and human resource management—aspects of the trade she had not picked up in business school or law school.

Her frequent interactions with printers, illustrators and translators inspired her to start her own printing press in 2001. Thankfully, a government program to help women entrepreneurs turned out to be available, and in 2006 land was awarded to her in Red Hills, around 70km from her home in Chennai. Seven years later, her dream came to fruition in this industrial area specially

earmarked for women entrepreneurs. Her brainchild, Sri MB Publishers, was born. Meenakshi's main support in all her business endeavors has come from her husband Baalu. She is equally grateful to all the employees who have stood with her through difficult times, working effectively to find solutions.

Meenakshi rises every day at 4am to perform her personal puja and prepare breakfast and lunch for her family. After sending her 15-year-old son Baala Ayyappan to school and 19-year-old daughter Santoshi to college, she is ready to go to the office around 8am. Her day concludes at 10pm.

Sri MB Publishers' most popular titles are *Trikaala Sandhyavandanam*, the brahmin's daily rites of personal purification, and *Maahalaaya Paksham*, the autumn-time observances in honor of departed family members. In eight years, over 50,000 copies have been sold. This may be because each mantra is explained along with a simple illustration of



Publications: (top) Mrs. Meenakshi Baalu; (above) a collection of religious books from Sri MB Publishers

the practice, ensuring clarity in the mind of the seeker.

"Chanting mantras gives me absolute confidence and the ability to handle any amount of pressure at home or at work," affirms the mother, wife, printer, publisher, social activist and lawyer. "The mantras provide enlightened guidance on handling people with bad



attitudes without taking any matters to the heart. The chanting of mantras reminds me to be contented and feel satisfied with whatever I have achieved in my life."

"Mantras," states Meenakshi, "purify our energy body and physical body. The repetition of a mantra trains the mind in stillness and concentration. It is believed that if you recite your personal Deity's mantra with genuine faith and reverence, you will be protected. Mantras can also cure disease, offer inner peace and transform a man into a man of God."

The impacts of her books reach across Tamil Nadu and beyond. One person distributed 5,000 photocopies of the book on after-death rituals. Ravi, a businessman based in UAE, sought Meenakshi's help to publish *Stotra Sangamam*, with shlokas for inner peace, wealth and prosperity in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and English. God-loving Kanthalakshmi picked up *Lalithasahasranamam* to heal her husband who had fallen ill with a severe facial palsy in 2010. The family saw his quick recovery as a miracle.

In 2014, the "Aanmeega Semmal" award was bestowed on Meenakshi for her publishing contributions. In just 18 years, she has published over 150 titles. "The purpose," says Meenakshi, who can speak five Indian languages, "is to educate the masses spiritually.

The Sanskrit-English model works well for today's global Hindu community." Each book coming from her press has Meenakshi's attention. From illustration to desktop publishing operations, from choosing fonts to proofreading, Meenakshi's involvement is at once sincere and serious. Visit Meenakshi's website at: srimbpublishers.com.

Singapore's Sri Thendayuthapani Temple

Come with us to Lord Murugan's sanctuary in South Asia's Garden City of Singapore, with its venerable history, vital present and vigorous future

By LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, USA

SINGAPORE, LOCATED AT THE SOUTH-ern tip of the Malay Peninsula, is one of only four city-states in the world. Though highly urbanized, it takes pride in being a garden city on an island that is only 25 miles across and 15 miles wide. It boasts the largest port in Southeast Asia and one of the world's busiest, one reason it has served as a center of trade and civilization for three millennia. This upbeat, prosperous, technologically advanced Asian hub, with just 55 million citizens, boasts what is arguably the most progressive Hindu community in the East.

Almost 300,000 Hindus call the island their home. For centuries the nation's booming economy has attracted people from India to its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society. Here Hinduism thrives, with its distinctive culture, traditions and religious beliefs. Sixty percent of people of Indian origin here are Hindus. In fact, Tamil is one of the four official languages. For nearly two centuries, Singapore's Hindus have been making tremendous contributions to the state's culture, economy, education and politics.

My Impressions

We always stop at Singapore on our way to Chennai, India, when we go to visit my sister and other relatives. When I land and walk through this most beautiful airport in the world, I feel the warmth, friendliness, courtesy and efficiency of the airport staff, most of whom are Hindu. Even if you have only a few hours of layover at Changi International Airport, be sure to visit the interesting landmarks in Singapore. You can easily buy a bus pass for a fistful of dollars and go by luxury carriage to visit fascinating places, including the Hindu temples. Singapore has excellent transportation; you can go by road, rail or boat.

Despite its dense population and multi-storied concrete buildings, Singapore remains a garden state. Tropical flora, stately palms, tall trees with huge canopies, colorful bougainvilleas and exotic orchids greet you everywhere, even on the highway. My favorite places include the botanical garden, National Orchid Garden, Japanese and Chinese gardens, the brand new billion-dollar Gardens

by the Bay—and, of course, the Hindu temples. Built mostly by the Tamils, these are scattered throughout the city. And unlike the temples in Tamil Nadu, those in Singapore allow anyone—not just the media—to photograph the Deities. Here, no special treatment is given to anyone. You feel that the temple belongs to the devotees—rich and poor alike.

During my December 2013 stopover, we visited the three main sanctuaries: Sri Mariamman Temple, Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple and Sri Thendayuthapani Temple.

The Sri Thendayuthapani Temple is located in a beautiful area close to the river valley on Tank Road, ordinarily a relatively quiet place. Tall avenue trees grace the entry. Built in Dravidian style, the temple is considered an architectural treasure. The imposing five-tiered rajagopuram with its ornate Deities welcomes one and all. The halls are supported by huge ornate pillars with various Deities. Its huge wedding hall helps to make it a social hub. Singaporeans believe that cleanliness is godliness, and the inside of the temple is famously spick-and-span.

I was impressed by the contrast with temples in Tamil Nadu. Here there are no beggars on the steps, no hawkers pestering you, no broken coconuts or banana peels. It is green and serene outside as well as inside. I was awestruck by the spaciousness and openness.

A Glimpse of History

The Nattukottai Chettiers of Chettinadu, India, among the early settlers here, have built several temples. These are commonly known as Chettiar temples. Sri Thendayuthapani

Temple, among the oldest of these, was built in 1859. In October of 2014 it was declared one of Singapore's 69 National Monuments. The temple is now legally protected by the Preservation of National Monuments Act. Any renovation now has to be approved by the National Heritage Board's Preservation of Sites and Monuments division. Sri Mariamman Temple and Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple received this same recognition a few years back. These three Hindu temples play a central role in the cultural, social and religious lives of Singaporeans.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain's East India Company enjoyed a flourishing trade in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia. It brought many Indians to East Asian countries to work in rubber estates as its employees. Meanwhile, the wealthy Nattukottai Chettiers of Tamil Nadu—mostly Saivites, worshipers of Lord Siva—migrated to Singapore as traders, financiers and bankers. The first commercial bank in Singapore was established by Chettiers.

In those days, building a temple for Siva in Singapore was not possible. The Chettiers were advised by Sivachariyars not to build Siva temples, because at that time the Brahmin Sivachariyars—the only priests authorized to perform the major rites in Siva temples—were prohibited from crossing the seas. Instead, the Chettiers were encouraged to establish Lord Murugan temples, because in such temples, pandarams (non-Brahmin priests) could perform the rites. Thus, the Nattukottai Chettiers built temples for Lord Murugan wherever they settled—Burma,



Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Singapore. In addition to epitomizing the glory of Sri Murugan, these temples play a pivotal role in the social, religious and cultural activities of Tamil-speaking Hindus in these countries.

The Vel and the Temple

In 1858, under a holy pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) on the bank of a pond near a hill, the Chettiers installed a Vel (spear), a symbolic representation of Murugan, for devotees to worship. This was an ideal location, as a waterfall from the hill filled the tank. Devotees could bathe in the pond and carry water up the hill for religious rituals. Nearby was a railway line connecting Singapore with Malaysia, where there was a large Chettiar community.

One year later, the Chettiers built a temple on Singapore's Tank Road for Sri Subramanya—another name for Murugan, who is also known as Kandhan, Karttikeya, Thendayuthapani, Shanmugan, Palani and Arumugan. Its grand kumbhabhishekam (temple consecration ceremony) was performed in April, 1859, as recorded in the stone inscriptions found in the temple. The temple's main Deity is Thendayuthapani, and the Vel represents Lord Murugan in the main sanctum. Many Tamil devotees worship Lord Murugan as the Supreme God.

Keeping pace with the development of Singapore, the prosperous and philanthropic Chettiar community added more and more Deities, along with facilities for devotees and staff. Sanctums for Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi (Siva and Sakti) were built in 1878. Navagrahas (the nine planets) were added later. The 75-foot-tall rajagopuram, the tallest in East Asia, was completed in 1983.

Hundreds of devotees (thousands on fes-

tive occasions) flock here from all over the world, attracted by the imposing architecture, beautiful paintings and sculptures, spacious hall for worship and modern amenities. During the Tai Pusam festival, massive crowds come to worship Lord Murugan that He may shower blessings on them to overcome life's difficulties, whether emotional, financial or physical. This historic temple has been celebrating this festival in Singapore for over 100 years.

Carrying Kavadi for Lord Murugan

On the day of Tai Pusam, devotees perform a special penance, trust that all their problems will melt away when they fulfill this vow. Kavadi in its simplest form consists of carrying a wooden pole with a basket hanging at each end. Offerings such as fruits, rice and milk are held in the basket. Highly elaborate kavadis decorated with peacock feathers and other ornaments are common. Barefoot devotees will walk miles and miles to collect offerings from others. From the day the devotee takes the kavadi vow until the day he performs the penance, he observes strict celibacy, eats simple vegetarian foods, wear a saffron-colored cloth, abstains from intoxicating drink and tries to think only of God.

The day before the festival, the organizers take Lord Murugan on a city procession in the silver chariot on Saik Road to Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple. The procession returns to Thendayuthapani temple in the evening. On Tai Pusam day, hundreds of devotees carry kavadi, many dancing with joy, shouting "Vel, Vel. Vetri Vel." Men may pierce their cheeks and chest with small vels, willingly enduring the suffering in fulfillment of their vows.

Reporter Jeannette Tan recently noted that Singapore's Hindus, far from facing discrimination, enjoy privileged status. She quotes

City citadel: (far left) Devotees perform the kavadi penance in the courtyard; (left) the colorful gopuram shows the typical South Indian architecture of Singapore's temples; (inset) Lord Murugan holding His danda

the Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs, K. Shanmugam, regarding a ban on religious foot processions that was implemented after riots in 1964. Shanmugam said Hindus are the only group given an exemption from this ban. They are allowed to hold three major foot processions—Thaipusam, Panguni Uthirram and Thimithi. "When non-Hindu religious groups apply to hold foot processions, they are usually rejected," he wrote.

Like Hindu temples worldwide, Singapore's temples promote Indian cultural activities such as festivals, music concerts, religious discourses and dance. They host weddings and conduct all manner of religious rites for the community. In maintaining these traditions, all Hindu temples on this island—and worldwide—act as a bridge connecting devotees to Mother India.

Lakshmi Sridharan, PhD, is a molecular geneticist and prolific freelance writer now living in San Jose, California. Contact: tmlakshmi@gmail.com



Who Is Murugan?

Lord Murugan is God Siva's Son, variously worshiped as a renunciate, as the King of kings and as Commander in Chief of the celestial armies. Here He is depicted as Skanda, the mighty warrior who fearlessly wields the Vel, the lance of light and spiritual knowledge that overcomes demons and forces of darkness for devotees who—like the man prostrating on the lotus—pray to Him.

From *Dancing with Siva, Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism*



SMITA TURAKHIA

BOOK REVIEW

India Unveiled Gets An Upgrade

Hundreds of color photographs and vivid writings offer a breathtaking exploration of one of the oldest and most culturally rich nations on Earth

By TARA KATIR, WASHINGTON

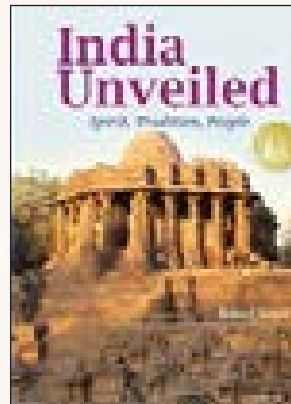
TRAVELING TO INDIA IS ALWAYS A WON-
drous adventure. If blessed with the
luxury of unrestricted time, one can
attempt to explore her vastness and
experience her profound spirituality. Robert
Arnett's sixth edition of *India Unveiled: Spirit,
Tradition, People*—a newly released and
richly expanded 308-page collection of 307
dazzling color photographs and vivid nar-
ration—can be enjoyed by anyone, be they
students and educators or even staycationers.
It provides an experience of the beauty and
spiritual richness of an immense country and
ancient culture.

India possesses one of the oldest civiliza-
tions in the world, and her original culture,
languages and religious beliefs still thrive
today. This diverse land is the birthplace of
four major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism,
Jainism and Sikhism. India is truly a place of
religious, cultural and geographical superla-
tives, and *India Unveiled* does an outstanding
job of bringing that to life as it meanders all
across the nation. Arnett guides us through
six major geographical areas of India, each
presented with glorious photos and a map of

the states in the region.

