

HINDUISM TODAY

October/November/December, 2007 US\$5.95

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



Lord Murugan's Six-Temple Pilgrimage



COVER: The six-faced Shanmugam, sitting astride His celestial peacock, is the chosen God of many Hindus of South Indian origin; the flute-playing Lord Ganesha is a heavenly patron of Hinduism's rich musical art, the subject of our feature story

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SARVAJIT, THE ALL-CONQUERING YEAR

Bodhinatha Veylanswami
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OPEN THE DOORS

Enter the Realm of Lord Murugan and come with us on the Arupadaiveedu, the most sacred pilgrimage for His devotees

The God of yoga and primeval sannyasin, Lord Murugan, son of Siva-Shakti, passes through these massive doors at Tiruchendur temple once every year during the temple's annual festival, or Brahmotsavam. Also called Skanda and Karttikeya, revered throughout India and specially beloved of Tamils, of Him the *Vedas* say, "To such a one who has his stains wiped away, the venerable Sanatkumara shows the further shore of darkness. Him they call Skanda." *Pilgrimage to page 38*

Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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A Sri Lankan priest's spiritual initiative: Siva Sri Arumugam Paskarakurukkal, founder and priest of Europe's biggest temple, leads the chariot parade of Goddess Sri Kamadchi Ampal

DIASPORA

GERMANY

Festival Marks Success Story In Hamm

TEN THOUSAND DEVOTEES worshipped the Goddess Kamakshi in Germany during the annual two-week June chariot festival of the Sri Kamadchi Ampal held in Hamm, June 1-12. The temple is the largest in continental Europe and a remarkable success story of Hinduism's integration into a land far from India and Sri Lanka. See www.kamadchi-ampal.de

Arumugam Paskaran (pictured), who fled the war in Sri Lanka in 1989, started the temple in a residential basement cellar. As it grew in popularity and its annual processions in the streets of Hamm became more and more grand, neighbors mounted insurmountable objections. Hamm authorities helped the Tamils relocate their temple in a more remote residential area with plenty of space. Out of this struggle, with a lot of cooperation from both sides, a full South Indian style temple was opened in 2002—the Goddess helping Germany move toward a much needed peaceful religious pluralism.

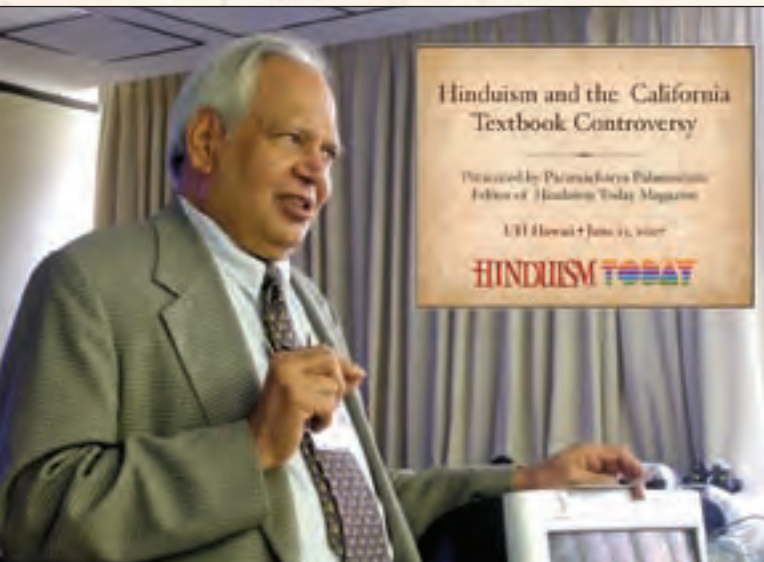
U S A

Academics Debate Texts

SCHOLARS ASSEMBLED IN Honolulu for the Association for Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast Conference from June 15 to 17, 2007. Their goal was to examine changes in how Asian cultures are viewed, including in the area of religion.

Toward this end, Dr. Shiva Bajpai, director of the Center

for Asian Studies, California State University, Northridge, assembled a panel discussion on the California textbook issue. At his invitation, Paramacharya Palaniswami, editor-in-chief of HINDUISM TODAY, presented a well-received overview of the controversy in which Hindus had challenged the negative portrayal of Hinduism in the state's proposed sixth-grade history books and requested—with some success—that Hinduism be treated with the same respect as other religions.



Equal respect: Dr. Shiva Bajpai introduces the textbook issue



Exploitation: Uganda's Africans protest Mabira forest destruction

U G A N D A

Sugar Plans Gall Africans

I N 1972 IDI AMIN ORDERED Uganda's 70,000 Indians to leave the country with one suitcase and \$100.00. Blacks had accused them of racial discrimination, cruel mistreatment and economic exploitation.

Today the 18,000 prosperous and newly re-established Indians who returned after the

new Musevani government offered them financial reparations and a forgive-forget deal are working hard to contribute to the country by getting directly involved in politics instead of focusing only on economics.

But the old accusation of exploitation is arising once again. On April 12, Africans stoned an Indian man to death in a protest of an Indian firm's government-approved plan to cut down 7,000 acres of the precious Mabira Forest reserve in order to grow sugar cane.

C A N A D A

Grotesque Ganeshas Protested

I N NOVEMBER 2006, EDMONTON's Art & Design in Public Places Program picked Ryan McCourt's four images of Lord Ganesha for its annual award. The exhibit, titled "Will and Representation," comprises four sculptures: The Reawakening of Ganesha, Destroyer of Obstacles, Guardian of the Golden Gate, and Om Sri Ganja. The sculptures are on public display at the Shaw Conference Centre, 97 Street and Jasper Avenue until November of this year.

One might conclude from the titles that the artist, though a self-declared atheist, had good intentions. But in fact, his depictions of the Hindu God are profane, grotesque and have understandably made Hindus unhappy, though organizers said some Hindus expressed a positive view. Roop Charkravorty, for one, wrote to the Shaw Centre: "It was a pleasant surprise to find Edmonton and Edmontonians celebrating the Indian culture and one of its most beloved Deities with such clarity and dignity." In contrast, Vaidyisa Bala shared: "This has been done without any



Left: Ganesha depicted as hunter, with chocolate cake and Mushika chained to his leg. **Right:** head cut off with exposed female body parts as side symbols

knowledge or consultation with the many Hindu temple priests in town. It is deplorable that an ancient civilization's main icon of worship today is depicted publicly in such a distasteful and disrespectful manner." He

recommends that the City of Edmonton have them removed. Aran Veylan notes: "One could accept the choice of 'industrial media' and an abstract style. But this exhibit is paid by our tax dollars, and some of the elements, like the exposed female breast and genitalia, and the chain around Mushika's neck to Ganesha's leg certainly

do not fulfill our Mayor's stated objective to make Edmonton a capitol that honors and respects a diversity of cultures. It's about education and it's not over yet. Hindus here are organizing to deal with this issue."



E D U C A T I O N

St. Olaf Picks a Hindu

I N JUNE, ST. OLAF'S COLLEGE in Northfield, Minnesota, a Lutheran Church private institution, appointed Anantanand Rambachan as head of its religion department. He has taught religion and philosophy at St. Olaf since 1985. Rambachand, a practicing Hindu, was born in the Caribbean. He spent three years as a monk in the Ramakrishna Order. He is on record as saying, "Certain

forms of Christian proselytization have given rise to tension and even violence between some religious communities," referring to discussions held in Rome with the World Council of Churches on the issue of conversion.

Bloggers from the Christian Right are chagrined that a Hindu could even teach religion in a Christian college, let alone be head of the religion department. And Washington DC's Council for Christian Colleges and Universities said that St. Olaf would not qualify for membership.

John Brooks, director of the news service for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, confirmed that the appointment was made by the college. "That's a decision that they made. We're not here in the role of oversight. That's about all we can say about it." College officials are citing former professor, Harold Ditmanson, who endorsed the hiring of Rambachan earlier. He argued, "St. Olaf is a church college in the Lutheran tradition, and Lutherans believe that studying religion at a college is not the work of the Church but rather the work of a liberal arts education in the religious things of the world."

S E L F - H E L P

Whatever Happened to Maharaji?

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NO clue about Maharaji of the late sixties and seventies—first a little history. In 1960, Shri Han Ji Maharaj formed the Divine Light Mission (DLM) in Delhi. An initiate in the Sikh-Hindu Rhadasoami Sant Mat tradition, he taught age-old yoga kriya techniques of listening to inner sound, focusing on inner light and the supremacy of the Satguru. He was succeeded by his eight-year-old son, Prem Rawat, popularly known as "Guru Maharaji." At a 1971 Delhi event, which the then 13-year-old called the "Peace Bomb," Maharaji declared to an audience of one million that he was greater than Rama or Krishna.

A turbulent two decades followed with global expansion, accumulation of great wealth, an eye-raising opulent lifestyle and a schism between Prem and the Indian DLM mission. His following decreased from millions to thousands. Prem married his American secretary

and formed his own organizations, Elan Vital and the Prem Rawat Foundation.

Articulate and charismatic, Prem Rawat has transformed himself from young-avatar-guru into a suave California-based inspirational speaker. His finances and mode of operation remain controversial. His presentations carry no mention of its Hindu roots and no religious overtones other than occasional references to the "Divine within." But despite its secular wrapper, his message is essentially Vedanta, that God is within us, and the way to peace is through sadhana and the raja yoga practices inherited from our Hindu rishis of old.



Still teaching: Prem Rawat, teaching a secularized Vedanta-based pathway to peace

Zed Gives Historic First-Ever Hindu Prayer in the US Senate

HISTORY WAS CREATED on June 12, 2007, when Rajan Zed, a Hindu chaplain from Reno, Nevada, opened the daily session of the United States Senate with the Gayatri Mantra from *Rig Veda*. The prayers were in English, as required by the Senate. This was the first Hindu prayer in the Senate since its formation in 1789. Usually the Senate Chaplain delivers the opening prayer, but sometimes guest chaplains are invited. The only other non-Christian, non-Jew to offer a prayer was Muslim Wallace Mohammed, in 1992.

As Zed was being introduced by Senator Robert P. Casey of Pennsylvania, three Christians shouted protests from the visitors' gallery and were summarily arrested and led off in handcuffs. After a nervous moment, Zed, wearing a saffron colored kurta, rudraksha mala and sandalwood tilak, bravely collected himself and gave his prayer, which included references from the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. He urged the senators to strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world by devotion to careful, wise, selfless work, guided by compassion. He concluded with "Peace, Peace, Peace be unto all."