Most Westerners have seen
pictures of Agra and the Taj
Mahal. From there one can
travel southeast to the Holy
City of Varanasi, where Hin-
dus worship at the Kashi
Vishwanatha Temple complex,
generally considered the ho-
liest of all Hindu pilgrimage
sites. Beautiful photos show-
case the ancient city's pil-
grims, waist deep in the cool
waters of the sacred Ganges
River, immersed in their wor-
ship. "What impressed me
most about the many pilgrims," Arnett re-
lates, "was their devotion, which their facial
expressions clearly mirrored and the cold
morning air and water temperature could
not chill."

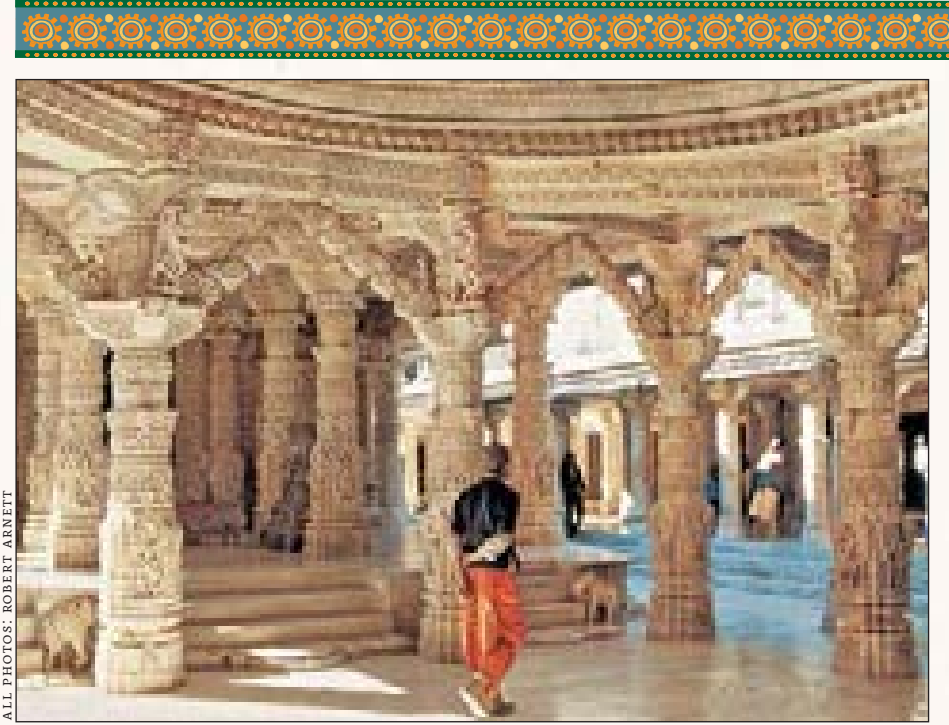
Just seven miles from Varanasi is the an-
cient city of Sarnath, site of Deer Park, where
it is said Buddha delivered his first oration.
Believed to be over 3,700 years old, the city
went into decline with the Muslim invasions.
Archeologists have extensively excavated this



ancient city, and today the
Archaeological Museum in
Sarnath houses exquisite
carvings from the cultural
heights of this Buddhist-
influenced complex. Some
of these are pictured in the
book.

Allahabad, at the conflu-
ence of the Yamuna and
Ganges rivers, is one of
the four sites at which the
Kumbha Mela is alternately
held. "The Kumbha Mela is
the largest religious festival
in the world. On auspicious
astrological days, the surging crowds swell to
over 27 million." Our author arrived on one
of those occasions and spent four days sur-
rounded by a sea of pilgrims immersed in re-
ligious devotion. His description of the expe-
rience, along with the accompanying photos,
give us a momentary glimpse of something
that defies ordinary human comprehension.

Continuing our zigzag across India, we
visit the western states of Gujarat, Maha-
rashtra and Goa. Gujarat was the home of one



ALL PHOTOS: ROBERT ARNETT

of India's most venerated citizens, Mahatma
Gandhi. And 4,500 years before Gandhi, the
great Indus Valley Civilization flourished in
this area. "Along with ancient Egypt, Iran and
China, it is one of the earliest civilizations
in the world and was the most widespread,
stretching from northeast Afghanistan to
Pakistan and northwest India." It is noted for
its urban planning, water supply engineer-
ing, elaborate drainage systems and much
more.

Scholars and scientists long wondered
what happened to this rich civilization. They
know now that climate changes shifted the
monsoon track, and tectonic movement

altered the river's flow, forcing migration
to more fertile regions. "The Indus Valley
Civilization did not disappear suddenly or
become extinct, and many elements of the
Indus Civilization can be found in later cul-
tures. The Indic people shifted eastward to-
wards the Ganges, which explains the large
influx of settlements in India after 1900bce."

South India—the states of Karnataka, Ker-
ala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu—was
the one area of the subcontinent never fully
conquered by invading Muslims. "Thus, its
culture is discernibly different from that of
the North." To exemplify this contrast, Ar-
nett juxtaposes a spectacular photo of the
reflective glass Infosys building in
Bengaluru, representing 21st-centu-
ry India, with one of the ancient Pal-
lava dynasty's seaport of Mamalla-
pura with its magnificent carvings
on gigantic granite outcroppings.

Several appendices enhance the
book. The first succinctly summa-
rizes the British Rule in India from
1613 to Independence in 1947. The
second is a timeline of India com-
pared to the rest of the world, dat-
ing from before 3000bce up to the
present. The third is an excellent but
simple glossary that explains unfa-
miliar terminology. A collection of
thoughtful quotes includes my per-
sonal favorite, from the American
author Mark Twain, who traveled
to Sri Lanka and India from January
to April in 1896: "India is the cradle
of the human race, the birthplace of
human speech, the mother of his-
tory, the grandmother of legend and
the great grandmother of tradition.
Our most valuable and most in-



A lasting legacy: (opposite page) A woman
rings a bell at Tilinga Mandir; the "bell tem-
ple" in Dibrugarh, Assam; (counter-clock-
wise from above) a man stands in the Betwa
River after his morning bath; marble interior
of Jain Vimal Vashi Temple; "India Unveiled"
cover; a Rajasthani woman in Jaisalmer

structive materials in the history of man are
treasured up in India only."

The stunning photography in this marvel-
ous book displays the glories and contrasts
of ancient and modern India. Adding to that,
Mr. Arnett's superb narrative accurately de-
scribes the richness of India's many-faceted
culture. In a few well-chosen words, readers
are given clear and elegant definitions that
will unfold their understanding of India's re-
ligions, scriptures, devotion, worship and the
principles of dharma.

Because of these perfectly expressed
truths and magnificent photos, *India Un-
veiled* has been given a stamp of approval to
be carried around the world in Indian Em-
bassies and Foreign Missions. Ajit Kumar,
the recently appointed ambassador and per-
manent representative of India to the United
Nations in Geneva, stated it best when he
said that *India Unveiled: Spirit, Tradition,
People* is "the best book on India there is."

When we tried to commend Mr. Arnett
for his work, he deftly deflected our praises,
bringing his collaborator, Smita Turakhia,
to the forefront for her artistic layout, ad-
ept editing and amazing photography. This
team's loving dedication to a true depiction
of Bharat has created a sixth edition of *India
Unveiled*, which is a must have for anyone
who loves India and wants to share it with
the world.

Emerson and the Transcendentalists

America's earliest mysticism was strongly influenced by Hindu thought

"CRIME AND PUNISHMENT GROW OUT of the one stem," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay, *Compensation*. "Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed, for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed."

Compensation was Emerson's interpretation of the Hindu law of karma. Long before his fellow countrymen even knew Hinduism existed, he was studying and absorbing the wisdom of the *Vedas* and their *Upanishads*, *The Laws of Manu*, *The Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Today Emerson is honored as one of America's most influential and original thinkers. Yet few realize how extensively his work was suffused with Oriental philosophy—especially Hinduism. Long before Swami Vivekananda's famed sojourn to North America, Emerson was subtly weaving Hindu thought into the fabric of his scholarly writing as if it were his own. In the minds of the Western intelligentsia, he ploughed fertile fields of inspiration 50 years before Indian swamis traveled West to seed them.

Transcendentalism was a literary movement founded in 1836 by Emerson and a handful of other adventuresome American thinkers. It featured at least three authors of world stature: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman.

Combining Romanticism with reform, Transcendentalism celebrated the spiritual potential of man by encouraging nonconformity so that, through a sense of individuality, man might be released from mass conditioning enough to intuitively experience God's all-pervading oneness by personal efforts of unbiased and open-minded introspection. Transcendentalism emphasized the individual rather than the masses, intuition rather than reason, the forces of nature rather than the powers of man. This was radical think-

ing in those days, and it did not bring them immediate popularity. Yet, such outspoken abandon of accepted norms freed the authors to study the literature, religion, philosophy and culture of exotic lands far beyond their shores. Perhaps as a result of Emerson's influence, they all eventually became fascinated by the ancient texts of Hinduism.

A Disparate Team

An irrefutable mystical bent coupled with an interest in Oriental literature may have been the only qualities the early American Transcendentalists had in common. History

and serene. He entered into disputes only with intellectuals on intellectual issues. He was a far more comprehensive thinker than his comrades, but less given to "putting the concepts into practice," which was the forte of Thoreau and Whitman.

Emerson's infatuation with the East enticed him away from an early career in the Christian ministry into a mystic search that his creative writing only partially appeased, even though it decidedly altered the course of Western thought for more than a hundred years to come.

In an essay entitled *Emerson as Seen from India*, written shortly after his death, Pratap Hunder Mozoomdar, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj declared: "Brahmanism is an acquirement, a state of being rather than a creed. In whomsoever the eternal Brahma breathed his unquenchable fire, he was the Brahman. And in that sense Emerson was the best of Brahmans. He shines upon India serene as the evening star. He seems to some of us to have been a geographical mistake."

Another author and scholar, Herambachandra Maitra, suggests that the Massachusetts mystic gave Hindus assurance and faith: "Emerson appeals to the Oriental mind. He translates into the language of modern culture what was uttered by the sages of ancient India in the loftiest strains. He breathes a new life into our old faith, and he assures its stability and progress by incorporating with it truths revealed or brought into prominence by the wider intellectual and ethical outlook of the modern spirit."

Not only is Emerson acknowledged by modern-day scholars East and West as one of the world's greatest writers, he is also considered to be a primary influence in the development of North America's open-mindedness toward religious tolerance, psychic interests and ethical concerns. Emerson is the most quoted American in the modern media, and his works have been translated into dozens of languages abroad. Even those who never

"Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable. It inspires awe and astonishment. How dear, how soothing to man, arises the idea of God, effacing the scars of our mistakes and disappointments!"

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

paints a vivid picture of disparity and dissimilarity between Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman. Yet, this very dissonance was fuel in the fire of the cause for which they had formed in the first place. Emerson remained the ring leader—staid

heard of him venerate the American ideals he helped to forge, including personal achievement, character development and moral living. According to one critic, Emerson continues to be "the least limited, the most permanently suggestive" of American literary artists.

Many Hindu religious leaders came to respect the work of Emerson. Swami Paramananda of the Ramakrishna Order, for instance, frequently quoted Emerson in his lectures and even wrote a book entitled *Emerson and Vedanta*.

Bringing Old Laws to Life

Today it's easy to find translations of Oriental writings. When Emerson was alive, however, things were different. Such translations were few and imperfect. International communication and travel were poor. It was rare to even hear of Hindu writings and rarer still to access them and be able to study them in depth. Emerson was able to gain much from "Hindu missionaries" like Ram Mohan Roy,

who traveled to America in the early 1800s, inspired to elucidate Hinduism for the West.

"When Confucius and the Indian scriptures were made known, no claim to monopoly of ethical wisdom could be thought of," Emerson joyfully proclaimed. "It is only within this century (the 1800s) that England and America discovered that their nursery tales were old German and Scandinavian stories; and now it appears that they came from India, and are therefore the property of all the nations."

Emerson often presented Hindu principles in their original purity. Sometimes he would quote the scriptures directly. Through all of the elegance of his refined prose, there ever remained in his work an unpretentious commitment to the wisdom of the words rather than the crafting of them, as if the core of his motivation was more about leaving behind diaries of personal practice and discovery than legacies of literary greatness. Even his finished works read like ongoing revelations "to be continued."