The scheduled prayer and its disruption by Christians was hot Internet news. In the days before the 12th, Christian groups were hard at work to thwart the prayer. They called Hindus polytheists who do not believe in a One God and criticized the Senate for not uphold America's "One Nation under God" motto by allowing for a "non-monotheistic prayer." The protesters, who all belong to the Christian right-wing anti-abortion group Operation Save America, had traveled to Washington from North Carolina to protest a hate crimes bill. Learning of the Hindu prayer, they stayed on to disrupt it. The first protester shouted: "Lord Jesus, forgive us, Father, for allowing a prayer of the wicked, which is an abomination in your sight. We shall have no other gods before You."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, the Democrat from Nevada state who invited Zed to the Senate, spoke shortly after the prayer. He defended his choice and linked it to the war debate. "If people have any misunderstanding about Indians and Hindus," Reid said, "all they have to do is think of Gandhi," a man "who gave his life for peace." "I think it



Protesters arrested: Rajan Zed pauses nervously while Senator Robert P. Casey asks the Sergeant at Arms to remove protestors

speaks well of our country that someone representing the faith of about a billion people comes here and can speak in communication with our heavenly Father regarding peace," said Reid, a Mormon.

Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, lamented that the protest "shows the intolerance of many religious right activists. They say they want more religion in the public square, but it's clear they mean only their religion."

Hindus were at once jubilant and dismayed by the protest. Ishani Chowdhury, Hindu American Foundation's Executive Director, wrote, "Our community is heartened and grateful by the brave voices of Senator Harry Reid and other Senators who made this historic moment possible in the halls of Congress today. We reach out to everyone to join us in continuing to build

a society based on the principles of tolerance, pluralism and understanding."

The American Jewish Committee issued a statement saying they were "deeply troubled by the verbal assault on Zed."

Harish Nevatia, an engineer in Mumbai, commented on the "suite 101" blog, "When this event was reported in the Indian media, it evoked surprise and even shock. Religious prayers are not allowed in the Indian Parliament or government events, because of the secular nature of the government." He noted that the younger generation is perplexed by the American interest in Hinduism at a time when they themselves are abandoning Hindu culture in favor of the West's.

The town of Fazilka in Punjab, a place visited by Zed in the past, held a celebration, complete with fireworks to mark the event.

AMARNATH'S ICE LINGAM MELTED away early this year, disappointing tens of thousands of pilgrims. Reasons cited include huge early gatherings of pilgrims who hugged the Lingam, lit incense and lamps, helicopter traffic and global warming.

THE R-1 RELIGIOUS WORKER VISA, relied upon by dozens of Hindu organizations in the US, is up for revision by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Under this visa, religious organizations are able to bring in ministers, priests, teachers and other religious workers to serve

their congregations. Hindus have brought in hundreds of temple priests and artisans for temple construction under the R-1. The proposed revisions, intended to prevent fraud, make the visa process much more complex. During the 60-day comment period which ended June 25, over 65 religious organizations and their lawyers blasted the revisions as excessive, expensive and uncalled for. Hindus in particular complained that the rules were written with Christians and Jews in mind and do not encompass traditional Hindu religious occupations.



HINDU RENAISSANCE TEAM

HINDUISM TODAY was founded January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. 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 a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, reports on events and encouraging others.

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IN MY OPINION

Adventures in Yoga Philosophy

The popularity of yoga in the West comes with a trend of completely obscuring its Hindu roots

BY LYND A M C C L A N A H A N

LIKE MANY OF MY GENERATION, I took up hatha yoga in the 1970s. All I knew about it was that yoga was from India and that it must be a more spiritual form of exercise. Frankly, to my young self, it mostly meant deep breathing, "down dog" and the chance to enhance muscle tone in a noncompetitive atmosphere. One would not expect my attitude to cause in me anything other than a trim figure, but as they say, "Even a blind hog

will find an acorn every once in a while." I found such an acorn when my quest for the philosophy of yoga began. Through study, I learned that hatha yoga steadies the body, regulates the life force and calms the mind. I also learned that its ultimate goal is union with God-consciousness. As time went on, I became convinced that hatha yoga is inseparable from the spiritual tradition in which it arose, Hinduism. Eventually, my studies led to teaching yoga philosophy to future hatha yoga instructors as part of their training and certification. Sharing with them my treasured discoveries about yoga was the fulfillment of a dream and a task filled with unexpected challenges and surprises.

Students come to hatha yoga with the intuition that it contains a subtle "something" which the local gym lacks. There is only a vague notion that this "something" is directly connected to Hinduism. My first difficulty was that the strength of this Hindu connection might be new or even shocking to students. Words like *Brahman* and *God-consciousness* are not normally used in yoga advertising. Even if students accepted these words, how would the studio owner react? After all, I had been hired to teach, not to diminish the market as upset clients walked out the door!

I had personal experience of negative reactions to Hinduism in the Methodist seminary I had attended. How well I remember the day when a lady fled the lecture hall of a Hinduism class exclaiming, "There is no



truth in this religion!" On the one hand, separating yoga from Hinduism seemed culturally insensitive at best and plain wrong at worst. Yet how could I communicate this connection without deeply distressing and alienating people?

I gave up trying to solve this puzzle and gained a measure of inner peace when I realized that I was assigned to teach yoga philosophy, not to monitor reactions. Once I understood this, the mind became calm

and everything fell into place. The idea that Western yoga students are innately antagonistic to Hindu ideas has not been my experience. Among my students are Indian and Indian-American Hindus, Jewish believers, secular humanists, Christians, artists and people with no spiritual affiliation at all. Many students show appreciation for the historical perspective I offer and speak of attaining a more mature understanding. One student shared that she was inspired to seek out a spiritual community for the first time. Far from rejecting yoga philosophy, most students behave like thirsty sponges.

We are at an important juncture in the history of Western yoga. Will hatha yoga in the West become identified with the culture that created it? Or will it make a clean break and call itself something else?

I teach that all yoga, including hatha, is an Indian spiritual technology saturated with Hindu ideas. What students do with this information is up to them. Only Brahman knows how it will all shake out. In the meantime, I hope yoga studios continue to insist on a philosophical component to their teacher trainings. Students should be exposed to the way yoga views itself from the inside out: as a spiritual discipline designed to assist in the evolution of both individual souls and the entire planet.

LYNDA MCCLANAHAN is an artist, musician, *New Thought* minister and yoga philosophy instructor in Ohio, USA.

BRIEFLY...

THE GOVERNMENT OF ANDRA

Pradesh, to prevent the possibility of religious conversions at the village level, has decided to revive pujas and rituals in all old temples. As a first step, the department will extend monthly financial support to 4,000 temples out of 32,000 in the State. It will give US\$24.40 for pujas and \$36.58 as honorariums to priests.

NEARLY 200,000 BANGLADESH

Hindu families, according

to Abul Barkat, Professor of Economics at Dhaka University, have lost 40,667 acres of land, including their houses, in the six years since the Vested Property Act was annulled in 2001.

THE SWAMINARAYAN FELLOWSHIP

continues with its dynamic march across North America, this time opening yet another large and spectacularly beautiful Hindu temple in Toronto in July, 2007.

Keeping the Mind Clear



By resolving negative happenings promptly, we free ourselves to flow with life's rhythms and accept all things as they are

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

Recently I had the opportunity to attend a gathering of the Council of Hindu Temples of North America in Flint, Michigan. During the evening ceremony, the resident acharya at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Pennsylvania, Swami Pratyagbodhanda, received an award on behalf of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. In his acceptance speech Swami offered a charming explanation of Aum Namah Sivaya, one of Hinduism's foremost mantras for japa: "Aum is to invoke, Sivaya means 'to God Siva,' and Namah means 'to surrender.' You should all chant Aum Namah Sivaya for one minute at 8am, 12 noon, 4pm and 8pm." That was the *sadhana* he gave to everyone.

Of course, that is what "Aum Namah Sivaya" means, but usually the word *surrender* is not used for *namah*. We would generally say it means to prostrate, to praise, worship, revere, but Swami said, "to surrender." He went on to explain that all our frustrations in life, our stress and unhappiness come from not surrendering, not accepting what is as it is. If we can accept what is, if we can surrender to God Siva, then we won't have that stress, we won't have that unhappiness. All we have to do is surrender.

I immediately thought of my guru's explanation of surrendering to God Siva. In his book *Dancing with Siva*, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Gurudeva, uses the dance analogy, that all of life is the dance of Siva. Life is Siva in motion. It is His dance, and we can either flow with the dance or we can resist it. If we are able to dance with Siva and not resist or fight against it, then everything goes well for us. Said another way, dancing with Siva is the ability, the philosophical ability, to accept what is as what should be. The challenge, of course, is that there are so many problems in the world that we wish weren't there.

But when we surrender to God Siva, we can clearly see that all that is occurring is an expression of what was set in motion previously. It's all working itself out. We can't stop that which was set in motion from expressing itself; we can only direct it. We can channel it, but we can't totally eliminate it unless the whole world is doing *tapas*, but that's not very realistic. We can influence it for the better, but it will still continue to work itself out, as the past expresses itself in the present through the unfailing cosmic law of karma. A guru in our lineage, Chellappaswami, had a succinct way of stating this insight: "There is not one wrong thing."

Being able to accept the world as it is, accept our life as it is, is the practice of surrendering to or dancing with Siva. This does not mean we should be fatalistic or not try to make improvements. The attitude of fatalism is: "If everything is as it should be, why should I even try? It won't do any good anyway." In truth,



we can make strategic changes in our own life through the decisions we make. We effect our future, not only in this life but in lives yet to be lived, by what we do in the present. In the wider world, beyond our personal sphere, our ability to change things is limited and delayed by time. It is hard, for instance, to bring peace to the world by our individual actions. Even here we should not become discouraged. All our actions taken together can and do make a difference in the course of time.

One of the beauties of Gurudeva's teachings is that they are both conceptual and pragmatic, containing the tools, the things to do, to control the forces of mind and emotion and manifest spiritual ideals in our life. Negative attachment to the past is one of the main obstacles to surrendering to God Siva, because it congests the subconscious mind and thus makes a person reactive, preoccupied and prone to instinctive emotions such as impatience, frustration, anger, resentment and despair. In such states it is impossible to maintain an attitude of surrender and acceptance. Far too many things in our life are wrong to sustain the consciousness that Siva's world is perfectly all right! One tool Gurudeva gives to eliminate life's burdens is called *vasana dahan tantra*—writing down memories of the past that are emotional and negative and burning them up. Writing them down brings them out of the subconscious mind, and burning them up dispels the emotion and gives us the sense that they are gone.

Quite often, memories of the past are what bog down our spiritual life. Imagine you have a basement in a house (these days it's usually the garage), and you just keep putting things there with the promise that one day you will clean them out and organize everything. Often that day never comes. Life is so busy that you just keep storing more things away. Eventually, the basement is so full and congested that you can't find anything, and it is troublesome to even go there.