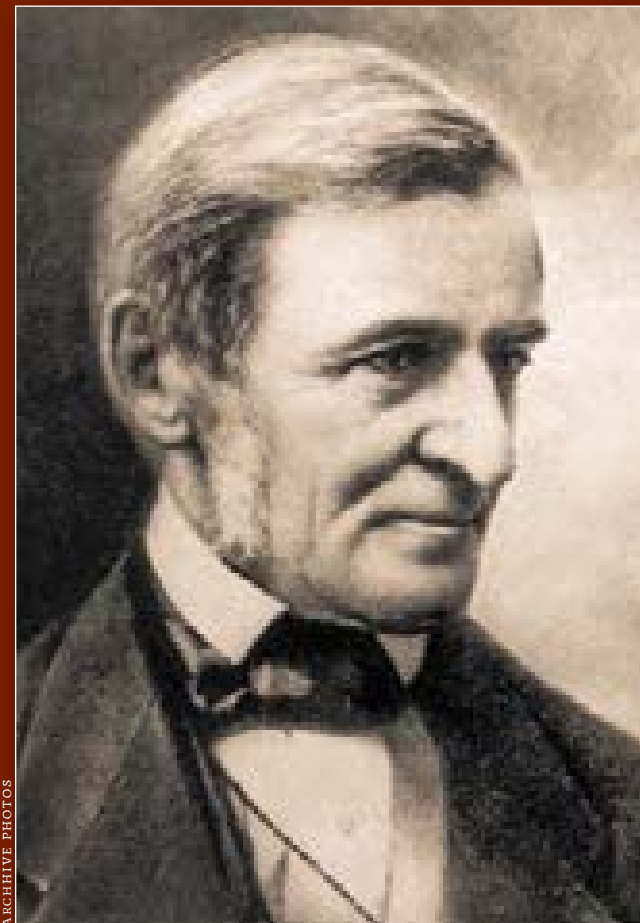
"Always pay!" he exclaimed, heralding the truths of karma and dharma. "First or last you must pay your entire debt. Persons and events may stand for a time between you and justice, but it is only a postponement. You must pay at last your own debt."

"Thou canst not gather what thou dost not sow; as thou dost plant the trees, so will it grow. Whatever the act a man commits, of that the recompense must be received in corresponding body."

Emerson more than echoed ancient wisdom. It was his pleasure and a good portion of his genius to be able to penetrate and expand upon the timeless truths. In this sense, his works were shared meditations.

"Every act rewards itself—or, in other words, integrates itself—in a twofold manner," he asserted. "First, in the thing, or in real nature and, secondly, in the circumstance, or in apparent nature. Men call the circumstance the retribution. The causal retribution is in the thing and is seen by the soul. The retribution in the circumstance is seen by the un-

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Philosopher



ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, but he spent most of his life in the town of Concord. His father was a Unitarian minister with a keen interest in fine literature who was instrumental in founding several important literary societies and publications of the time. When his father died, Emerson was given into the care of his aunt, who took a strong interest in his education. His literary gifts were recognized, encouraged and developed early. In 1817 he entered Harvard College where he met "Hindu missionaries," including Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Emerson became licensed to preach in the Unitarian community in 1826. His early sermons contained the themes of his later famous essays. His early work from the pulpit also laid the foundation for his distinguished skill as a lecturer.

Grief over the death of his first wife drove him to question his beliefs and his profession in the Christian ministry, turning him to other religions for evidence of vital truth. He resigned from the Unitarian ministry and traveled abroad. Infatuated by the possibility of spiritual correspondence between man and nature, he began lecturing and writing. Personal experience played heavily into Emerson's assimilation and expression of creative ideas. His disenchantment with Christianity finds its way into *Compensation*, one of his early essays. "Ever since I was a boy," he writes, "I have wished to write a discourse on compensation; for it seemed to me when very young that on this subject life was ahead of theology and the people knew more than the preachers taught. It seemed to me also that in it might be shown a ray of divinity, the present action of the soul of this world, clean from all vestige of tradition; and so the heart of man might be bathed by an inundation of eternal love, conversing with that which he knows was always and always must be, because it really is now. It appeared, moreover, that if this doctrine could be stated in terms with any resemblance to those bright instructions in which this truth is sometimes revealed to us, it would be a star in many dark hours and crooked passages in our journey, that would not suffer us to lose our way."

derstanding. It is inseparable from the thing, but it often spreads over a long time and so does not become distinct until after many years. The specific stripes may follow late after the offense, but they follow because they accompany it."

A man of considerable influence

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a poet, an essayist and a lecturer. He is considered one of the most significant leaders of the American Renaissance, which flourished at the middle of the nineteenth century. Besides Thoreau and Whitman, that period also featured the masterful work of other literary greats like Emerson's dear friends Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Emily Dickinson.

Collectively these notable artists had a profound effect upon the religious, aesthetic, philosophical and ethical thinking of the day, and Emerson was at the center of it all.

His transcendentalism left the literary world with a sense that there are mystic realities over, above and greater than the trials and tribulations of common, everyday life. Ironically, though, his writings were never without a measure of realistic pragmatism. He combined ancient classical humanism with Oriental metaphysics to ratify his own down-to-earth brand of philosophical monism.

"There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is

made a free man in the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done. How easily these old worships of Moses, of Zoroaster, of Manu, of Socrates, domesticate themselves in the mind. I cannot find any antiquity in them; they are mine as much as theirs."

The Legacy

According to historical accounts, Emerson was a quiet, humble and unassuming gentleman. Nevertheless, history also shows that he had a commanding and wide-ranging influence upon the humanity of his day. Thus,

like many men of legendary greatness, he became more than the sum of his various identities as speaker, poet, writer and philosopher. Because the common denominator in and through all of his work was meditative introspection, he is recognized, loved and admired today as one of America's first truly indigenous sages.

Searching the world over for glimmers of truth and in the process delving deep within himself, Emerson discovered in the limitations of human comprehension what was perhaps his greatest find: humility.

"The philosophy of six thousand years (Hinduism) has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul," he lamented. "In its experiments there has always remained,

in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine."

When the Earth's most comprehensive philosophical system yielded what he considered to be, at best, a spiritual dilemma, Emerson was forced to seek his answers—as all mystics must—in personal transcendental experience. It should come as no great surprise that he would be fundamentally responsible for founding a movement referred to as Transcendentalism. As Emerson and the Transcendentalists became enamored with Hinduism, they took up the crusade of literary eclecticism, showing a breadth of vision

that went beyond their heritage of European and American literature and thought. It was their dream to integrate Judeo-Christian and Americo-European transcendental thought with Hindu ideas. The result of that endeavor forms a good portion of the extensive appeal their writings still today all over the world.

"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagvat-Gita*, since whose composition years of the Gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial," writes Thoreau. "And I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions." 

Henry David Thoreau, the Recluse



Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) made a few important ideas famous—but not during his lifetime. He said that man must follow his conscience regardless of cost, that life should be lived with awareness and appreciation and that the world of nature was superior to the world of man. Although these are not original ideas, his lucid, provocative writing made them convincing.

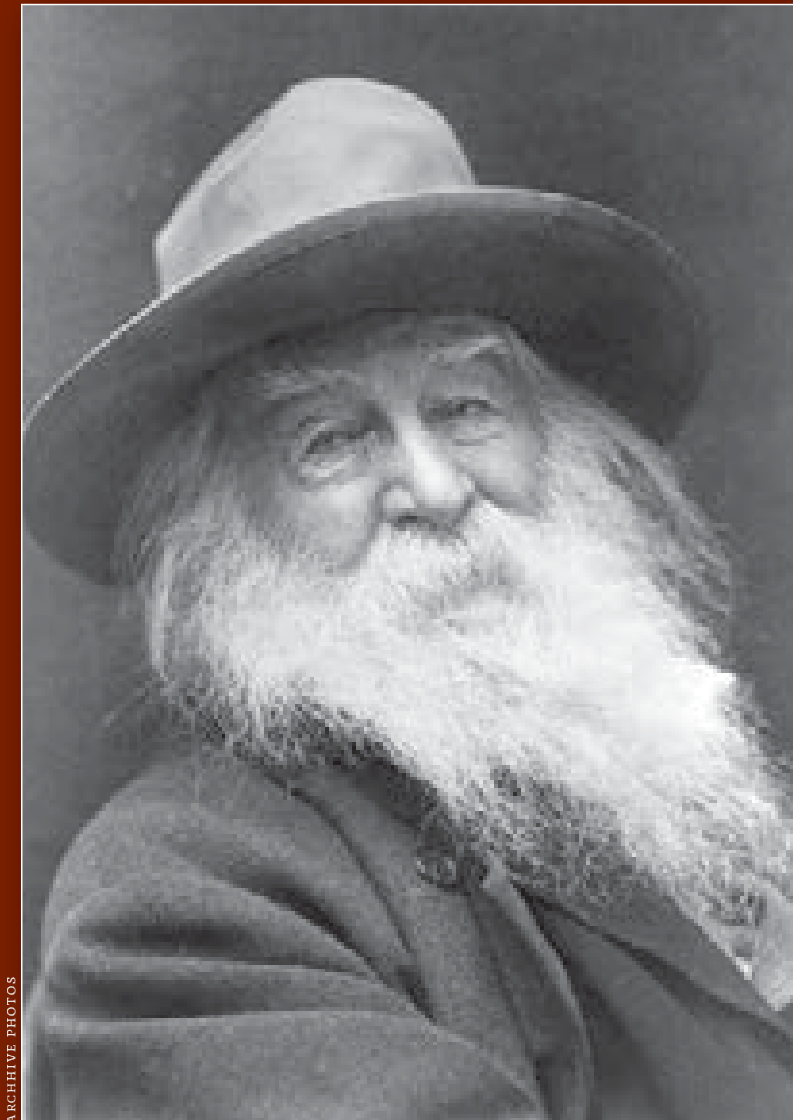
On first impression, Thoreau's life was one of poverty and failure. He was a rebel. With prickly independence, he referred to his most famous work, *Walden*, as his "cockcrow to the world." Toward the end of his life the fiery disdain of his youth died to warm embers. Because of his outspoken ways, he received few accolades for his literary accomplishments. Even his close friend Emerson predicted no literary greatness for him. Such evaluation humbled the talented writer as he got older.

An intensely practical man, Thoreau rarely idealized. Yet, of Hinduism he wrote in his journal: "What extracts from the *Vedas* I have read fall on me like light of a higher and purer luminary, which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum, free from particulars, simple, universal."

Thoreau was austere and remained an ascetic throughout his life. This attitude was inspired by his encounter with the yoga of Hinduism. "Depend upon it that, rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the yoga faithfully," he writes. "The yogi, absorbed in contemplation, contributes in his degree to creation. To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi."

Mahatma Gandhi, another nonconformist, was deeply inspired by Thoreau: "My first introduction to Thoreau's writings was when I was in the thick of the passive resistance struggle. A friend sent me his essay, *Civil Disobedience*. It left a deep impression upon me. The essay seemed to be so convincing and truthful that I felt the need of knowing more of Thoreau, and I came across his *Walden* and other essays, all of which I read with great pleasure and equal profit."

Walt Whitman, the Mystic



Walt Whitman (1819–1892) was born in Long Island, New York. Having left school at the age of eleven, he was mostly self-educated. He worked as a typesetter, journeyman printer, school teacher, editor, stationer, journalist, essayist—and finally a poet.

Whitman lived in New York for 36 years. Around age 30, he experienced a spontaneous mystical illumination which was strongly reflected in his poetry. In *Song of Myself*, he writes, "All truths wait in all things. They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it. The insignificant is as big to me as any."

In 1855 he wrote *Leaves of Grass*, his most famous work, which he revised and published nine times throughout the remainder of his lifetime. Although the radical form and content of this poetry eventually marked him as a revolutionary epitome of American literature, he was, during his life, known more for his influence as a prophet of democracy and "an enthusiast of the common man." The Transcendentalists loved him from the start and gave his work credence, for he exemplified their coveted denial of conformity in pursuit of individual mystical experience.

Whitman's work was applauded first by great Eastern minds. Sri Aurobindo had respect for him and extolled him in his essay, *Future Poetry*. Tagore admired him and even translated one of his poems. Swami Vivekananda paid tribute to him as a "spiritual genius." In the late 1860s Whitman received overdue recognition in America as the early reactions to his radical style began to fade. In 1870 Whitman wrote *Passage to India*. This poem moved beyond America, beyond humanity, to death and "the hereafter."

In January, 1873, Whitman had his first stroke, which left him partially paralyzed. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Camden, New Jersey, where he spent the last years of his life. Facing his final days, he wrote *Proudly the Flood Comes In*, a wondrous contemplation of death. He died March 26, 1892.

We Are God's Instruments!

The proximity of great souls reminds us that we are just humble servants who should fulfill duty with dispassion and faith and leave the rest to God

BY JUSTICE C.V. WIGNESWARAN

Justice C.V. Wigneswaran served in Sri Lanka's judiciary from 1979 to 2001 as an Eastern province magistrate, a district magistrate in Colombo, then the High Court, Court of Appeals and finally the Supreme Court. Chosen by the Tamil National Alliance as their candidate in October, 2013, he ran from the Jaffna district to win as the Chief Minister of Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council, as his country emerged from three decades of nearly continuous warfare.

RECENTLY I HAD THE PRIVILEGE AND GOOD FORTUNE TO shake hands with His Holiness Pope Francis I at the helipad constructed in Madhu Church premises in Mannar in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, when he alighted from his helicopter. Thereafter for some time, that evening and even during the night, a sense of happiness, peace and relaxation enveloped me. While traveling back to Jaffna from Mannar by car, I could notice I was smiling. I was totally relaxed. "How come?" I thought.

I had learned in the course of my studies of Hinduism and other religions that there is an aura around great human beings that is able to affect you in a positive way. Was I experiencing that now? I think back about His Holiness, a very simple, humble human being. His flow of energy towards us was through his eyes. There was love in those eyes. I had learned that love flowing from a human being to others is capable of doing wonders. I saw His Holiness driving in an open chariot, despite his age turning and twisting his body to bless the large humanity around him and acknowledge their love and enthusiasm. I saw him on television seated at the Madhu Church, slightly panting after his exposure a little while earlier. It showed that the flow of love and goodwill takes place despite the limitations of the body and its faculties.

It is then that I started thinking. "Who is he?" "Who am I?" "Who are we?" We belong to different religions; we come from different countries. Colors of our skin are different. Our tongues speak different languages. Our customs and backgrounds are different. Our conditionings are different. Yet we can love a fellow human being. How is it possible? Probably it is because we are essentially divine. Our inner beings must contain the spark of the Divine which makes us love fellow human beings. Have I not learned Anbe Sivam—Love is God?

As a child, I went to the Holy Family Convent in Anuradhapura. The nuns there would say, "We are all sinners. Only Lord Jesus Christ can redeem us. If you become a Catholic, you will be redeemed." I remember running up to my father one evening, when I was five or six years old, complaining that I am a sinner and I need to get saved by Lord Jesus Christ. I asked my father whether I should become a Catholic. My father just laughed and showed me the electric light flashing from the ceiling. "What color is that light?" he asked. "White," I replied. "Suppose I install a blue shade over it, what would the color be?" "Maybe blue?" I said. "Good! Suppose I install a green shade?" "Green." "That is it, my son! Life is how we see it. And



Justice Canagasabapathy Visuvalingam Wigneswaran:
on parade after winning the election in October, 2013

what we see is dependent on how we see it. Your teacher is a Catholic nun. She sees life the way she has been trained to see it. She sees through the blue or green colored shade. Do not be worried. You will realize that what we seek is the white bulb not the colored shade." I do not think I understood fully what my father said until later, when I was mesmerized during my student and early professional life with what J. Krishnamurthi, the world renowned philosopher, had been saying. "We are conditioned to look at life in particular ways as a Hindu, as a Christian, as an atheist, as a communist and so on. But Truth lies beyond those conditionings." It was an extension of what my father had been saying. I thought to myself, probably the Truth lay beyond the blue and green shades!

I come back again to my question, "Who are we?" Traditional Hindu way of life defines a person's development physically and

mentally as developing from a student's life (*brahmacharya*) into a householder's life (*grihastha*), then into a life of retirement (*vanaprastha*) and finally to *sannyasa* (renunciation of the world).

When I was on the threshold of a sannyasi's life, I was forced into politics. From an old man's life of ease and relaxation, love and affection, I was transposed into the hubbub of politics. Fear, lust, anger, jealousy, confused thoughts, selfishness, violence, malice and murderous instincts were all around me. There were times I asked myself the question, "Who am I? What am I doing here?" It was a difficult question to answer. I was used to a judge's pattern of life. I had lived a relatively ivory-tower existence. The sufferings of people were known to me only through the lens of a professional judge and that of the newspapers and TV. I was now face to face with people. People who strove to kiss my fingers, people who fell at my feet, people who expected an end to their sufferings through me!

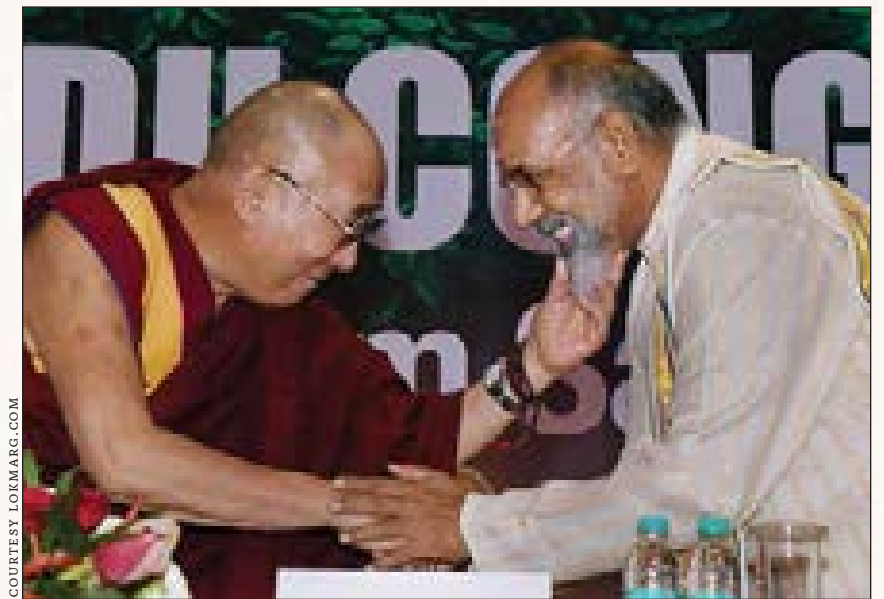
"Good Lord! What have you done to me? Who am I to be what they want me to be?" I asked. Then it dawned on me—I am nobody. But He is everybody. It is He who is in everything and everybody. This person identified as myself is only an instrument. I have to move on to the best of my ability with all my limitations and disabilities. He will take care of His instrument. I am in His hands. He directs. Sometimes why I am directed in a particular way is not understood by me. Then I understand. He knows where we are going. We do not know. There are pleasurable moments and painful moments. But they don't belong to me. I am only an instrument.

Take the pleasure and the pain as they come. He knows what is best. When people fall at your feet, think of Him and ask Him to bless them. When people kiss your fingers, it is His fingers they are kissing! Keep the fingers clean and tidy. Because He dwells in them and at any time people would want to kiss His fingers. When a person praises me, I smile inwardly. When did I do anything they say I did? He did it. It is to Him all credit should go. I am an onlooker. When they criticize me, inwardly something says, "Why do you worry? They are criticizing Me." Then I get back to a state of equilibrium.

Politics has taught me more religion than all I had learned at the feet of holy men and women whom I have had the privilege of meeting—so many of them!

I had learned of centers of consciousness, or chakras—*muladhara*, *svadishthana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha*, *ajna* and *sahasrara*. They have various attributes. We are generally living at the level of the first three or four. Memory (*muladhara*), reason (*svadishthana*) and willpower (*manipura*) are the attributes of the first three chakras. Most of our energy is dissipated at this level. Only at the level of cognition (*anahata*) do we start looking at ourselves, our mind, our personality and question ourselves. "Who are we?" "What are we?" "What do we like?" "What do we dislike?" "What should I do if any quality of mine is reprehensible?" and so on. When we improve or progress, we move up to divine love (*vishuddha*). As you improve, it is as if some form of mercury is rising along your vertebral column. It goes up and comes down. Sometimes it reaches even beyond *vishuddha*.

Coming into contact with holy men like His Holiness the Pope, or the Dalai Lama, whom I had the privilege of meeting recently in Delhi, you realize that love is eternally flowing out from them, since they are always at the level of the *vishuddha* chakra or above. In their presence we mortal humans are able to suddenly reach up to



The Dalai Lama meets the chief minister of Sri Lanka's northern province: The World Hindu Congress held in New Delhi November 21-23, 2014, brought together religious and political leaders from all around the world. Here, the head of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, connects with C. V. Wigneswaran.

their love, like the mercury in the thermometer. Suddenly our sense of love and well-being rise up in our hearts to touch or mingle with the love emanated by such holy men and women. You feel humbled in their presence. You feel you are nothing in their presence. You are deeply washed by their love. It was such an ablation that I experienced in the presence of His Holiness Pope Francis I—a simple, humble, noble human being. I was able to recognize who I am in his presence—just a receiver of love. Energy, which is all pervading, flows through such humans in the form of love, and we are but magnets, instruments which catch that love. For a while their love works in us and through us. Then it is gone. We get hooked into more mundane matters.

But the question "Who are we?" still remains. "Who am I?" "Who are we?" There is no doubt that we are a combination of body, mind and intellect. But there is also a spiritual aspect which envelops us at the fringe of the body, mind and intellect level.

Saint Valmiki was able to transform himself from the body level to the spiritual. He was a bandit living at body level who changed because of his chance meeting with the Saptha Rishis (Seven Saints). Saint Sundaramurti Nayanar was able to reach the fringes of the spiritual dimension at the mind level. It was while he was preparing for his marriage that Lord Shiva intruded into his life. At the level of the higher intellect, Goddess Devi helped Adi Shankara. Various incidents at their body, mind and intellectual levels transposed them into the spiritual dimension. When you are an instrument in the hands of the Divine, He will decide when you should enter the portals of His privileged domain. You do not have to desire. It will take place in time.

So, let me conclude this piece by saying that my little experience in this life of 75 years has taught me that we are but instruments. He knows what to do with us. Just have faith in Him and carry on to the best of your knowledge, ability and skill. This is an easy philosophy of life, in essence the same as Krishna prescribed in the *Bhagavad Gita*—disinterested devotion to duty! There is nothing left for us except to do our duties to the best of our abilities, because we are but instruments in the hands of the Divine!



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

RETIREMENT

Homeless Elderly in Nepal Find New Life

A peek inside an oasis on the sacred grounds by Pashupatinath Temple

It is ironic that this story, filed just before the devastating earthquake of April 25, begins with a single man's disaster. Yet the Briddhashram has proven to be a haven even now, as the entire country struggles with unimaginable tragedy impacting millions. Here is what we know at press time: The elderly residents are safe and have been fed, housed and cared for as usual. But the village of volunteer Yogesh Gurung has been leveled. Durga Prasain, who was too poor to provide a home to her aunt, has now lost what little she had. Some of those Nepalis who volunteered are now being fed themselves at the Briddhashram, thankful to be alive but struggling, as all are in Nepal, to recover from the 7.8-magnitude earthquake.

BY SALLY ACHARYA, KATHMANDU

WHEN THE HILLSIDE COLLAPSED IN the middle of the night and buried Ganesh Bahadur Karki's home under tons of mud and rock, he should have been asleep inside. But, in a rare stroke of luck for the impoverished widower, he had stepped out into the night air only moments before the rumbling began. The landslide took everything but his life—his home, his farm, all his possessions. For a while he slept in the government office where he worked as a peon, but he was get-

ting old. With no family able to take him in, where could he go?

Then he heard about the Pashupati Briddhashram, or "elders' ashram," on the grounds surrounding Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu. Now, instead of being homeless, he lives in one of the most sacred spots on Earth.

Every morning he relaxes in the cobbled courtyard, listening to bhajans sung by fellow residents. Women pass the time by twisting cotton into wicks for oil lamps to be offered in prayer. Even those who can't walk the hundred paces to the entrance of Pashupatinath Temple are on holy ground; in their central courtyard are the five massive cupolas of the Panch Dewal, or five shrines, around which Briddhashram is built.

It's an austere life. Needs are met in simple ways: a cot to sleep on, two plain meals a day, a government health worker on staff, and young volunteers to bathe and feed the frailest of residents, wash their clothes and listen to their stories. To elderly Nepalis whose hard lives might otherwise end in poverty and loneliness, the Briddhashram can be a lifesaver. "I have a new life here," says 83-year-old Laxmi Devi Thapa. "It's all through the blessing of God."

Caring for elders is a cherished ideal in Hindu families. Our aging grandmothers and grandfathers consider a child's home as

their own home. As they grow older, even if they haven't been living in a joint family, they often take up residence with a son or daughter. Aging in the same home as children and grandchildren is still a cultural norm and fortunate reality for many Nepalis.

But not for everyone. Urbanization has led to social dislocation, notes Manoj Kumar Basnet, the chief administrator of Briddhashram. The poor, as always, are the most vulnerable. Urbanization and migration have meant that families are moving out of remote villages, often ending up crowded into rented rooms in cities with no extra space or resources. A poor, childless elder who in the past would have been surrounded by relatives willing to take her in or lend a helping hand may be left with no one capable of offering her a home.

Western-style retirement homes are beginning to rise around Kathmandu for well-to-do senior citizens who can't or don't want to move in with family. Such homes are not an option for the residents of Briddhashram. "These are all people who have had trouble in life," says Durga Prasain as she sits on a veranda with her elderly aunt. "There isn't a single person here who has had an easy life."

Her aunt, Chandamaya Upreti, is 84 but childless. Durga would care for her if she could, but she lives in a single cramped room with all her children; her husband is a laborer



Where the heart is: (clockwise from far left) early morning bhajans at the home; teenage volunteer Merina Shrestha, who hopes to become a nurse, changes linen in the ward for disabled elderly women; unlike these buildings and shrines in central Kathmandu, the Briddhashram was unaffected by the earthquake; elders apply tika for one another and to the volunteers and guests as bhajans conclude



overseas. Chandamaya had floated uncomfortably among various equally poor relatives before a space opened at Briddhashram. Most residents are referred by their Village Development Committees, who vouch that they are indigent with no family to support them. Some have been found sleeping on the road, suffering from dementia or abandoned.

The ashram wasn't always for the elderly. The traditional brick building with its carved wooden windows was built around the Panch Dewal in 1881 as a resthouse for pilgrims who came from far away to worship God at Pashupatinath. The rustic dormitories that once housed traveling pilgrims are now the final stop in life's journey for 230 senior citizens.

The care they receive isn't only from Nepal's cash-strapped government. Worshipers who come for darshan at Pashupatinath stop by to make donations, often sponsoring a day's worth of meals for everyone at the home. In addition, young Nepalis come to volunteer through nursing programs, school service projects and independently.

The frailest residents live in wards nearest the kitchen and dining terrace. There, on a recent day, Sita Karki, who had just finished Class 10, was bathing a woman who was barely the size of a five-year-old, hunched, immobile and unable to speak. Sita picked her up like a child. "I just do it because it's en-

joyable to me," Sita said, her long black braid swinging behind her. "It's not hard. It makes me happy."