Our mind is like that. Life is so fast-paced that, day after day after day, we put experiences that are still bothering us into our subconscious without resolving them. This creates a growing burden.



But the mind has a wonderful mechanism to tell us when something is unresolved. Do you know what it is? Memory! We remember the experience on a regular basis. We may remember it several times a day. That means it is unresolved. The subconscious mind is displaying it unsolicited on our mental screen, letting us know it needs attention. If we ignore it for a time, say a week or two, the subconscious mind finally gives up reminding us. It says: "You don't seem to want to resolve this matter, so I will store it away." It dutifully puts it in the subconscious basement, or the subconscious garage.

Troubled memories: This seeker is reviewing recent arguments and embarrassing moments that are still playing back in her subconscious theater, indicating they need to be resolved in understanding, so that she may live in the consciousness that everything is perfect at every point in time.

To avoid building up a subconscious of unresolved memories, it is obvious what we need to do. We need to act on each experience while it is still alive in our mind, right? Do what's needed to resolve the matter. Sometimes just thinking about it is enough, when the problem is simply that we haven't taken the time to reflect deeply enough to fully understand it. Most such memories involve conflicts or misunderstandings with people. Through reflection, we can come to see the other person's point of view. This broadens our understanding and makes us feel better about the experience. For serious disagreements that we can't come to terms with alone, we may need to talk with the person. Sometimes, to smooth things out, we need to offer an apology. And if that's not appropriate because of the nature of the relationship, we can offer a gift. We can also write down the problem and burn it up. If we do this mental maintenance on a regular basis, we avoid filling up the subconscious with unresolved negative experiences.

Why is this important? Because Divinity is on the other side of that barrier of emotion. Our soul nature can be obstructed by a congested subconscious. When we look inward in meditation, we are trying to see our soul nature, trying to see our Divinity, our superconscious. If the subconscious mind has a lot of unresolved matters in it, all we see is the subconscious mind. That's not much fun, so we don't look within very often. We keep distracting ourselves—"Let's go out to a movie. What's on TV tonight?"—because what's inside of us isn't that enjoyable.

But if we keep the subconscious uncongested, it is transparent; and when we look within, we can see right through it and perceive our Divinity. Those who want to live in and enjoy their inner self, their spiritual nature, need to keep the subconscious mind clear, keep it from piling up with unresolved negative experiences. In this way, seekers avoid clinging to the past and are better able to surrender to God Siva and accept the present as it is while at the same time working to create a positive future.

Gurudeva sums it up beautifully in *Dancing with Siva*: "The world is seen as it truly is—sacred—when we behold Siva's cosmic dance. Everything in the universe, all that we see, hear and imagine, is movement. Galaxies soar in movement; atoms swirl in movement. All movement is Siva's dance. When we fight this movement and think it should be other than it is, we are reluctantly dancing with Siva. We are stubbornly resisting, holding ourselves apart, criticizing the natural processes and movements around us. It is by understanding the eternal truths that we bring all areas of our mind into the knowledge of how to accept what is and not wish it to be otherwise. Once this happens, we begin to consciously dance with Siva, to move with the sacred flow that surrounds us, to accept praise and blame, joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity in equanimity, the fruit of understanding. We are then gracefully, in unrestrained surrender, dancing with Siva."

LETTERS

Hindu History Lesson

I HAVE HAD NOW A CHANCE TO LOOK AT the very attractively produced text ("Hinduism from Ancient Times," Apr/May/June, 2007) and believe it to be a vast improvement over what I have seen so far in this genre. I welcome the idea of presenting Hinduism to young people in a positive and uplifting manner from the perspective of a practicing Hindu scholar. While there is always scope for discussion on matters of history and interpreting textual sources, it should be accepted as a matter of principle that it is the responsibility and privilege of a faith-community to present itself from its own perspective and in such a manner that its members can gain by it spiritually and feel proud of its history. Hindus certainly have much to be proud of when they look at their traditions.

As an academic connected with the religion department of the University of Manitoba, Canada, I welcome the idea to include in social studies texts for public schools sections on the religious traditions to which students belong. I was personally involved some years back in producing slide series with texts for local schools that sympathetically explained the background and practices of various communities. I was told that these presentations had a positive effect on the students who learned to have respect for the different traditions their fellow students came from.

I consider it a matter of course that only scholars who are active members of a particular faith community prepare such texts and that it would not be left to any outsiders to decide their content. I am sure that a local school board wishing to have a write-up on Christianity would not ask the Beijing Centre for the Study of Religions to supply such a text, however reputable its scholars may be, but would invite a Christian theologian to do so. I am sure that in the course of time texts will be produced that are both scholarly unobjectionable and religiously inspiring, providing the younger members of the Hindu community with a genuine introduction into their faith traditions and also teach non-Hindus important lessons in history and religion.

KLAUS K. KLOSTERMAIER, PH.D., FRSC
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR EMERITUS
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA, WINNIPEG, CANADA
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THE BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED OVERVIEW of Hindu history, philosophy, culture, religious beliefs, etc., provides an excellent way for a young Hindu to start his or her journey toward exploring and experiencing our ancient spiritual tradition. In addition, the section links various philosophical themes to their relevance in modern times

and how modern personalities have inculcated these themes to change their lives and impact the world.

NIKUNJ TRIVEDI, NATIONAL PRESIDENT,
HINDU STUDENTS COUNCIL,
SOUTH PLAINFIELD, NJ
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YOUR ATTEMPT TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN the academic and Hindu community's perception and portrayal of Hinduism must be warmly welcomed. Of course, not everything in it meets the scholarly gold standard; some scenarios are more plausible than compelling, and some dates more speculative than others, but it may no longer be entirely utopian to hope that more common ground might emerge as more of it is sought.

ARVIND SHARMA, PH.D.
BIRKS PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION,
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AS I READ THE LETTERS PUBLISHED ON the last issue of HINDUISM TODAY, it was a pleasant surprise to know that you recently published a lesson on the history of Hinduism designed for sixth-graders. By doing so this magazine is undoubtedly fulfilling the wishes of many serious and devout Hindus. Now that our position is clearly presented, everyone interested in the California textbook controversy will have enough information to draw the lines and make their own conclusions. Such an initiative really awakens the Hindu community.

KRISHAN JOSHI
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California Textbook Coverage

I BELIEVE A GREAT AMOUNT OF PRAISE IS due to Hindu Press International for your coverage of the California textbook controversy. I believe that it has provided me with a more balanced picture than censored memoranda and disparaging, *ad hominem* editorials in the *New York Times* could have provided on their own. For this, I am very grateful. Keep up the good work.

GERALD PENN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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Thai Pusam in Malaysia

I AM A NEW SUBSCRIBER TO HINDUISM TODAY, and what an uplifting time I have had reading your magazine! It provides a wonderfully balanced insight into the metaphysical, ritual, and life experiences of those living and breathing Hinduism. Your feature on Thai Pusam was a powerful de-

piction of a momentous festival. I had no idea that there were so many pious Hindus in Malaysia. Hindus have lacked unity, but HINDUISM TODAY provides an impetus for Hindus the world over to share in the glory of our faith. It reinforces a sense of belonging. The special educational feature on the history of Hinduism is a bold venture that has rightly won acclaim. I am convinced that many of our yogis and saints have imparted their blessings to the publishers, so that HINDUISM TODAY will continue to bring light into our lives.

SUBRATA DEY
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Religion and Marriage

TODAY IN THE WESTERN WORLD, INTER-religious dating and marriages are not uncommon, and thus it is increasingly important for young adults to understand potential religious complications before entering into a serious relationship. While interfaith relationships should develop based on a mutual respect for religious diversity, it is often true that major differences in fundamental beliefs pose difficulties for couples to find common ground. For example, Hindus believe that although the Ultimate Reality (Nirguna Brahman) is singular, nameless and formless, its qualities can be worshiped in the form of multiple Deities (Saguna Brahman). This practice is forbidden in other religions, such as Judaism, and poses an issue when it comes to puja. Another example: Islam forbids marriage with a nonbeliever. An uninformed non-Muslim may only discover this expectation of religious conversion after years of being in a romantic relationship. I am aware of one such couple, and other examples of inter-religious complexities are endless. Before getting into a relationship, one should have an open dialog about religious expectations and consider the consequences. Though this issue is important for the well being of the couple, it is also a significant issue for future children and the couple's extended families who have interest in preserving their religious and cultural traditions.

DILIP AMIN, PH.D.
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Teaching Young Adults

MORE THAN ONE YOUNG ADULT ASKS ME regularly during study circle discussions, "Who are the Pandavas"? or, "Why do we pray to Ganesha?" These are questions that we would expect to be asked by outsiders to the religion but have become more and more commonplace among our own youth. I have read about the problems of Chris-

tians converting Hindus here in Malaysia but I fear that a greater blame may be upon us. Children have to be taught about their religion at the level of a child's understanding, and as they grow up, they need a more scientific understanding of our practices and rituals. When teenagers choose to rebel against established religious practices, we should thoroughly educate them about the reasons for those practices.

For a person who is not a Hindu to say that the religion is nothing but "mumbo-jumbo" is one thing. But now our twenty-something Hindus, born into devout Hindu families, have begun labelling it as such and dismissing it as irrelevant. In a religion whose greatest teachers and sages doubled as scientists, I find it ironic that our young adults think that our religion is full of irrelevant rituals. The truth is that they have not understood the science and the logic lying behind every single ritual of Sanatana Dharma.

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Beef in McDonald's Fries

BACK IN 2005, FOLLOWING THE LAWSUIT that required McDonald's to distribute US\$10 million among relevant institutions, HINDUISM TODAY warned: "Hindu vegetarians around the world may wish to take note of the little-publicized fact that McDonald's made no changes in their fries, which are still beef-flavoring saturated. Sure, the oil is vegetable. But make no mistake about it. There is meat in those luscious Golden

Arches French fries." Today, this issue is forgotten. Every Hindu with whom I have spoken about this matter believes that McDonald's no longer use their beef flavoring since the class-action lawsuit. McDonald's beef-laced French fries returned to the mainstream menu for Hindus.

RANJI SINGH
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✓ *McDonalds still acknowledges "natural beef flavor" in the list of ingredients for "French fries" at <http://app.mcdonalds.com/bagamcmeal?process=item&itemID=6050> Their hash browns also contain beef flavoring. In India, McDonald's website, www.mcdonaldsindia.com/ourfood/addons/index.html, states the fries in India are cooked in 100% vegetable oil. It also claims, "The only thing we add to our fries is salt."*

Jainism Dates

AS I READ THE ARTICLE "VEGETARIANISM and Meat-Eating in the World's Religions," Apr/May/June, 2007) I noticed that Jainism is mentioned as being 1,600 years old, a date which I would assume is connected with the life of Lord Mahavira. We believe he was the last *thirthankar* and not the first. Jains do not see Jainism as having a beginning and believe it to be timeless.

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Corrections

✓ *The talented singers of the Oduwar tradition ("In Praise of Siva's Singers," Apr/May/*

June, 2007) can be contacted through anoorkay@hotmail.com.

✓ *In "Malaysia's Festive Jewel," Apr/May/June, 2007, the photo on page 22 is not Sri R. Nataraja, honorable president of the Maha Mariamman Temple. We apologize for the error. The corrected photo can be seen in the digital edition of Hinduism Today at www.hinduismtoday.com/digital/.*

✓ *In "God, Soul and World," Apr/May/June, 2007, several lines of the last paragraph were missing. The correction was made on time in our Digital Edition, but the last words of the article's conclusion were missing from the printed version. The full text of the last lines read, "After moksha has been attained—and it is an attainment resulting from much sadhana, self-reflection and realization—subtle karmas are made and swiftly resolved, like writing on water. The Self cannot be attained by the weak, nor by the careless, nor through aimless disciplines. But if one who knows strives by right means, his soul enters the abode of God" (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.4)."*

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 e-mailed to: letters@hindu.org

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.
✉ INDICATES LETTERS RECEIVED VIA E-MAIL

Let Hinduism's Voice Be Heard!

Help fund our magazine's grand future

MR. MURLI MELWANI AND HIS SON, Arvind, recently gave generously to the HINDUISM TODAY production fund, a part of the Hindu Heritage Endowment, because they are keen to help the magazine reach ever more souls, now and in the near and far futures.

Mr. Melwani was born in India, lived for 26 years in Taiwan as a businessman, then settled in the USA where he now resides with his family. As he traversed the various nations, climes and cultures, he continued to cherish the heritage of his boyhood. "I am infinitely grateful for the precious tradition that my ancestors bequeathed to me. It has kept me ever spiritually inclined which, doubtless, has been my greatest blessing."

In HINDUISM TODAY, he found a true friend that shared a similar vision and

dedication. "It meshes beautifully with my inherited beliefs. I like it for its clear-mindedness, its genuineness, tolerance and especially for its stand on ahimsa, the key to the spirit of Hinduism. If the desirable end is human solace, then nonviolence is our greatest strength. HINDUISM TODAY is truly the voice of Hinduism."

To help that voice carry farther, Murl and Arvind Melwani chose to contribute to the HINDUISM TODAY production fund. This fund will provide future editors with the means to produce an ever more potent magazine and keep abreast of future technological advancements. "I find it satisfying that my modest gift of today will grow through the years (via compounding dividends) into a significant amount that will empower HINDUISM TODAY through the decades to come."



"We believe in the power of words:"
(left to right) Mona, Murli, Arvind and Arpan Melwani. "Our gift will bring some enlightenment to a world that desperately needs it."

Please consider becoming a benefactor of HINDUISM TODAY by making the Fund a beneficiary in your estate plan of a gift of \$5,000 or more—in your living trust or charitable remainder trust. Contact us and ask for the Hinduism Today Production Fund flyer.
www.hinduismtoday.com
www.hheonline.org/ht/plannedgiving/
hhe@hindu.org • 808-822-3012, ext 244

QUOTES & QUIPS

Adversity and prosperity never cease to exist. The adornment of great men's minds is to remain unswervingly just under both.

Tirukural, 12.32

A person's growth begins with dissatisfaction. Not content with the world, he seeks satisfaction by prayers to God; this purifies his mind and he longs to know God more than to satisfy his carnal desires. Then God's grace begins to manifest. God will take the form of a guru and appear to the devotee, to teach him Truth so that his mind gains strength and is able to turn inward. With meditation the mind is purified yet further, and eventually remains still without the least ripple. That stillness is the Self. The guru is both exterior and interior: from the exterior he gives a push to the mind to turn inward and from the interior he pulls the mind towards the Self. That is grace. See? There is no difference between God, guru and Self. **Ramana Maharishi** (1879-1950), *South Indian mystic*

I loved my motherland dearly before I went to America and England. After my return, every particle of dust of this land seems sacred to me. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863-1902)

People see God every day, they just don't recognize him. **Pearl Bailey** (1883-1931), American singer

You can often find in rivers what you cannot find in oceans. *Indian Proverb*

The fish in the water is silent, the animal on the earth is noisy, the bird in the air is singing. Only man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth and the music of the air. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861-1941)

You can't have everything—where would you put it? *Anonymous*

I do not want my house to be walled, or my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

Before you start some work, always ask yourself three questions: Why am I doing

it? What might the results be? Can I be successful? Only when you think deeply and find satisfactory answers to these questions, then proceed.

Chanakya (350-275 BCE), *Indian politician, strategist and writer*

Make me silent, O God, that I may eloquently converse with Thee. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893-1952), *founder of Self Realization Fellowship*

In the four eternal Vedas,
In the study and reading of scripts,
In sacred ashes and in holy writs
And muttering of prayers
You will not find the Lord!
Melt with the heart inside
And proclaim the Truth.
Then you will join the light—
Life without servitude.
Sivavakkiyar, *10th-century Tamil devotional poet and mystic*

Today is in your hands. Tomorrow the chance may never come. **Swami Sivananda** (1887-1963), *founder of the Divine Life Society*

If we want to realize our dreams, we have to stay awake. **Swami Tejomayananda**, *spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission*

Give up everything to Him, resign yourself to Him and there will no trouble for you. Then you will come to know that every thing is done by His will. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886)

It is a right and a duty of the wise ones to purify the strong by teaching them their duties; and to strengthen the weak by teaching them their rights. **Subrahmanya C. Bharati** (1882-1921), *Indian poet, journalist and activist*

Frank and Ernest



Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition. *Anonymous*

In India I found a race of mortals living upon the Earth, but not adhering to it. Inhabiting cities, but not being fixed to them, possessing everything but possessed by nothing. **Appolonius of Tiana** (2-97 CE), *Greek philosopher and occultist. His work deeply influenced Western mysticism.*

If you can laugh together, you can work together. **Robert Orben**, *journalist*

Sattvic knowledge sees the one indestructible Being in all beings, the unity under-

lying the multiplicity of creation. Rajasic knowledge sees all things and creatures as separate and distinct. Tamasic knowledge, lacking any sense of perspective, sees one small part and mistakes it for the whole. **Bhagavad Gita 18:20-22**

You don't want to see God. You must feel God. God is you. Just be that. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872-1964) *of Sri Lanka*

Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the Mystery, unique and not to be judged. **Rumi** (1207-1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

You will not be punished for your anger, you will be punished by your anger. **Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha** ca 566-486 BCE)

Sight is very powerful. Sight is the first connection made with the Deity. The sight of the murti in the temple inner sanctum stimulates and enhances the flow of uplifting energies, or pranas, within the mind and body. Each Deity performs certain functions, is in charge of certain pranas. Seeing the Deity there unfolds in the mind's eye a like image and prepares the way for deeper blessings and devotion. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

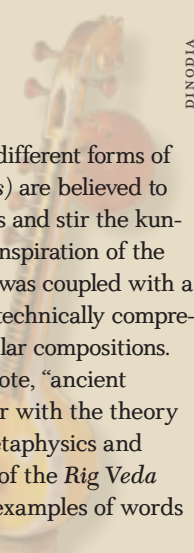
DID YOU KNOW?

India's Musical Genius

INDIA, OF ALL NATIONS THROUGHOUT history, has developed the most complete system of scales and melody for understanding sound and creating music. Little wonder in a land where sages discovered the power of the primeval Aum permeating the universe. The origins of Indian classical music can be found in Hinduism's oldest and most revered scriptures, the *Vedas*. The *Samaveda* describes music at length. Indian classical music has its roots as a meditation tool for attaining

Self realization. The different forms of these melodies (*ragas*) are believed to affect various chakras and stir the kundalini. The mystical inspiration of the Indian music system was coupled with a design that makes it technically comprehensive even for secular compositions.

Alain Danielou wrote, "ancient Hindus were familiar with the theory of sound, both its metaphysics and physics. The hymns of the *Rig Veda* contain the earliest examples of words set to music."

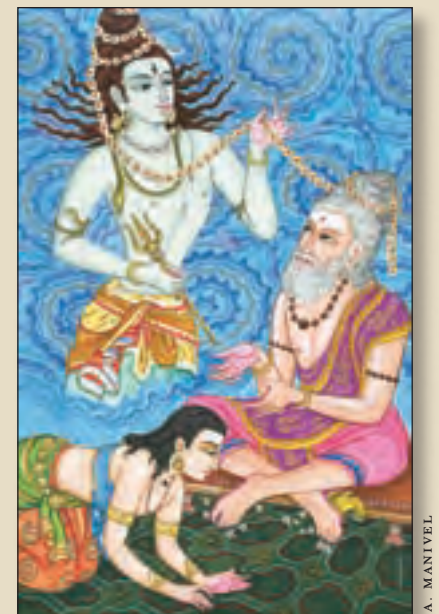


BASICS OF HINDUISM

Diksha

Diksha, "initiation," is a solemn induction, taking the initiated into a new realm of spiritual awareness and practice. It is traditionally given by a teacher or preceptor, such as a guru. *Diksha* is a powerful blessing that acknowledges and empowers the individual's own past efforts done in preparation for that auspicious moment of receiving it. It will often take years of disciplined effort for the preceptor to deem the candidate ready for initiation. Usually granted during a ceremony or festival, *diksha* may be conferred by a touch, a word, a look or a thought. As the aspirant matures, he may receive

deeper initiations, each one drawing him further into his spiritual being. Most Hindu schools, especially Saivism, teach that only with initiation from a *satguru* is enlightenment attainable. To Vaishnavites, initiation is also a transfer of the karma from the disciple to a saintly preceptor. It is by the grace of *diksha* that the guru passes on the power received from the Gods. Central *dikshas* include *samaya diksha* (initiation into a sacred mantra), *vishesha diksha* ("distinguishing" initiation, denoting acceptance into a select group) and *sannyas diksha* (final vows of renunciation of the world taken by the *sannyasin*).



Finally, a Fair and Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

A 16-page sixth-grade social studies lesson from the editors of Hinduism Today

Hinduism Today's 16-page Hindu history lesson is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Ph.D Director, Center for Asian Studies, California State University

This lesson corrects many of the errors in the current chapters on Hinduism, presents the religion in a sympathetic light and describes the religion in the way Hindus understand and practice it. The lesson is a commendable attempt that is acceptable to nearly all in our religion.