As Sita scrubbed, 17-year-old Merina Shrestha dusted food crumbs off the lady's bed and stripped the linen. Merina hopes to become a nurse and is learning what it's like by volunteering daily at Briddhashram, where she not only takes care of the physical needs of elderly women but provides a listening ear as they share their stories. "Someday," she says, "we'll all be old. Wouldn't we all want someone to help us?"

Then there is Yogesh Gurung, who is coming through the courtyard swinging a pail of potatoes and teasingly calling out "alu le lo" ("come get your potatoes") like a street hawker. The 26-year-old Nepali has hair dyed a punkish blond covered by a traditional Dhaka topi cap and a string of sacred rudraksha beads peeking out from under his t-shirt. He had been going in the wrong direction in life, he says, partying and hanging out with a bad crowd, when a personal tragedy caused him to rethink his choices.

"I began to meditate and read some biographies, like Mahatma Gandhi. He said we should work for humanity. We're human beings, not animals, so what can we do to show that we're human? We can share the joys and sorrows of others," he says. "Coming here and

helping is a discipline for me. It's my bhakti to Siva-ji."

Working alongside the young Nepali volunteers are a government health worker, volunteer Nepali doctors and international volunteers who often come through the Indian organization International Development Exchange (IDEX) while on a gap year or traveling the world. "I'd rather volunteer than just be a tourist," says Melloney Maurits of the Netherlands, 22, as she carried a pail of laundry to be scrubbed by hand. "It's different," laughs Hae-youn Sin of Switzerland, 19, who was hanging laundry in the sun by the five shrines with 25-year-old Sylvia Uribe of Mexico. "But we enjoy it. It's very physical, but we have a feeling we're helping."

The residents of Briddhashram may be bent and frail, but they use their skills to benefit others. Worshipers at Pashupatinath often purchase a bundle of wicks to light in prayer, and these may be the work of ladies at Briddhashram, who make a little pocket change by practicing their traditional crafts.

Laxmi Devi Thapa is one of the residents who keeps herself busy making wicks and weaving baskets, both for temple devotees and her own use. To her, life at the Briddhashram is a miracle. Orphaned in childhood and never married, she had no one to turn to as she grew older and faced a future on the streets.

But then, she relates, God Siva came to her in a dream. She tells her tale in a storyteller's voice, animated and cheerful, as if speaking to the grandchildren she never had. "Three times He came and said, 'Come to Pashupatinath,' and three times I refused," she says. "Who would take me? Why should I go? I didn't know about this place. I didn't know what He was telling me. Finally, Parvati Mata came to me."

The Goddess, too, told her to come. When she awoke, a person had arrived to tell her about the Pashupati Briddhashram. The elderly lady raises her hands in a gesture of prayer to the shrines to Siva that now form the centerpiece of her world. "It is the wish of God. I'm a very fortunate woman. Now I'm at peace."

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Educate and Bring Pride

Hinduism is underdeveloped in Guyana. We must work with our youth for a positive future.

BY SWAMI AKSHARANANDA

When Swami, the head of Saraswati Vidya Niketan in the South American nation of Guyana, visited the offices of Hinduism Today, our editors interviewed him about the history and current state of Hinduism in his country.



INDIANS WERE FIRST BROUGHT TO THE BRITISH COLONY of Guyana in 1838 to replace the slaves who had just been freed. Most came from Northern India—primarily Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—and some from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The originators of the scheme had proposed to the British government that in addition to profiting the plantation owners, this would benefit the Indians by exposing them to Christianity.

A strong emphasis was placed on conversion throughout the colonial period. The usual incentives were given to become Christian, such as teaching and other government jobs. Christian priests were brought from India to work on the local population, too. But during the colonial period conversion efforts met little success. At the end of his tenure of more than 20 years, Rev. H.V.P. Bronkhurst wrote of the refusal of the Hindus to convert, "Morally and spiritually they seem as hard as stones, and as cold as icicles."

Fifty years after independence, Guyana is still a Christian state. The Pentecostal sect in particular has been very active in conversion. This is still going on, and it is an area of involvement for our organization, and for me personally, to try to combat these efforts at various levels. We know that conversion in this style has nothing to do with finding God. It is more of a cultural or political move. Nobody says, "I converted because I wanted to find God" or "I wanted to find the Truth." It is always for some other reason, some pretext, excuse or dissatisfaction with one's social position.

Many regard Christianity as an aspect of modernity rather than merely a faith. It has become part of the globalization movement. It is the modern thing, the cool thing for young people. And it comes from America, like so many other things, so it must be good, right?

We tend to compliment ourselves for holding on to Hinduism outside of India for 170 years, and we have. But to some extent we have been cut off from the evolution that has been taking place in the rest of the Hindu world. We are not aware of some of the major developments, including some of the modern-day gurus. Hinduism has not remained static in India. The Hinduism that we have maintained is to some degree what you will find in the rural part of India, or how it was there a century and a half ago. I have gone back and seen the changes for myself.

The primary way we identify ourselves to our fellow Hindus is by our various ritual practices. That's the level we are at; we have not gone beyond that. The principal texts we refer to are the *Ramacharitamanas* and *Bhagavad Gita*. The more educated go with the *Gita*, but not many. If one were to seek a scholastic understanding of the *Gita*, studying all the commentaries, he will gain some understanding. But obviously Hinduism is more than the *Bhagavad Gita*. The

sophisticated intellectual-philosophical discussions we find in the Saiva scriptures are not found in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

So, we are, in a sense raw, and the field is wide open in terms of how we can develop, what we can put into our society, what direction our society can be given as far as our religion is concerned.

There has been a large migration of Hindus from Guyana to North America, and among them have been our pandits. Fifty years ago it was felt—and now and again you will hear it, especially in Trinidad—that a pandit is supposed to be brahmin by birth. But that is no longer the case in Guyana. Perhaps 80 percent of our pandits are self-trained, but unsophisticated. Many of them are not connected to temples; they freelance, going into the community to serve whoever has a need for them, such as at weddings, funerals and the highly popular Hanuman puja. There are some fairly well-educated priests who will go a little beyond that, conducting regular discourses, but there are only a handful of these.

There are many aspiring priests who have set up organizations who probably hope to fill that role. But it has to be with the blessings of the dominant political par-

ty with which a group is affiliated. This is where politics have played a harmful role for us. As an example, during our anti-conversion outreach activities, politicians told us not to rock the boat. This is because our politics are divided. We succumb to race politics; there is a black component and there is an Indian component, and among the Indians are the Christians. This political influence is fairly strong. In a sense, Hindus in Guyana are prisoners in a political cage. We can't get out of it because we are Indians; our voice must always be moderated according to the Indian political parties' needs and demands. It causes tension, and it is a serious conflict for us.

Bringing teachers and spreading knowledge should not cause much of a problem because others are bringing their best scholars and teachers. There is a constant flow of Christian missionaries from North America. We have fallen behind, not reaching out to the international community for the best that we could summon.

The typical Hindu child in Guyana is not proud of himself or herself—I wouldn't say self-loathing, but somewhat ashamed to be Hindu. He or she would not stand up and identify himself or herself as a Hindu with the same kind of commitment and assertion that a Christian kid would. I am not saying that we must adopt the Christian or Muslim style. The tragedy is that we always are so defensive and apologetic about ourselves.

Our school just outside Georgetown has 525 students now. One of the reasons for starting it was to change that, to give Hindus a sense of identity, to bring them up strong and assertive, to give them an understanding about Hinduism so they can be proud of their heritage. But this is where we are at a severe disadvantage, because we don't have the material and human resources.

If our vision can be replicated in different parts of Guyana and we can work primarily with young people, who are willing and excited to learn, I think we can make a difference.

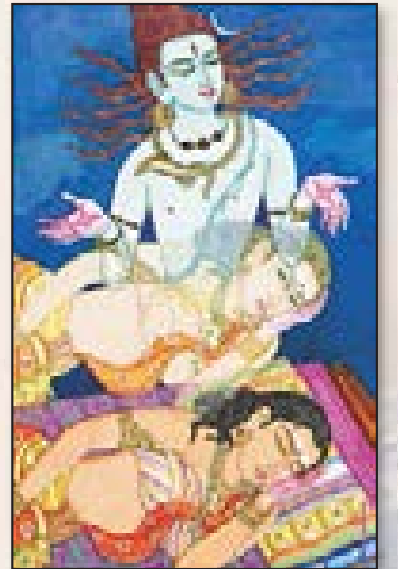
I think Guyana needs a special medicine because of the level of our development. A transformation in the sense of pride in being Hindu is the change that I see our society needs. The work has to be done.

Email: swami_aksharananda@hotmail.com

Hindu Heritage Endowment

DEATH & DYING: PREPARATIONS FOR TRANSITION

People ask, "What should a person do to prepare to die?" Everyone is prepared to die, and whether it happens suddenly or slowly, intuitively each individual knows exactly what he is experiencing and about to experience. Death, like birth, has been repeated so many times that it is no mystery to the soul. The only problem comes with conflicting beliefs, which produce fear and anxiety about death. This temporary ignorance soon subsides when the failing forces of the physical body reach a certain level. At this point, the intelligence, the soul itself, is there. We can compare this to restless sleep and deep sleep. ¶ When one knows he is going to depart the physical body, he should first let everybody know that he knows and give relatives security by explaining to them that soon they won't be seeing him in a physical body anymore. He should consciously go over his wealth and his properties. >From the Hindu point of view, the knowledge of one's imminent departure begins the *sannyāsa āśrama* for the individual. The devotee traditionally divests himself of all material belongings, effecting a conscious death before the actual death. He is the executor of his own will, taking care of everybody and not leaving these things to others to deal with after his passing. ¶ After everything is settled, all personal possessions disposed of, then he begins meditation and awaits the fruitful hour, trying to exit through the highest chakra of the attainment of this life. Each chakra is a door through which we can depart. The dying should always remember that the place where one will reincarnate is the place that he is thinking about prior to death. So, choose your desires wisely. The last thoughts just before death are the most powerful thoughts in creating the next life. One must also realize that if he and others are aware that he will soon depart, others in the inner worlds also realize he will soon be making his transition and are busy making adjustments and preparations for his arrival. ¶ With a sudden death—uncalled for, unbidden and unexpected—a totally different sequence of events occurs. There is no settlement of affairs, and the chaotic situation, emotional and otherwise, persists in the inner worlds and even into the next life. Property is not distributed, and nothing is settled. Negative karmas and positive karmas are all cut short. The situation can be summed up in one word, unfulfillment. Once in the inner world, the deceased feels this unfulfillment and is restless and anxious to get back. He is in a place he did not intend to be, and does not want to stay. So, in the inner world he is with a whole group of those who almost immediately reenter the flesh, for he is too agitated to stay very long on the inner planes. It's like an emergency ward or intensive care unit. ¶ Chances are, it would be difficult for such a soul to get a birth. Perhaps there would be an abortion or miscarriage a couple of times before there was a successful birth. These are the disturbed children we see, emotionally distraught, needing special care. They cry a lot. ¶ In preparation for death, one can soften the karmas of future births by making amends with others, settling scores, doing everything to tie up loose ends, seeking the forgiveness of those harmed, to get the mental-emotional matters of this life all worked out."



A woman has just made her transition. Though her physical body lies lifeless, her astral remains fully aware as she thinks of Siva.

This article was extracted from the book *Merging with Siva*, lesson 351.

To download an Estate Planning Tool Kit visit www.hheonline.org.