C.K. Hiranya Gowda, M.D., Former President, Hindu Temple of Nashville, TN, USA

While no document can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA



Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight in HINDUISM TODAY magazine's response to the controversy in California over the way Hinduism is taught in public-school history books. It is a 16-page lesson on Hindu history, beliefs and practices for sixth graders written from the Hindu point of view. It is historically sound and acceptable in content and tone to the various denominations of the Hindu community.

The problem with every existing textbook for this grade level is that Hinduism is presented negatively, incompletely and inaccurately. This lesson is patterned after a typical chapter on the Jewish faith in these same books. It deliberately does not follow the specific California standards for

presenting the Hindu religion because we believe them to be deeply flawed and contrary to the State's own general rule that teaching material must: 1) be historically accurate, 2) "instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage" and 3) avoid "adverse reflection" on a religion. It is our intent that this lesson will serve as a model for US textbooks, providing an authentic depiction of the eminent Hindu and traditions of the faith while giving 10-year-old Hindu students justifiable pride in their religion.

In most states teachers are allowed to supplement the textbooks with additional material. This lesson may be offered as a more accurate basis for the classroom study of the origins and development of Hinduism in ancient India.

This is the most comprehensive summary of Hinduism's multi-faceted tradition that I have seen to date. I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use in all official textbooks for students.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Founder & Chairman, India Heritage Research Foundation, Rishikesh

This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending these sections as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA

FROM THE VEDAS

Contemplation of the Unborn

Garbha Upanishad relates the anguish of the reincarnating soul

GARBHA IS THE 17TH OF THE 108 UPANISHADS and is attached to the Krishna Yajur Veda. The "Womb" Upanishad includes this description of the thoughts of the newly embodied soul as it approaches the moment of birth.

In the ninth month the body, made of the five elements and able to sense the five senses, through *tejas* (spiritual fire) and more then cognizes the indestructible Omkara, the supreme mantra Aum, through its deep wisdom and contemplation. It is now full of all attributes. It then remembers its previous births, finds out what has been done and what has not been done, and discriminates between actions, right and wrong. Then it thinks thus: "Many thousands of wombs have been seen by me, many kinds of food have been tasted, and many breasts have nursed me. All parts of the world have been my place of birth, as also my burning-ground, in the past. In the 8.4 million different kinds of wombs have I been born. I have been often born and have often died. I have been subject to the cycle of rebirths very often. I have had birth and death, again birth and death, and again birth.

"There is much suffering while living in the womb. Delusion and sorrow attend every birth. In youth are sorrow, grief, dependence on others, ignorance, the nonperformance of what is beneficial, laziness and the performance of what is unfavorable. In adult age, the sources of sorrow are attachment to sensual objects and the groaning under the three kinds of pain—those that arise from the body, from the elements and from the devas. In old age, anxiety, disease, fear of death, desires, love of self, passion, anger and non-independence—all these produce very great suffering. This birth is the seed of sorrow, and being of the form of sorrow is unbearable. I have not attained the dharma of *nivritti*, the means of overcoming the cycle of rebirth, nor have I acquired the means of yoga and *jnana*, wisdom. Alas! I am sunk in the ocean of sorrow and find no remedy for it. Fie on *ajnana*, ignorance! Fie on *ajnana*! Fie on the troubles caused by passion and anger. Fie on the fetters of *samsara*, the process of worldly life! I shall attain wisdom from a guru.

"If I get myself freed from the womb, then I shall practise Sankhya Yoga, which is the cause of the extinction of all evil and the bestower of the fruit of emancipation. If I get myself freed from the womb, I shall seek refuge in Mahesvara, Siva, the great Lord, who is the cause of the extinction of all evil and bestower of the four goals of life—love, wealth, dharma and liberation. If I get myself freed from the womb, then I shall seek refuge in that Lord of the World who is the cause of all causes. If I get myself freed from the womb, then I shall seek refuge in that supreme Lord Bhargava, Siva, who is Lord of Souls, Rudra, Mahadeva and Guru of the World. If I get myself freed from the bondage of the womb, I shall perform great penances. If I get myself freed from the passage of the womb, I shall worship Vishnu in my heart, who is the bestower of nectar, who is bliss, who is Narayana and who never decays. I am now confined in my mother's womb, and were I freed from its bonds, I shall please the divine



What's next? This remarkable photograph is of a living baby in its mother's womb—pondering, we learn from the Vedas, the consequences of birth

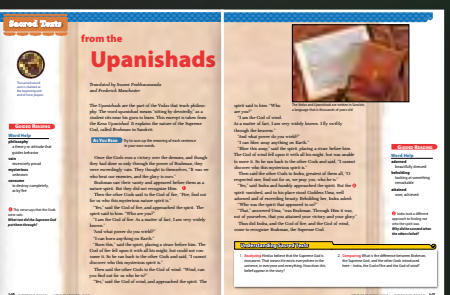
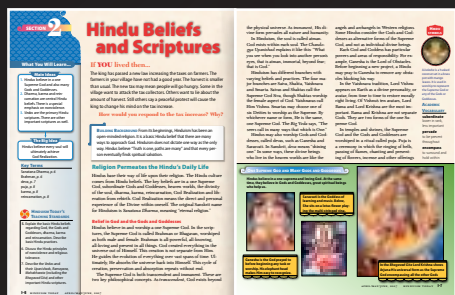
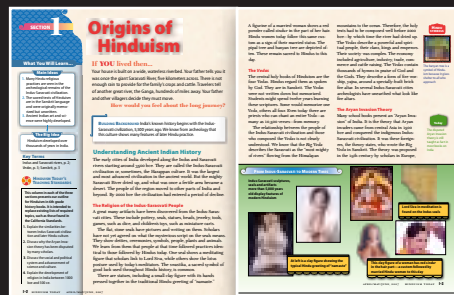
Vasudeva without diverting my mind from Him.

"I am burnt through actions, good and bad, committed by me alone before for the sake of others, whilst those who enjoyed the fruits thereof have disappeared. Through lack of belief, I formerly gave up all fear of sin and committed sins. I now reap their fruits. I shall become a believer hereafter."

Thus does the *jiva*, the soul, within the mother's womb contemplate again and again the many kinds of miseries it had undergone, and remembering always the miseries of the cycle of rebirths, becomes disgusted with the material enjoyments of the world, often fainting in the inmost center, that is, the heart of all creatures, at the idea of his ignorance, desire and karma. Then this being, who had entered many hundreds of female wombs of beings in the previous births, comes to the mouth of the womb wishing to obtain release. Here it suffers much trouble in the process of delivery. As soon as it is born, it comes in contact with the air and ceases to remember anything of the past. It also ceases to see far and to be the cognizer of the Real. Coming into contact with the earth, it becomes fierce-eyed and debased. The evil of the eye after it is cleaned by water vanishes; and with it, vanishes memory of birth and death, good and bad actions and their affinities.

K. NARAYANASVAMI AIYAR published this translation of Barbha Upanishad (slightly edited here) in 1914 along with the Adyar Library as part of his book, Thirty Minor Upanishads. The translations had previously appeared in the monthly journal, The Theosophist. He collaborated on the work with Sundara Sastri.

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, *shruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 BCE), Bible New Testament (100 CE), Koran (630 CE) or Zend Avesta (600 BCE). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 BCE.



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Shashank, known as a magician flautist, gives an enthralling performance in front of the Nandi Mandapam of the Brihadisvara Temple in Thanvajar, accompanied by his sister, Shirisha, and their ensemble

FEATURE STORY

The Magic of HINDU MUSIC

DAVE TROFF





The rudra vina, shown here, is used primarily to perform the Hindustani music of North India. Rudra vina literally means "vina dear to Siva." It is rarely played in modern times.

Exploring the religious, historical and social forces that shaped Hindu music and now propel it into the future

By Dr. Guy L. Beck, New Orleans

FROM THE CHANTING OF ANCIENT Vedic hymns to the melodic bhajans of modern-day devotees, Indian music is ultimately rooted in basic theological principles of sacred sound. These primordial principles are documented in Hindu scriptures such as the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* (ca 4000-1000 BCE)—which are regarded as eternal and authorless, though later committed to written form.

Music, both vocal and instrumental, is considered to be of divine origin and is closely identified with the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The Goddess Sarasvati, depicted with vina in hand, is venerated by all students and performers of Indian music as the divine patron of music and learning; indeed, She personifies the power of sound and speech. Lord Brahma, creator of



Goddess Sarasvati

the universe, portrayed as playing the hand cymbals, fashioned Indian music out of the verses of the *Sama Veda*. Lord Vishnu, the Preserver, sounds the conch shell, and in His avatara Krishna He plays the flute. Lord Siva

Nataraja plays the *damaru* drum during the dance of creation.

Each of these instruments symbolizes Nada-Brahman—the sacred, primeval, eternal sound, represented by the syllable Om, which generates the universe. This sound is embodied in the *Vedas* and itself symbolizes Brahman, the Supreme Absolute of the *Upanishads*. Nada-Brahman appears in musical treatises as the foundation of music. Yoga texts use the term to denote the musical and inner sounds heard in deep yogic meditation. *Nada* refers to the cosmic sound, which may be either unmanifest or manifest. Since Brahman

pervades the entire universe, including the human soul, the concept of sacred sound as Nada-Brahman expresses the connection between the human realm and the divine. Combining the principles of Nada-Brahman with Indian aesthetics of *rasa* and the structures of *raga* and *tala*, the various *gharanas* have nurtured the formal classical traditions of music to the present day (see "Traditions of Teaching" sidebar, p. 23.)

Nada-Yoga, the yogic discipline that seeks transcendental inner awareness of Nada-Brahman, has also influenced Indian traditions of chant and music. Nada-Yoga techniques, including Om meditation, are found in philosophical yoga texts such as the *Yoga Upanishads* and the major hatha yoga texts, as well as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* and its commentaries. My 1993 book, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, deals extensively with the Hindu philosophies of sound and Nada-Brahman www.sc.edu/uscp/1993older/9855.html.

It begins with Vedic chanting

Intrinsic to the ancient Vedic practice of fire sacrifice are chanting and meditation on sound. Recitation and chanting in Sanskrit are traceable to the Vedic period, when the *Rig Veda* was recited by priests during public and private fire ceremonies.

From those early times, chanting has been seen as a powerful means to interact with the cosmos and obtain spiritual merit that would help one to gain a heavenly afterlife or an auspicious next life.