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	Total	7,066.33	Suntheram Family Trust Fund		
Anonymous	100.00		Ramachandran Suntheram	1,500.00	
Roshan Harilela	375.00				
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	166.20		Hindu Press International Endowment Fund		
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	250.00		Rajendra Giri	110.00	
Gayatri Rajan	75.00		Hiranya Gowda	63.00	
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00		Murari Singh	100.00	
Other Donations	45,999.98		Total	273.00	
Total	47,041.18				
Iraivan Temple Endowment			Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund		
Frank Burkhardt	30.00		Gassa Patten	1,350.00	
Naresh & Sanchita Gupta-Goyal	31.92		John & Abha Wiersba	225.00	
Dheeraj Handa	51.00		Total	1,575.00	
Victoria Lynne Johnson	11.00				
Anonymous	1,251.00		Saiva Agamas Trust		
Tejasinha Sivalingam	21.00		Ganga Sivanathan	56.00	
Ganga Sivanathan	216.00				
Vythieswara Subramanian	25.00		Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment		
Other Donations	31,636.92		Anil Kumar	27.00	
Total	33,273.84				
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund		
Anonymous	121.00		Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	
Anil Ananda Badhwar	9.00				
Gunavadee Caremben	27.40		Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund		
Somasundaram Caremben	27.40		Anonymous	100.00	
Sukanta Caremben	27.40				
Tarakini Gunasegaran	2.04		Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund		
Victoria Lynne Johnson	11.00		Tamnash Gupta	108.00	
Juhivaasana Koothan	5.52				
Anil Kumar	18.00		Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund		
Veena Kunniah	247.52		Rajadeva Alahan	51.00	
Saroja Devi Manickam	3.50				
Saroja Maureemootoo	11.04		A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund		
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	0.22		Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	
Thiaga Nadaraja	100.00		Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	5.00	
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00		Total	155.00	
Melanie Noel	20.00				
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98		Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		
Kirtideva Peruman	1.00		Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00	
Puvaneswary Roberts	108.00		Lyubov Chesnokova	30.00	
Arasen Pillay Samoo	251.00		Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	108.00		Anonymous	913.43	
Muthukumar Shanmugam	190.70		Debashis Ghosh	300.00	
Hemavalli Sivalingam	1.65		Gunasekaran Kandasamy	373.14	
Rohini Sivalingam	57.58		Meena Narayanan	50.00	
Maran Thondaya	134.41		Cassan Pancham	500.00	
Total	1,593.36		Mano Rajah	150.00	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			Puvaneswary Roberts	108.00	
Prabhu & Radhika Ambatipudi	499.00		Chamundi Sabanathan	2,124.00	
Darlene Bolesny	80.00		Aran Sambandar	162.00	
Shaun Deepan Cadle	100.00		Hitesvara Saravan	108.00	
Mansukh M. Chhiba	499.00		Tejasinha Sivalingam	10.00	
Anonymous	287.30		Ganga Sivanathan	56.00	
Mahadevan Gengadaram	499.00		Anba Dayananden Valayten	11.23	
Tarakini Gunasegaran	3.26		Vayudeva Varadan	42.00	
Tirunyanam Gunasegaran	79.00		Michael Wasylikiw	648.00	
Haran Kandadas	499.00		Total	5,942.80	
P. Keerthi Kemparajurs	499.00		Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment		
Veena Kunniah	499.00		Shyamal Chandra Debnath	100.00	
Sivakavinian Moonesawmy	50.00				
Bhaveshan Moorghen	5.52		Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	5.30		Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	
Udeyadeva Moorghen	5.52				
Mohan & Sutha Narayanan	499.00		Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		
Nithyananda Swami	499.00		Anonymous	100.00	
Kusumita P. Pedersen	499.00		Bala Sivaceyon	60.00	
Kirtideva Peruman	24.94		Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00	
Niroshnee Peruman	10.94		Total	190.00	
Paramesha Pillay	499.00				
Narayanan & Latha Ramesh	499.00		Taos Hanuman Fund		
Arasen Pillay Samoo	182.80		Anonymous	15.36	
Sai Singh	120.00				
Rohini Sivalingam	107.31		Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		
Potriyan Sivanathan	16.44		Akshat Jaganmohan	150.00	
Sugan Subramanian	499.00				
Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund					
Vel Mahalingum	18.13				
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment					
Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	9.00				
Michael R. Eisen	50.00				
Devajyothi Kondapi	303.00				
Umasankaran Mohambourame	90.75				
Gowri Nadason	148.63				
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00				
Nigel Subramaniam Siva	160.00				
Bala Sivaceyon	30.00				
Tejasinha Sivalingam	5.00				
Anonymous	108.00				
Total	997.38				
Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund					
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00				
Kulagan Moonesawmy	17.29				
Gowri Nadason	148.63				
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00				
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00				
Other Donations	4,800.00				
Total	5,094.92				
Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund					
Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00				
Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam					
Anonymous	424.00				
Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment					
Rajnikant B. Acharya	100.00				
Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund					
Anonymous	324.00				
Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund					
Anonymous	200.00				
Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment					
Mano Rajah	75.00				
Hinduism Today Production Fund					
Krishnan Lal Saxena Family Charitable Fund	100.00				
Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00				
P.C. Ghosh	90.00				
Hiranya Gowda	93.00				
Raji Kasinathan	250.00				
Rajiv Kaushal	48.00				
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00				
Sheila D Nayak	101.00				
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01				
Gayatri Rajan	75.00				
Hitesvara Saravan	108.00				
Shun K. Sunder	5,000.00				
Total	6,085.01				
Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund					
Linda Desabato	68.00				
Rajendra Giri	110.00				
Roshan Harilela	375.00				
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	166.20				
Anonymous	75.00				
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00				
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00				
Matthew Wieczork	19.00				
Total	918.20				
Hindu Education Endowment					
Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00				

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment		Panchangam Endowment Fund	
Anonymous	100.00	AmazonSmile Foundation	12.58	Cuddalore Kumar	11.00
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00			Anonymous	10.00
Total	160.00			Total	21.00
Hindu Literature Fund		India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Digital Dharma Endowment	
Praneel Chandra Gosai	51.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	Rohit Bhatnagar	30,000.00
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00			Michael R. Eisen	75.00
Total	204.00	Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Saravanan Kasthuri	300.00
		Kishore Acharya	151.00	Puvaneswary Roberts	215.00
		Vayudeva Varadan	36.00	Anonymous	108.72
		Total	187.00	Total	30,698.72
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Insurance Premiums	
Hiranya Gowda	153.00	Danyse Crotti	100.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	Hiranya Gowda	99.00		
Total	173.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	28.17	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
		Kulagan Moonesawmy	17.29	Other Donations	600.00
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00		
Anonymous	100.00	Ganga Sivanathan	56.00	Total Contributions	\$153,277.26
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Total	360.46		
Total	133.00			Funds at Market Value, March 31, 2015	
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Grand Total	\$13,776,973.22
Krishna K. Devarajulu	101.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	10.00		
Michael R. Eisen	25.00				
Victoria Lynne Johnson	3.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment			
Kumaran Duraiswamy Thangarajah	101.00	Vani Chenganna	20.00		
Anuradha Venkatachalam	101.00	Anonymous	58.00		
Total	331.00	Dheeraj Handa	21.00		
		Natraj Narayanswami	22.00		
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00		
Anonymous	640.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	45.50		
Marlene Carter	162.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	50.00		
Sunil Chacko	795.00	Total	246.50		
Sasikumar Darmalingam	16.60			Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Anonymous	115.36		
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	295.50			Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Andrew Stich	300.00	Anil Ananda Badhwar	9.00		
Soma Sundaram	15.00	Sanjay Dahya	17.02		
Michael Zimmermann	5.00	Anil Kumar	18.00		
Total	2,279.11	Anonymous	250.00		
		Total	294.02		
Siva Poomi School Trust					
Anonymous	100.00				

MISSION STATEMENT: Hindu Heritage Endowment is a publicly supported, charitable organization recognized as tax exempt by the IRS on April 22, 1994. Employer ID 99-0308924. Founded by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, its philanthropic mission is to provide secure, professionally managed financial support for institutions and religious leaders of all lineages of Sanatana Dharma.

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS: Halbert, Hargrove, Investment Counsel; Alvin G. Buchignani, Esq., Legal Counsel; and Sonoda & Isara LLP, certified public accountants. HHE is a member of the Council on Foundations, an association of over 1,500 foundations which interprets relevant law and management and investment principles.

I WANT TO PARTICIPATE: Where should I Send My Donation? You can send your gift to an existing fund, create a new endowment or request information through the address below. Donations may be made online at www.hheonline.org to join our family of benefactors who are Strengthening Hinduism Worldwide. Thank you.



HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY

107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA

808-822-3012 ext 6 • Fax: 888-217-3108 • hhe@hindu.org

www.hheonline.org • www.facebook.com/hhecares





NextGen

HAF's Congressional internship program is incredibly unique and strong. Of the thousands who apply for internships in Congressional offices, HAF has built its name so prominently that it can place several interns in high-ranking offices...Because of this internship, I've never felt prouder of being represented by an organization that cares so much for our future. This experience has changed the way I understand our government, and I couldn't be more thankful to HAF for giving me this opportunity.

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



910 17th St NW, Suite 316A
Washington, DC 20006

PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY, MUTUAL RESPECT, AND PLURALISM

Find out more about
HAF's advocacy work and
how it impacts you!

WWW.HAFSITE.ORG



Your Hawaiian Pilgrimage Destination

Visit the spectacular gold-domed, all-white-granite *Iraivan Temple* being constructed at Kauai's Hindu Monastery—from stones quarried and hand-carved in India. Bring the children. Read more, see photos, videos and/or donate at:

himalayanacademy.com/iraivan.org
808-822-3012, x237 • iraivan@hindu.org

Gather endless insights into the heart of Hinduism



What Is Hinduism? is published by the editors of **Hinduism Today**. It is a collection of 46 of their finest articles published

through the years—those that illustrate and illuminate the best of Sanatana Dharma, its wisdom, knowledge, practices and vibrancy. All is captured in *Hinduism Today's* characteristic clarity, relevance, color and enthusiasm.

Keep this volume around, and delight yourself browsing through it from time to time. It's a great tool to learn with, or teach or share with someone—your children for example. It makes you feel you really do know what is Hinduism!

"The most concise, clear and complete presentation of Hinduism anywhere."
Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley)

www.minimela.com/wih?



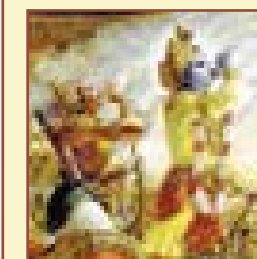
Life Insurance and Estate Planning

Rely on a professional for
Retirement and Estate Planning

For information, contact one of
the most highly trained financial advisors:

Niraj P. Baxi, msi, clu, chfc
Tel: 800-686-8436
niraj@baxifinancial.com
www.baxifinancial.com

Educators' Society For Heritage Of India presents: *Concise Geetā for Students*



Access with your smart-phone or tablet 108 selected verses logically organized in five chapters and succinctly explained by Dr. Ved Chaudhary in clear, simple terms that reveal the

Essence of Yoga and Vedānta

Download:
ESHlusa.org/philosophy



Vegan Vitamins & Supplements

No animal products or derivatives of any kind

High quality
Wide selection
Affordable prices



...and many more!

Available for purchase at:

WHOLE FOODS & other
Natural Health Food Stores.

(888) 988-DEVA

www.devanutrition.com
info@devanutrition.com



DEVA vitamins are 100% vegan, vegetarian and certified by the Vegan Society, the non-profit organization that actually invented the word "vegan."



Hindu Global Charity



We are currently planning projects in Indonesia, Nepal and Nigeria.

American Hindu World Service (AHWS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to educating the American public and the world about Hindu perspectives on global health and international development. It is now working on HIV/AIDS, nutrition awareness, secondary education (school construction) and sustainable agriculture. It is active with other religious communities on interfaith issues, and serves without discrimination as to ethnicity, gender, nationality, or creed. More at www.ahwsngo.org

AHWS • PO Box 1483, Laurel, MD 20725-1483, USA
626-475-7149 • ahwsngo@gmail.com

Chakrapani Ullal, Vedic Astrology

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



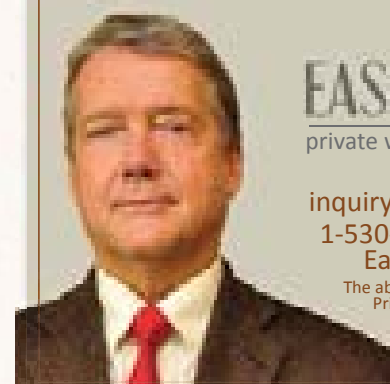
Born into a traditional Hindu lineage of astrologers in South India, Chakrapani began his training at an early age and enjoyed associations with many of India's most revered and celebrated saints and sages. With over 45 years of experience, his depth of knowledge and unique understanding of how astrological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

Chakrapani Ullal • PO Box 74427
Los Angeles, CA 90004 USA
tel: 323-962-9911 • fax: 323-962-9915
info@vedicastrology.com • www.chakrapani.com

Invest with a clear conscience

Earn while doing no harm

We prudently manage wealth, and screen for socially conscious, ahimsa-affirming investments.



EASAN KATIR

private wealth management
since 1983

inquiry@easankatir.com
1-530-231-5646 (USA)
EasanKatir.com

The above is not FDIC insured.
Principal will fluctuate.

INSPIRED TEACHINGS IN THE KRIYA YOGA TRADITION

Roy Eugene Davis, Direct Disciple
of Paramahansa Yogananda

www.csa-davis.org

Free *Truth Journal* magazine, booklets,
video and audio talks. Articles in eight
languages. Meditation retreat schedules.
Order books, DVDs, CDs online.

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

Center for Spiritual Awareness
PO Box 7 Lakemont, Georgia
30552-0001



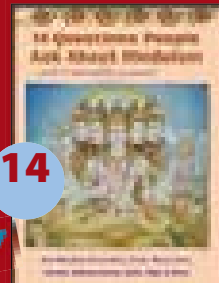
For **FREE** literature: info@csa-davis.org

* In India many of Mr. Davis' books are published by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. At bookstores in several cities. www.mlbd.com

Embarrassing questions *no more!*



10



14

Ten Questions People Ask About Hinduism and Ten Terrific Answers has just expanded to become: **14 Questions People Ask....** Here are simple, clear, golden answers to the common questions: why many Gods? do Hindus worship cows? why do some Gods have animal features? etc. Especially helpful for children in a non-Hindu setting. www.minimela.com/booklets
books@hindu.org • 877-255-1510

American Meditation Institute's Yoga of Medicine Program Presents

7th Annual Conference for Physicians • RNs • NPs • PAs • Psychologists

Comprehensive Training in Yoga Science as Holistic Mind/Body Medicine

A Unique Curriculum Developed for
Clinical and Personal Application and Relieving Physician Burnout

NOVEMBER 3-7, 2015

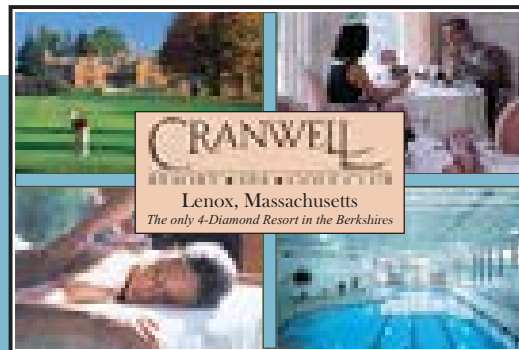
The Heart and Science of Yoga™

How to Relieve Physician Burnout and Enhance Patient Health

Meditation • Mantra Science • Diaphragmatic Breathing • Yoga Psychology • Chakras • Easy-Gentle Yoga • Nutrition
Mind Function Optimization • Lymph System Detox • Ayurveda • Epigenomics • Functional Medicine • Yoga Nidra

30 CMEs

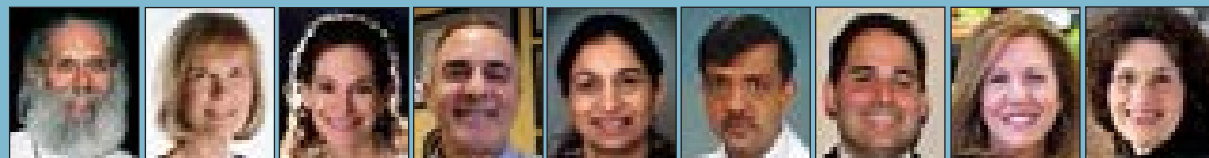
FREE!
5 1/2 Hour
Online Video Course
and Hard Cover Book



"This important teaching
faithfully interprets the
wisdom of the ancient
Yoga masters and is
a great service to humanity."

SIVACHARYA SIVAGURU KUMARASWAMI DIXITAR
SRI RAJAGANAPATHI TEMPLE, SWEDESBO NJ

30 CMEs



Leonard Perlmutter (Ram Lev) • Susan Lord MD • Beth Netter MD • Mark Pettus MD • Rosy Mann BAMS • Prashant Kaushik MD • Tony Santilli MD • Kathie Swift MS RDN • Jenness Cortez Perlmutter

REGISTER ONLINE: americanmeditation.org/cme • Tel. (518) 674-8714

Core Curriculum Endorsed by: Mehmet Oz MD, Dean Ornish MD, Larry Dossey MD and Bernie Siegel MD

Masterpiece Quality Hindu Sculpture

Offering fine handmade
bronze, wood, marble & stone murtis
for homes & temples



LOTUS SCULPTURE
FINE HINDU & BUDDHIST STATUES
info@lotussculpture.com
1 (760) 994-4455
www.lotussculpture.com

Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press

VEDIC YOGA

The Path of the Rishi

David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)



Vedic Yoga: The Path of the Rishi is one of the first and most detailed books published in the West on the ancient Vedic origins of Yoga, including all aspects of its philosophy and practice. The book reveals secrets of the Vedic Yoga from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, Ganapati Muni, Brahmarshi Daivarat, and Swami Veda Bharati as well as Vamadeva's own insights. It challenges popular ideas of the meaning of Yoga and brings Yoga back to the vision of the ancient Himalayan Rishis.

ISBN: 978-0-9406-7625-1
\$18.95 • 360 Pages

Lotus Press, Inc., a majority woman-owned, family business,
P O Box 325, Twin Lakes, WI 53181 USA • Office Phone: 262 889 8561
Office Fax: 262 889 2461 • Toll Free Order Line: 800 824 6396
Email: lotuspress@lotuspress.com • Website: www.LotusPress.com
Pandit Vamadeva Shastri • www.vedanet.com

Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press

ETERNAL FRIEND
SHRI SWAMI SAMA
MAHARAJ OF AKKALHI



MUKUND M. HANUMANTE, PhD

Find the Divine Within

Eternal Friend gives you the keys to the Divine, which ever resides within you—is always there for you, ready to guide you and help you attain that peace and contentment which is your true nature.

"**Eternal Friend** is the doorway to auspiciousness and infinite peace."—Shri Sathya Sai Baba

"**Eternal Friend** helps people manifest their deepest soul potentials."—Dr. David Frawley

By M. Hanumante, PhD • 142 p • hardcover • color • \$35 • mukund@juno.com
<http://akkalkotswamisamarth-usa.org>



International Yoga Day

As declared by 170 Member States of the United Nations who recognized that yoga provides a holistic approach to health and well-being

For local activities and global connection

visit

www.yoga21.org



Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, USA

hssus.org

facebook.com/hssus

तपः स्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः ॥१॥

tapah svādhyāy-eśvarapraṇidhānāni kriyā-yogaḥ ||1||

Practicing with zeal and vigilance, self-study, without attachment to the outcome, and surrendering to the ultimate truth are the acts of Yoga. ||1||

- Sadhana-Pada, Patanjali Yoga Sutras

TRIHEALTH

Ayurveda

The science of vital power from the balance of nature

The most effective herbal remedies available in the US.

- Sourced from a family lineage in the ancient tradition.
- Constantly evolving in application to meet the health needs of the day.
- Through the optimal combination of potent herbs the efficacy has been ensured.



"Of all nectars, Ayurveda is Supreme"

800-455-0770 www.trihealthayurveda.com

Narmahdaswara

**Shiva
Lingams**

- perfectly shaped and marked
- for your temple or home puja
- finest quality
- hand carved
- traditional
- all sizes available
- bottom photo shows item with rare, perfect crown chakra marking.

*See them on our website
or at our gallery in Hawaii.
Use coupon GodRealization
for 10% discount.*

Kauai Lotus Galleries
www.jewelofthelotus.com

10% of all receipts support the
construction of the Iraivan Temple
at Kauai's Hindu Monastery.



**SACRED STATUES & ART
FROM INDIA & TIBET**



This 5-foot tall
sandstone Shiva
and other fine,
hand-carved statues
are available
in the USA, now,
ready to be shipped
anywhere.

713-668-2948
concept@wt.net
www.hindugods.net

*We specialize in
orders from
monasteries & temples*



We offer group tours to visit temples in INDIA

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads are us\$52 for 20 words, \$1 for each additional word. "Box ads" are \$75 and \$140 • 10% to 35% discount for repeat ads • 888-464-1008, cell: 808-634-5407 fax: 808-822-3152 • ads@hindu.org www.hinduismtoday.com (click "advertise")

Appeal

Help Hinduism Today flourish by building up the Hinduism Today Production Fund which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. The fund was established to empower current and future editors in both print and digital realms. Donate at www.HHEonline.org/donate_pf Subscribe to our Production Fund newsletter at gurudeva.org/email-news • kaivalya@hindu.org

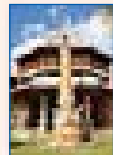
Ayurveda/Health

Low-cost blood test. Eg., PSA, \$10, HIV screen, \$10 • www.BloodTestInChicago.com or Call Dr. Siva, tel: 1-866-505-1556 (USA).

Bali — Ashram

Ashram in Ubud, Bali

Spiritual seekers welcome. Meditation, satsang, kirtan. Comfy rooms, veg. meals. ubud.anandashram.asia +62-817-743-769

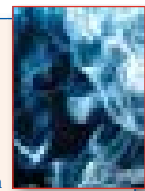


Devotional Supplies

Top Quality Rudraksha beads and malas Jai Hanum an Ltd. • gdg4044@yahoo.com 641-472-2448 • www.rudraksha.com

Holy Smokes! Incense

Made entirely of natural essential oils, resins, herbs, spices & plant extracts. Suppliers to Kauai's Hindu Monastery • alahan@me.com



Free Products and Services

Shri Shivabalayogi Maharaj Meditation Blessings. Peace, Bliss and Self-Realization Guaranteed through Meditation. Receive Shivabalayogi's photo, holy ash and meditation instructions. Free. Sanjay Singh, 8300 Halston St. # 7, Louisville, KY 40222 USA. thesksmail@yahoo.com www.meditate-shivabala.org

Indian Cuisine Videos and Recipes.

Let Manjula teach you authentic, delicious Indian vegetarian and vegan cooking. Over 270 free videos and recipes at: www.manjulaskitchen.com

Free Panchangs—245 cities

PDF and iCalendar formats. May be imported into iCal, BusyCal or Google calendars. May 5, 2015 to April 22, 2016. Download: www.minimela.org/panchang



Professional Products/Services

Fine Quality Neem Products

Living neem trees, fresh branches, twigs or leaves. Complete line of neem products including cold-pressed oil, soaps, cream, shampoo, salve and certified-organic extract and capsules, all at fresh-from-the-farm prices • 813-661-8873 www.neemtreefarms.com 601 Southwood Cove Brandon, FL 33511 USA



Indoor/outdoor painting - No. California Residential, commercial, interior & exterior. Color consulting. Licensed, bonded & insured. Vama's Painting Co., 925-279-1051.

Freight Forwarder

Ship >45 kg or more Anywhere from US Fx: 1-800-396-6659 Sales2@air7seas.us www.air7seas.com



Publications

Sri Aurobindo books. Ayurveda. Reiki. Vedic astrology. Alternative health. Plus over 14,000 health & wellness products. Wholesale-retail-mail order. Free catalogs. Lotus Press, HT Box 1008, Silver Lake, WI 1008 USA • www.lotuspress.com

Divine Life Society Publications

Choose from over 100 free e-books and 300+ printed books on Hindu philosophy, yoga, meditation and more by Swami Sivananda and his disciples.



www.dlsebooks.org • www.dlsbooks.org

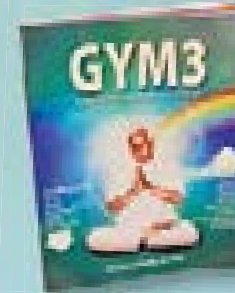
Dreaming Peace: Your Thoughts Can Change the World, and other inspirational writings by Nori Muster • Amazon.com, search "Nori Muster."

Sri Chinmoy Books

Wisdom of ancient India made clear and simple. Free catalog: 1-734-994-7114 www.Heart-Light.com www.SriChinmoy.org



Babaji's Kriya Yoga & Publications. See our e-commerce at www.babajiskriyayoga.net • Books, correspondence course, seminars. In India: india@babajiskriyayoga.net Outside of India: tel. 888-252-9642 or 450-297-0258; info@babajiskriyayoga.net



Recover & maintain your health by yourself, at home

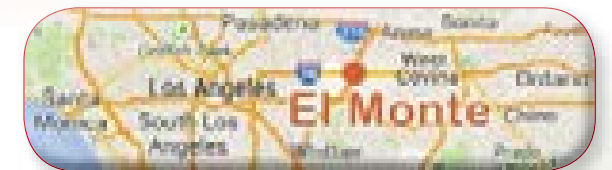
During a lifetime of medical practice, Dr. Gowda MD observed that the ailments that burden people can almost always be improved or remedied easily by applying simple, basic principles and practices. He now

with simple, easy practices that have proved effective for thousands of years

shares his knowledge and experiences in highly illustrated GYM3. The title is an anagram referring to the three traditional practices: exercise, yoga and meditation.

106 pages • \$13.30, including shipping less for quantities • contact us: 2025 Priest Road, Nashville, TN 37215 USA 615-665-1565 • www.EntDrGowdaGYM3.com

So. California
Traditional Yoga studio



Begin practicing yoga to build a healthier and a happier you! Traditional, authentic Yoga is the science of life well lived. It has worked unfailingly for millennia. At REVELATIONS YOGA, you begin wherever you find yourself, work at your own pace under the guidance of dedicated, certified and caring teachers. Soon, you will rejoice at the progress made. Our staff is also trained in hypnotherapy and neuro-linguistic programming to alleviate blockages and develop self-confidence.

REVELATIONS YOGA, VEDANTA BOOKS & MORE
3580 SANTA ANITA AVE #C • EL MONTE, CA 91731
626-442-YOGA • yogam.vedanta@gmail.com
<https://revelationsyoga.com>

Kauai's Hindu Monastery

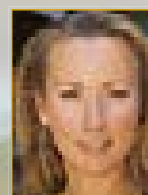
Rudraksha Heaven

Most of our rudraksha seeds and rudraksha items are grown in the monastery's rudraksha forest, prepared by devotees and blessed by our monks. We also have beads, malas and jewelry from India, including a spectacular collector's set of single-to 13-faced beads. See them all at minimela.com.

books@hindu.org • 877-255-1510



HAWAII HEAVEN



The one and only vegan, raw-foods restaurant/café on Kauai, Rainbow Living Foods. Awarded 4½ stars on **Yelp, Tripadvisor** and **Happy Cow**. Offered for sale at \$175,000.

Yelena Okhman Realtor®(S) • Remax Kauai
808-635-6552 • yelenastars@gmail.com

VASTUVED INTERNATIONAL



Building design in the ancient tradition of Vastu Shastra Residential and Commercial Properties Comprehensive Vastu Design Theory and Application for Everyday Life

<http://www.vastu-design.com/vastu-architecture-book.php>
www.vastu-design.com 1-641-472-2157

AMMA SRI KARUNAMAYI 2015 WORLD TOUR



MEDITATION RETREATS

Practice the noble art of silent meditation to awaken your inner wisdom & compassion.