Special brahmin priests known as Hotri chanted selected verses from the *Rig Veda* in roughly three tones, notated in early manuscripts as accents on particular syllables: *anudatta* (grave, "not raised"), *svarita* (circumflex, "sounded") and *udatta* (acute, "raised"). The grammarian Panini (4th century BCE), who knew the early tradition, described the *svarita* tone as connecting the other two. But according to modern scholars—and in modern practice—the *udatta*, left unmarked, is considered the tonic, the principal note upon which the chants are intoned (like middle C); the *anudatta*, often marked with an underline, is a whole step below (B-flat); and the *svarita*, marked with a small vertical line above the syllable, is a half step above (D-flat).

Sama Veda chanting

The chanting and hearing of sustained musical notes has been linked to the Divine in Hinduism from early Vedic times. The *Sama Veda* contains Vedic verses set to pre-existent melodies. These songs, known as *samans*, were chanted by special brahmin priests called Udgatri during elaborate sacrificial ceremonies to petition and praise the Deities that control the forces of the universe. Unlike the three-tone chanting of the *Rig Veda*, *samans* were rendered in melodies of up to seven tones, ranging from F above middle C to G below. These notes were in descending order, as the melodies of the *samans* were usually descending in contour.

A unique feature of the *Sama Veda* chanting was the insertion of a number of seemingly 'meaningless' words or syllables (*stobha*) for musical and lyrical effect, such as *o*, *hau*, *hoi*, *va*, etc. These *stobha* syllables were extended vocally, with long duration, on various notes of the *Sama Veda* scale for the purpose of invoking the Gods. Vedic scholar G.U. Thite explains, "The poet-singers call, invoke, invite the Gods with the help of musical elements. In so doing they seem to be aware of the magnetic power of music, and therefore they seem to be using that power in calling the Gods." Thite elaborates, "Gods are fond of music. They like music and enjoy it. The poet-singers sing and praise the Gods with the intention that the Gods may be pleased thereby, and having become pleased they may grant gifts." He stresses the importance of the singing of *samans*: "Without it, no sacrifice can go to the Gods."

Precise methods of singing the *samans* were established and preserved by three different schools—the Kauthumas, Ranayaniyas and the Jaiminiyas, the oldest. Each has maintained a distinct style with regard to vowel prolongation, interpolation and repetition of *stobha*, meter, phonetics and the number of notes in scales. In each school there has been a fervent regard for maintaining continuity in *Sama Veda* singing to avoid misuse or modification over the years. Since written texts were not used in early times—were in fact prohibited—the priests memorized the chants with the aid of accents and melodies, passing this tradition down orally from one generation to the next for over three thousand years.

Evolution of Gandharva Sangita

The early tradition of *saman* singing set the stage for the creation and development of Indian classical music known first as Gandharva Sangita, then as simply Sangita. According to Dr. V. Raghavan, Sangita is born from the *Sama Veda*: "Our music tradition in the North, as well as in the South, remembers and cherishes its origin in the *Sama Veda*, the musical version of the *Rig Veda*." Indian music, known as Sangita, has three divisions, as understood from the musical texts: vocal music, instrumental music and dance. All three have always been intertwined, whether in religious observances, sacred dramas or courtly entertainment.

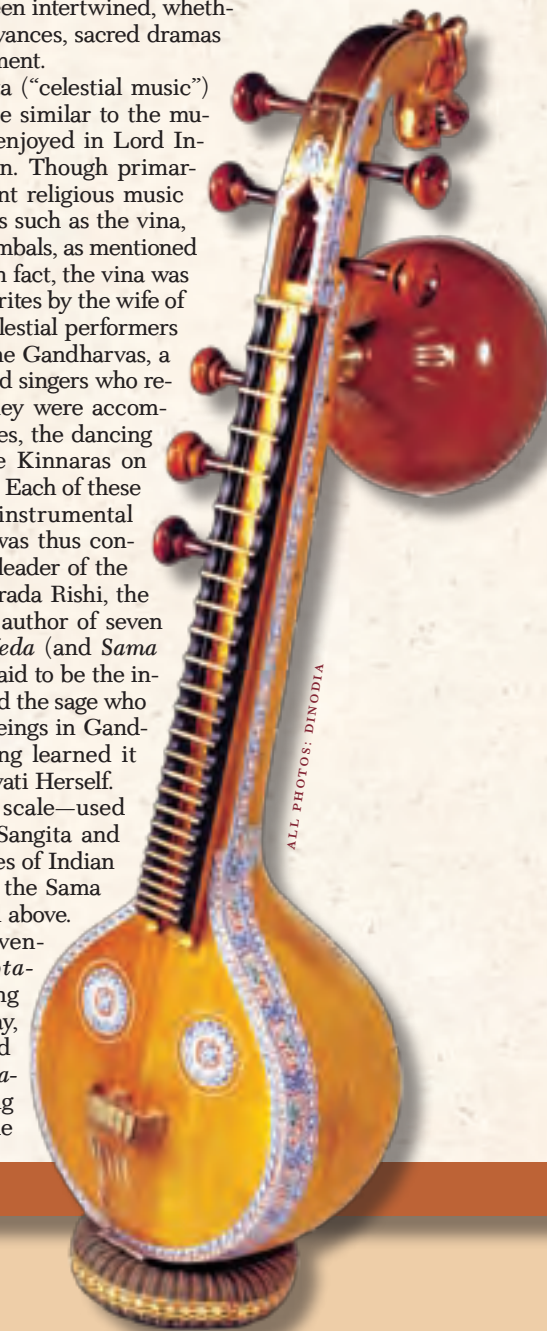
Gandharva Sangita ("celestial music") was considered to be similar to the music performed and enjoyed in Lord Indra's court in heaven. Though primarily vocal, this ancient religious music included instruments such as the vina, flutes, drums and cymbals, as mentioned in Vedic literature. In fact, the vina was played during Vedic rites by the wife of the officiant. The celestial performers of the music were the Gandharvas, a class of male demigod singers who resided in heaven. They were accompanied by their wives, the dancing Apsaras, and by the Kinnaras on musical instruments. Each of these arts—vocal music, instrumental music and dance—was thus considered divine. The leader of the Gandharvas was Narada Rishi, the son of Brahma and author of seven hymns in the *Rig Veda* (and *Sama Veda*). He was also said to be the inventor of the vina and the sage who instructed human beings in Gandharva Sangita, having learned it from Goddess Sarasvati Herself.

Sangita's musical scale—used first in Gandharva Sangita and later in all other types of Indian music—differs from the *Sama Veda* scale described above. Sangita uses a seven-note system (*sapta-svara*) in ascending order. Current today, the standardized notes are *sa-ri-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni-sa*, taking their sounds from the

The Vina

Vina (also spelled veena), a stringed instrument of the lute family, is used in Carnatic music. Vina designs have evolved over the centuries; variations include the Rudra vina, Mahanataka vina, Vichitra vina and Gottuvadhyam (Chitra) vina. Currently, the most popular design is known as the Sarasvati vina. This has twenty-four frets; four main strings which pass over the frets and are attached to the pegs of the neck;

and three supporting strings, which pass over an arched bridge made of brass and are used as side strings for rhythmic accompaniment. The vina is played by sitting cross-legged and holding the instrument in front of oneself. The small gourd rests on the left thigh, with the left arm passing beneath the neck of the instrument and the left hand curved around so that the fingers can press the strings against the frets. The



ALL PHOTOS: DINODIA

vina's main body is placed on the floor, partially supported by the right thigh. Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning and the arts, is often depicted with vina in hand, seated upon a swan or peacock.

names of different birds and animals: *sadja*, peacock; *rishabha*, bull; *gandhara*, ram; *madhyama*, crane; *panchama*, cuckoo; *dhaivata*, horse; and *nishada*, elephant). These are set forth in the *Narada Siksha* (1st century CE), where the presumed author, Narada Rishi, explains how these seven notes were determined from the three Vedic accents: *udatta* into Ni and Ga, *anudatta* into Ri and Dha, and *svarita* into Sa, Ma and Pa.

Complex rules and standards for scales, rhythms and instrumental styles of Gandharva music were gradually codified in a number of texts which came to be known collectively as the *Gandharva Veda*, an auxiliary text attached to the *Sama Veda*.

Several of these works have been lost; but the oldest surviving texts of Indian music—the *Natya Shastra* by Bharata Muni and the *Dattilam* by Dattila (both ca. 200 BCE) and the aforementioned *Narada Siksha*—provide glimpses into the evolution of Gandharva Sangita. Bharata's work in particular was foundational. It was he who classified musical instruments into four categories based on the Gandharva instruments: vina (chordophones), drum (membranophones), flute (aerophones) and cymbals (idiophones). Based on these four divisions (given in parentheses), the famous Sachs-Hornbostel system—used today in the academic field of ethnomusicology—was established in the early twentieth century. Also, the term *raga* (“musical mood or flavor”) as a type of scale or melodic formula, first mentioned in the *Narada Siksha*, was derived from the parent *jati* enumerated in Bharata's work.

Gandharva music soon developed into the principal style of music performed in Hindu festivals, court ceremonies and temple rituals in honor of the great Gods and God-

desses, like Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, Ganesha and Devi. The ancient epics and *Puranas* describe temple musicians and dancers who performed for the pleasure of these Deities and contain numerous references to temple music in ancient times. Music was also associated with sacred dramatic performances, as clearly evidenced in Bharata's *Natya Shastra*.

Evolving vernaculars

Special songs used to propitiate the Gods, called Dhruva, were rendered not in Sanskrit but in Prakrit, a derivative language with less rigid grammatical construction, which led to the evolution of several vernaculars. The

Dhruva form was the prototype of the medieval Prabandha, from which arose the classical devotional forms sung in vernacular and known as Dhruvpad (Dhruvpad) in the North and Kriti in the South. The rapidly developing music of India also enlarged itself with materials from outside the original repertoire.

Nada-Brahman

By the period of the early Bhakti movements in South India (7th to 10th centuries CE), Indian musicological treatises such as Matanga's *Brihaddeshi* began to incorporate the theory of sacred sound as Nada-Brahman, the principles of Nada-Yoga and the

Tantra traditions, interpreting all music as a direct manifestation of Nada-Brahman—and therefore as a means of access to the highest spiritual realities. Music was viewed not only as entertainment but as a personal vehicle toward moksha, liberation.

Subsequent musicological authors influenced by Matanga discussed Nada-Brahman in relation to the Gods and as present throughout the cosmos, including all living beings. For example, the *Sangita Ratnakara*

of Sarngadeva (ca. 1200-1250 CE), arguably the most important musicological treatise of India, opens with the salutation: “We worship Nada-Brahman, that incomparable bliss which is immanent in all the creatures as intelligence and is manifest in the phenomena of this universe. Indeed, through the worship of Nada-Brahman are worshiped Gods (like) Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, since they essentially are one with it.” Thus by this time there was a full conflation of the tradition of sacred sound (the Nada-Brahman principle) with the art of music in all its phases, including religious, secular, classical and folk.