SACRED FIRE CEREMONIES

Experience the healing power of vedic homas to purify ourselves & mother earth, as well as bring peace to all of humanity.

INDIVIDUAL BLESSINGS

Receive guidance, blessings & be showered in the nectarean love of Divine Mother.

SARASWATI DIKSHA

Students, age 4 -24, can receive the rare gift of the Saraswati mantra to increase intellect, memory, academic knowledge & pure wisdom.

 www.karunamayl.org 

March

27-29: Phoenix

April

03-05: Los Angeles
07-08: Ojai/Ventura
10-12: San Francisco
17-19: Seattle
20: San Antonio

May

01-03: Austin
08-10: Dallas
15-17: Houston
22-24: Atlanta

June

06-10: Atlanta
15-21: Cleveland
26-28: Toronto
30-01: Woodstock

July

10-12: New York
16-18: New Jersey
21-23: Philadelphia
24-26: Washington DC

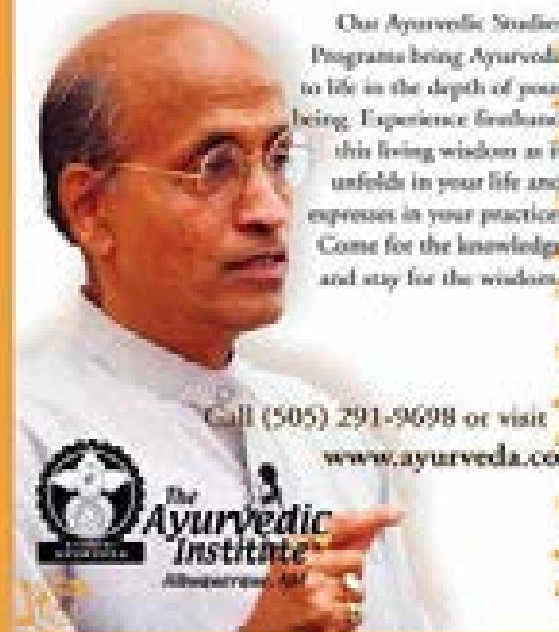
LALITA SAHASRANAMA MAHA YAJNA **GURU PURNIMA RETREAT/CELEBRATION**

May 29 - June 7: Atlanta

July 31 - Aug 2: New York / New Jersey

All programs are free, except meditation retreats which require advanced registration.

Experience a Living Tradition



Call (505) 291-9698 or visit
www.ayurveda.com



The Ayurvedic Institute
Albuquerque, NM

Ayurveda: Discover & Experience Official Trademark of the Institute

Jyotish Vachaspathi R. G. Krishnan

Details of the services rendered by Jyotish Vachaspathi R. G. Krishnan and articles published by him in regard to Stock Market and other astrological matters may be seen at:

<http://rgkrishnan.com>

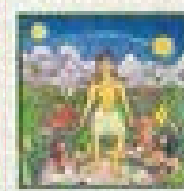
He may be contacted at:

jyotish@juno.com

tel.: 972-881-3751 • cellular: 469-879-5107



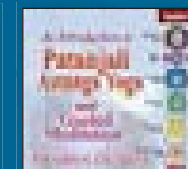
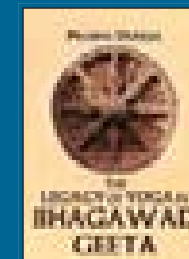
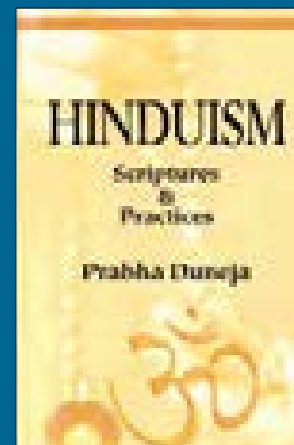
Lemurian Scrolls



Gain a great understanding about where humankind is headed at this time, why we came to this planet, why we have gone through all that we have gone through, where it will all lead and what is the purpose of it all. **Lemurian Scrolls** consists of akashic messages read clair-

voyantly by the founder of Hinduism Today magazine, **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** in 1973.

Illustrated, color • www.minimela.com/lemurian



Resources for enhancing your life

"All the guidelines for positive, joyful living were given to us long ago and preserved for you to enjoy and take full advantage of today. Inspire and enlighten yourself. Uplift your life."—**Prabha Duneja**

Visit our website and share in the wealth of spiritual resources that Prabha Duneja has gathered and elucidated over a lifetime. She lectures widely and her writings are used in college and university classrooms. She is recognized for the depth of her personal devotion and her ability to shed light into Hinduism's spirit, philosophy and mysteries of mind and body, mantra, yoga and meditation. Many testify that her insights and articulations have transformed their lives.

Geeta Society • www.holygeeta.org • 925-484-5411 • duneja@aol.com

American Institute of Vedic Studies

Expand your horizons in Vedic and Hindu Dharma. Practical teachings of Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley). Authentic Vedic knowledge in a clear and modern idiom. Courses, publications, programs and retreats—with students from all over the world.

Recent books:

- *Vedic Yoga: The Path of the Rishi*
- *Soma in Yoga and Ayurveda*
- *Mantra Yoga and Primal Sound*
- *Inner Tantric Yoga*
- *Hinduism, the Eternal Tradition (Sanatana Dharma)*

Courses from the Institute:

- Ayurvedic Healing Course in Ayurvedic Medicine
- Advanced Yoga & Ayurveda Course
- Vedic Astrology and Ayurveda Course

American Institute of Vedic Studies
PO Box 8357, Santa Fe, NM 87504-8357 USA
tel: 505-983-9385 • www.vedanet.com

(Note our on-line articles, books and Vedic resource guide)



Yogini Shambhavi

Yogini Shambhavi is a mystic yogini, spiritual guide and educator rooted in the ancient traditions of Bhakti Yoga, Shakti Sadhana, Vedic Astrology, Mantra Yoga and Ayurveda.

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.

- Introducing a Special Two Year Yoga Shakti Training with Yogini Shambhavi
- Yoga Shakti Retreat Kauai (Hawaii), December 28, 2015 - January 4, 2016, Shiva Dakshinamurti & Sundari Devi
- Shiva Ganga Yoga Shakti Retreat, India, on the banks of Ma Ganga above Rishikesh. March 5-12, 2016
- Vedic astrology consultations with Yogini Shambhavi Devi

shambhavi.yogini@gmail.com • www.vedanet.com



Hold the key to the Truth in the palm of your hand

Turn your favorite digital device into your choice spiritual tool, with an 8GB USB drive that contains the entire book, *The Guru Chronicles*—a vast treasure of spiritual knowledge and wisdom—in PDF format and as a beautifully narrated audio book.

Authored by the swamis of Kauai's Hindu Monastery, *The Guru Chronicles* is the awesome story of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva), his guru Siva Yogaswami, and the five preceding masters who all held truth in the palm

and illumination— and his eventual return to America to teach the path of enlightenment. Now *The Guru Chronicles* is available as an audio book on a removable USB drive.

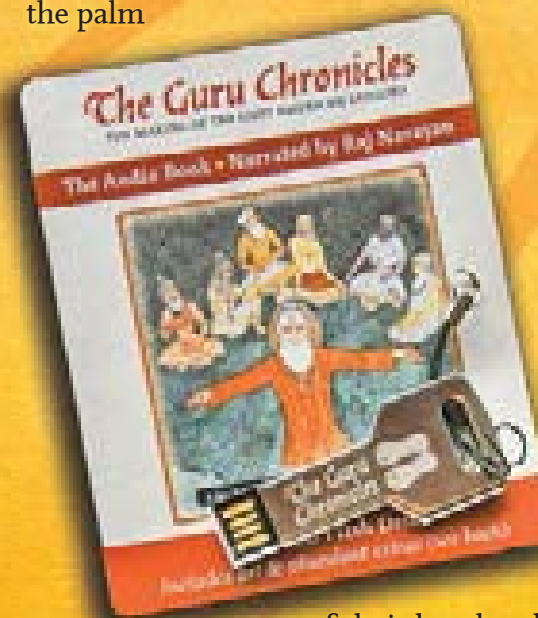
THE USB DRIVE INCLUDES:

- Complete audio book (23 hours of dramatic reading by Raj Narayan)
- Complete PDF and e-book editions of the 814-page volume including S. Rajam's exquisite art
- 41 high-resolution art files
- Vintage Gurudeva photos and audio/video clips
- USB is Mac and PC compatible

ALL FOR \$17.95 • ORDER NOW at: <http://www.minimela.com/tgc>



ENJOY AN AUDIO EXCERPT OF THIS EPIC ADVENTURE:
<http://himalayanacademy.com/tgc>



of their hand and inspired one and all to "Know thy Self." The sweeping 2,200-year story of this remarkable lineage is told through the prism of Gurudeva's journey of truth



Himalayan Academy Publications
himalayanacademy.com

VEDIC YAGYA CENTER

PO Box 500271 • Austin, TX 78750 • 512-633-7999 • Fax: 512-788-5694
www.vedicyagyacenter.com • cs@vydic.org • vyc@vydicfoundation.org

Participate in our traditional Vedic yagyas performed by expert Vedic pandits.

Special upcoming events, 2015:

- Shani Jayanthi, May 17, and Shani Pradosham Yagyas, May 30
- Guru Purnima Yagyas, June 30
- Special & Exclusive Yagyas for Sravana Vara Lakshmi Vratam, August 27, 28 & 29, 2015
- Special Ganesh Yagyas for Ganesh Navarathri from September 8 to 16

We also offer Yagyas for:

- Daily Rudrabhishekam & Chandi Parayanam to enhance daily life
- Daily Welfare Yagyas for individual, family, group or business
- Customized Yagyas to fit your needs as per natal chart & astrology
- Vastu rectification, residential, commercial land and other properties

Learn more:

- Contact us for pricing for the above services
- We can perform Yagyas for you anywhere in the world
- View our Yagyas & events: www.youtube.com/user/samavedula/videos
- Visit our website for more details



Pandit Samavedula
888-835-7788 • fax: 512-788-5694
cs@vydic.org • vyc@vydicfoundation.org
www.vedicyagyacenter.com

DIGITAL DHARMA



Uncommon collections: A rarely seen 1863 painting depicting Siva and Parvati with their children Ganesha and Kartikeya

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Solution To Long-term Data Storage: DNA

WITH TODAY'S SEEMINGLY LIMITLESS growth of data, a question has arisen: "How can we safely store our amassing amounts of information?" Currently, the average hard drive will fail after nine years. Many leading information companies have resorted to tape storage for their most important information, as tapes have a lifetime of about 46 years.

Researchers at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich are attempting to produce data storage that will last much longer. Their answer is the most stable and compact data storage known to exist: DNA. Its potential to cache information is something scientists have been considering for quite sometime. One obvious benefit is its small size. In 2012 for example, a bioengineer and geneticist at Harvard's Wyss Institute temporarily stored 55 petabits of data—around 700 terabytes—in a single gram of DNA. It's also incredibly enduring. While the scientists in Zurich are trying for storage which will last at least one million years, some of the oldest DNA ever

Writing DNA: This remarkably sturdy, organic molecule can remain readable for thousands or millions of years. Its future use for digital storage might not be far off

MUSEUMS

Online Archiving

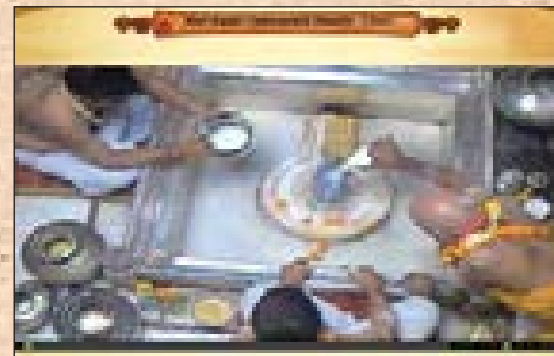
IN JANUARY, 2015, THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION released a digital collection of more than 44,000 images of precious artifacts and artwork from two of their museums of Asian art, the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

According to a Smithsonian press release, the digital collection, which took several years to complete, includes around 35,000 works that have never been seen before, having been kept in museum storage for decades. The release required a massive effort to photograph and create a digital record for each object. It took almost 6,000 staff hours in the past year alone and resulted in more than ten

terabytes of data.

Julian Raby, the Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art, stated, "We're poised at a digital tipping point, and the nature of what it means to be a museum is changing. We are striving to promote the love and study of Asian art, and the best way we can do so is to free our unmatched resources to inspire appreciation, academic study and artistic creation." All of the images are provided without copyright restrictions for non-commercial use. The collection can be viewed and downloaded freely on their website. Just visit open.asia.si.edu.

www.hinduismtoday.com



From Varanasi: Priests perform worship during a 3am abhishekam, held following the Ardra nakshatra—an auspicious time to worship Lord Siva

WORSHIP

Streaming Darshan

DEVOTEES CAN VIEW A LIVE FEED OF THE worship at the famed Sivalingam of Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, India. The camera is fixed looking down at the Sivalingam—which is usually barely discernible in its silver enclosure—as devotees move through at the rate of several a minute. They are allowed to touch the Lingam and offer their own worship most of the day. There are also periods of formal worship by priests. These times are noted under "Programmes" on the drop-down menu on the home page. Visit: bit.ly/vishwanathlive