Bhakti-Sangita

Celebrated by many as a distinct doctrine and mode of religious life superior to *jnana* (knowledge) and karma (works), bhakti—initially propounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* by Krishna—became the primary motive for religious music from the early medieval period. As early as the sixth century CE in South India, bhakti emerged as a powerful force that favored a devotion-centered Hinduism, with songs composed not only in Sanskrit but in vernacular languages. Leading this trend were two main groups of poet-singer-saints in South India whose devotion to Siva and Vishnu lives to this day: the Saivite Nayanars and the Vaishnava Alvars. The collections of their devotional poetry in Tamil—the Saivite *Tevaram* and the Vaishnavite *Naliyar Prabandham*—represent the oldest surviving verses in Indian vernaculars. These two books are the first hymnals of Bhakti-Sangita or devotional music.

Directly related to the word *bhakti* and to *Bhagavan* (a word for Supreme Being) is the term *bhajan*, which means musical worship. These three words arise from a single Sanskrit root: *bhaj*, “to share, to partake of” (as in a ritual). *Bhagavan* refers to the Lord who possesses *bhaga*, good fortune and opulence. *Bhajan*, a somewhat generic term for religious or devotional music other than Vedic chant and Gandharva Sangita,

movable (allowing fine variation in tuning) and raised, so that resonant, or sympathetic, strings can run underneath the frets. In conjunction with the gourd resonating chamber, this produces a lush, distinctive sound. A typical sitar has 18, 19 or 20 strings, depending on the style. Soundclip:

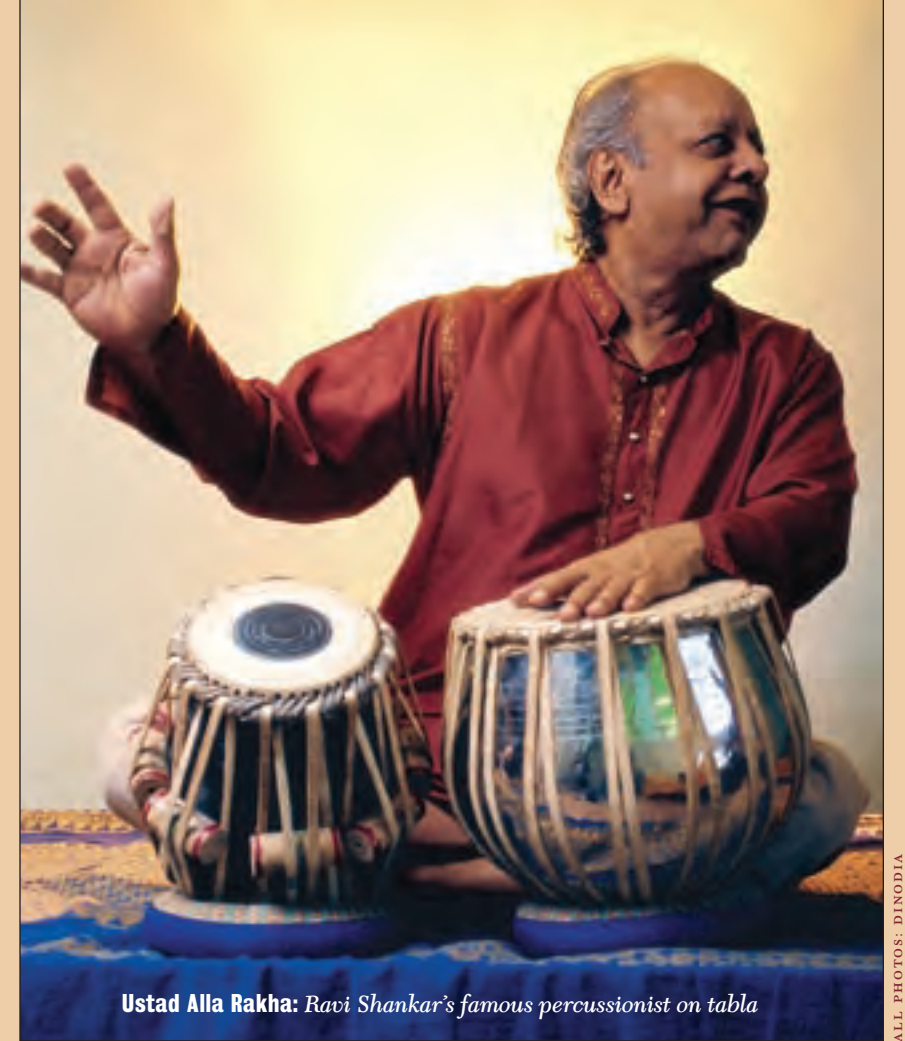
www.swarsystems.com/Downloads/Instruments/sitar.mp3

is directly linked to the rising Bhakti movements. In bhajan, God (Bhagavan) is praised, worshiped or supplicated in a mutual exchange of loving affection, or bhakti. The Bhakti traditions contained various styles of bhajan or Bhakti-Sangita, ranging from formal temple music to informal group or solo songs. Hindu music incorporated a simple aesthetic, reflecting back to these emerging Bhakti movements and their perspectives on music as a means of immediate communion with a chosen Deity.

The *Upanishads* describe Brahman, the Supreme Truth, as full of bliss and rasa (“emotional taste, pleasure”). In theistic Vedanta, Brahman as supreme personal Deity—whether worshiped as Vishnu, Siva, Sakti or in any other form—was believed to be the source of all rasa and extremely fond of music. The emotional experience produced by music in the minds of the listeners (*bhava*) was thus also linked to God.

Raga and tala

It is said that the musical scales or melody formulas of Indian music, known as raga, are as timeless as the law of gravity and must be discovered, much like the *Vedas* themselves. Each raga embodies a particular rasa (mood or flavor) and can thus generate those same feelings within both the listener and the performer when properly invoked. When those feelings are directed towards God as Brahman or Ishvara, the result is higher attachment (also called raga). And if the music is both understood as Nada-Brahman and performed properly



Ustad Alla Rakha: Ravi Shankar's famous percussionist on tabla

Tabla and Mridangam

The tabla is a popular Indian percussion instrument used in the classical, popular and religious music of the Indian subcontinent, primarily in Hindustani classical music. It consists of a pair of hand drums of contrasting sizes and timbres. Legend has it that the 13th-century Muslim Persian poet Amir Khusrau invented the tabla by splitting the mridangam into two parts. The transformation of the tabla from a religious-folk instrument to a more sophisticated instrument of art-music occurred in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when significant changes took place in the feudal court music of North India. Soundclip:

www.chandrakantha.com/articles/Indian_music/tabla_media/tabla.ram

The mridangam is a percussion instrument from South India. It is the primary rhythmic accompaniment in a Carnatic music ensemble. The word *mridangam* is derived from the two Sanskrit words *mrid* (“clay” or “earth”) and *ang*, (“body”). Alternate spellings include *mridanga*, *mrudangam*, and *mrithangam*. The mridangam is a double-sided drum made from a piece of jackfruit wood, hollowed out so that the walls are about an inch thick. The two apertures of the drum are covered with pieces of goatskin leather which are laced to each other with leather straps. In ancient Hindu sculpture, art and story-telling, the mridangam is often depicted as the instrument of choice for a number of Deities, including Lord Ganesha. Nandi, Lord Siva's bull mount, plays the mridangam during Lord Siva's *tandava* dance. The mridangam is thus also known as Deva Vadyam, the “instrument of the Gods.” Soundclip:

www.swarsystems.com/Downloads/Instruments/mridangam.mp3

The mridangam

Traditions of Teaching

North Indian (Hindustani) classical music has to a great extent been taught through the *gharana* (literally, “household”) system of hereditary “schools.” Alongside the *gharana* system, even in the North, existed the Hindu guru-*shishya* system. South Indian (Carnatic) classical music has always been preserved, taught and perpetuated through the guru-*shishya* system, wherein the student need not belong to the family line of the teacher.

Sitar

The sitar is probably the best-known Indian instrument in the West. This stringed instrument has been ubiquitous in Hindustani classical music since the Middle Ages. The sitar became popular in the West when Pandit Ravi Shankar introduced Indian music to the masses, aided by popular rock groups such as The Beatles. The sitar is distinguished by its curved frets, which are

in the spirit of bhakti or bhakti-rasa, then the musician and the listener are said to gain release and the association of Ishvara (Supreme Controller) in both this life and the next. Musicians in India have a saying: “through *svara* (musical notes), Ishvara (God) is realized.”

Tala (rhythm) is also of great importance in Indian music. Vedic ritual chants were punctuated by metrical divisions. Besides aiding memorization, these divisions—when chanted—were believed to generate distinct units of merit that accrued to the priest or sacrificer, leading to afterlife in heaven. This connection of music to Vedic merit was explained in classical music texts such as the *Dattilam*. Since Vedic chanting was metrical, religious music also required a distinct rhythm or division of musical time sequence in order to yield the same benefits.

In Gandharva music, similar metrical units were marked by the rhythmic playing of drums and metal hand cymbals (*kartal* or *jhanjh*).

Emphasis on devotion

The ancient theory held that performing or hearing music hastened one's liberation solely through the marking of ritual (musical) time. But in the emerging Bhakti traditions, it was recognized

that moksha depends also on one's emotion or feelings—the depth of one's personal relationship with the Deity, including the proper rasa and feelings of *bhava*.

Bhakti literature saw a rapidly expanding assortment of song-texts in regional vernacular languages. Many of these were stimulated by Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, a Sanskrit work of 12th-century Bengal. This text contained linguistic innovations in Sanskrit meter which influenced the development of vernacular musical composition in Prakrit, including special dialects like Braj Bhasha and Brajbuli. The 14th century saw a magnificent outpouring of devotional poetry addressing almost every Deity of the Hindu pantheon, with nearly every region of India producing its own composer of songs to a favored Deity.

In the North, Sur Das wrote about Krishna as Sri Nathji in Braj Bhasha; Tulasi Das addressed Lord Rama in Avadhi; Tukaram and Namdev wrote devotional songs in Marathi to Krishna as Vitthala; Mira Bai addressed Krishna as Giridhar Gopal in both Rajasthani and Hindi; Vidyapati praised Radha-Krishna and Siva in Maithili and Brajbuli; Chandidas composed songs to Radha and Krishna in Bengali; Govinda Das lauded Radha-Krishna and Chaitanya in Brajbuli; Ramprasad praised Goddess Kali in Bengali; and Shankaradeva venerated Krishna in Assamese. In the South, Purandaradasa expressed his worship of Vishnu in Kannada, and several com-

posed devotional songs in the Telugu language—Syama Shastri to Goddess Kamakshi, Annamacharya to Lord Venkateshvara, and Tyagaraja to Lord Rama. These and many other composers are believed to have attained eternal liberation through their songs.

Classical music, East and West

Just as Christian church music has strongly influenced the development of Western classical music, these various traditions of Indian religious music in India, which developed in specific sacred places and within religious lineages, have been a rich source of material for Indian classical music. “Classical” music in India—as in the West—refers to music performed primarily as a form of art, for entertainment, by professional, skilled artists. Therefore, the development of this music is influenced by the preferences of patrons, individual improvisation and even foreign influences. This type of music tends to place great emphasis on virtuosity, creativity and “art for art's sake.” The distinct northern and southern classical music traditions gradually developed from this background some time after the thirteenth century.

Carnatic music

Southern Carnatic music is grounded upon the devotional music performed by Vaishnava and Saiva saints in the temples and shrines of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. A major influence was provided by

Purandaradasa (1480-1564), a Vaishnava musician said to have written nearly half a million songs known as Kirtanas. Hailed as the father of Carnatic music, Purandaradasa was the main inspiration of Tyagaraja (1759-1847), whose devotional Kritis (compositions) in Telugu to Lord Rama dominate the current repertoire of South Indian music. Tyagaraja is recognized as part of a trinity of great musician-poets from Tiruvavur which included Syama Shastri and Muttuswami Dikshitar, composers of songs to the Goddesses Kamakshi and Minakshi.

Hindustani music

The Hindustani music of the northern regions stems from the temple music, especially Dhrupad, that was performed by Vaishnava musicians in Mathura, Vrindaban and Gwalior as well as Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. The Persian and Islamic Sufi influences in the North also affected the development of Hindustani music.

The musical style of Dhrupad provided an ideal vehicle for the vernacular Bhakti lyrics. Several new related genres of music emerged, including Haveli-Sangit, Samaj-

Gayan and Padavali-Kirtan. Dhrupad, linked to the Prabandha songs of earlier Sanskrit treatises, refers to the formal, slow, four-section vocal rendition of a poem using the pure form of a raga, along with the rhythms of mainly Cautal (12 beats) and Dhamar (14 beats). Most of these new devotional poems contained at least four lines, so there was a natural division into the four parts of Dhrupad—*sthai*, *antara*, *sancari* and *abhog*. Dhrupad spread as a classical form wherever it was patronized by the ruling elite, in temples as well as the Hindu and Mughal courts.

A famous name in Hindustani music is Sur Das (16th century), a blind musician-poet associated with the Vallabha Sampradaya (Pushtimarga tradition) who spent his entire life singing to Krishna. In his Braj Bhasha work *Sur Sagar*, he praised singing as the most viable means of spiritual liberation. Sur Das was a member of the Ashtachap, a group of poets considered foundational by some historians in developing and refining the Dhrupad style later known as Haveli Sangita—a form of temple music which

is believed to be one of the forerunners of Hindustani music. In fact, many songs in the Hindustani vocal classical repertoire are drawn directly, or else paraphrased, from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Braj Bhasha lyrics that describe the pastimes of Krishna, including especially the festival associated with Holi in the spring season and the Rasa Dance in autumn. Originally established in the Braj area, Haveli Sangit is now more widely practiced in the Vallabha headquarters in Nathadvana in Rajasthan. Many musicians known as *kirtankars*, attached to Vallabha or Pushtimarga temples and centers in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Mumbai, continue to perform Haveli Sangit.

Swami Haridas (ca 1500-1595), the founder of a Vaishnava lineage in Vrindaban, was another expert singer and musician of the Dhrupad style. Considered the father of Hindustani music, he was the teacher of the legendary Tansen, who sang at the court of Akbar in the 16th century and whose disciples were almost solely responsible for the transmission of Hindustani classical music through the Mughal period and thereafter. The various *gharanas* of Hindustani music today trace their lineages back to Tansen, or else to Swami Haridas or Baiju Bawra, both Hindu devotional singers. Beside the Seniya (direct from the family of Tansen), some of the famous *gharanas* are Gwalior, Agra, Patiala, Rampur, Kirana, Jaipur and Indore.

Musical sophistication: The illustrious Pandit Shivkumar Sharma demonstrates the fullest potential of the santoor

Tambura

The tambura (South India) or *tanpura* (North India) is a long-necked Indian lute, unfretted and round-bodied, with a hollow neck. The wire strings (four, five or, rarely, six) are plucked one after another in a regular pattern to create a drone effect. The larger *tanpuras* are called “males” and the smaller ones “females”. Soundclip: www.swarsystems.com/Downloads/Instruments/tanpura.mp3

Background drone: The South India tambura looks much like the North India tanpura

Shehnai

The *shehnai* is a tubular instrument of Persia, similar to the *nagaswaram* but smaller, that gradually widens towards the lower end. It usually has between six and nine holes and employs two sets of double reeds, making it a quadruple reed woodwind. By controlling the breath, various tunes can be played on it. The *shehnai* was created by improving upon the *pungi* (or *been*), the musical instrument played by snake charmers.

Soundclip: www.chandrakantha.com/articles/indian_music/shehnai.html

Nagaswaram

Louder than any other non-brass instrument in the world is the *nagaswaram* (also called *adaswaram*), one of the most popular classical instruments of South India. It is a large wind instrument with a hardwood body and a large flaring bell made of wood or metal. The *nagaswaram* is considered to be highly auspicious, and it is the key instrument which is played in almost all Hindu marriages and temples in South India. The instrument is usually played in pairs and accompanied by a double-headed drum called *tavil*. Soundclips: www.sawf.org/audio/kalyani/karaikurichi.ram

Santoor

The santoor is a trapezoid-shaped hammered dulcimer often made of walnut, with seventy strings. The lightweight, specially shaped mallets (*mezrab*), also of walnut, are held between the index and middle fingers. A typical santoor has two sets of bridges, providing a range of three octaves. Like other forms of the hammered dulcimer, the santoor is derived from the Persian *santur*; similar instruments are found in Iraq, Pakistan, Armenia, Turkey and other parts of Central Asia. The Indian santoor is more rectangular and can have more strings than the original Persian counterpart, which generally has 72 strings. The santoor is placed on the lap with its broad side closest to the body. Using both hands, the musician lightly strikes the strings with the mallets, sometimes in a gliding motion. The palm of one hand can be used to gently muffle strokes made with the other. The resultant melodies resemble the music of the harp, harpsichord or piano. Soundclip: www.worldmusicalinstruments.com/uploaded/snr.wav

Sarangi

In the Hindustani music tradition, the most important bowed string instrument is the sarangi of North India and Pakistan. Of all Indian instruments, it is said to best approximate the sound of the human voice. Carved from a single block of wood, the sarangi has a box-like shape, usually around two feet long and around half a foot wide. The lower resonance chamber is hollowed out and covered with parchment and a decorated strip of leather at the waist which supports the elephant-shaped bridge—which in turn supports the pressure of approximately 40 strings. Soundclip: www.worldmusicalinstruments.com/uploaded/srgi.wav

Ghatam

A ghatam, earthenware pot, is a percussion instrument used in the Carnatic musical tradition of South India. The artist uses the fingers, thumbs, palms and heels of the hands to strike the outer surface of the ghatam. An airy, low-pitched bass sound, called gumki, is created by hitting the mouth of the pot with an open hand or by pressing the mouth of the pot against the bare belly, which deepens the tone of the bass stroke. Different tones can be produced by hitting different areas of the pot with different parts of the hands. Ghatam usually accompanies a mridangam. Although the ghatam is the same shape as an ordinary Indian domestic clay pot, it is made specifically to be played as an instrument. Soundclip:

www.swarsystems.com/Downloads/Instruments/ghatam.mp3



Percussion at its best: The famous Vikku Vinayakram on the ghatam

Although Akbar and his immediate successors, Jehangir and Shahjahan, were generally supportive of Indian music in their courts, music was banned after the rise of the puritanical Aurangzeb. Many musicians fled the Delhi area to take up work in outlying regions like Tirth Raj Prayag (Lucknow), Varanasi, Vishnupur in Bengal and ultimately Kolkata, where British colonials had become increasingly interested in Indian music by the mid 1750s. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Muslim families of many musicians who carried forth and preserved the art of classical music through those troubled times. It was not until the early twentieth century that, due to the efforts of pioneer scholar-musicians like V.N. Bhatkhande and V.D. Paluskar, Indian music was “relearned” by many Hindu musicians and began to receive due recognition on the concert stage and from general educational institutions. Modern music academies like the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata (founded in 1978) are doing yeoman service in the preservation and dissemination of Hindustani music. Likewise, the Music Academy in Chennai has carried forth the Carnatic tradition in the south.

Pan-Indian musical tradition

The musical texts and traditions cited above provided a common root for a pan-Indian musical tradition, setting standards of scale and rhythm systematization. This allowed Indian music to develop along very similar lines regardless of context or sectarian affiliation. Whether they believed in Nirguna (Absolute without qualities), Saguna (Absolute with qualities), Vaishnava, Saiva, Sakta or other Deities, all musicians drew from the same evolving corpus of musical genres, raga patterns, tala structures and assortment of instruments.

Music for religious purposes

Indian music performed for religious purposes focuses closely on the text and its clear pronunciation, at the same time maintaining established patterns of performance over many generations. Although melody and rhythm are important, musical virtuosity for its own sake is normally discouraged, as a distraction from the devotional purpose of the music, in Hindu temples and religious gatherings, unlike the developing classical traditions which place great emphasis on improvisation and technical mastery.

Religious musical sessions are usually observed as group enterprises, with participants seated on the floor. Generally a particular area in the home or temple, facing or adjacent to a Deity or picture, is designated for music. The lead singer reads from a hymnal—many of which have been published by various religious groups—with the group repeating afterwards in unison. The leader may also sing solo or with occasional refrains by the group.

Lead singers often accompany themselves on the harmonium. This is a floor version of the upright, portable reed organ used by 19th century Christian missionaries; but its metal reed is South Asian in origin, linked to the *pungi* or snake-charmer’s instrument, and is the basis for the Western harmonica and accordion.

Other instruments used in bhajan may include pairs of hand cymbals called *kartal* or *jhanjh*, drums such as the tabla, *pakhavaj*, dholak or *khole* and occasionally bells, clappers or tambourines. Bowed chordophones, such as the sarangi or *esraj*, may accompany

the singing, but the harmonium has tended to replace these. A background drone may be provided by a tambura, harmonium or *shruti* box, a small pumped instrument used in Carnatic music.

Modern bhajan

Nearly every Hindu religious gathering includes chanting or music; but in both India and the Hindu Diaspora, many earlier forms of devotional music are being supplanted by a looser style of bhajan. In the Bhakti tradition of class egalitarianism, bhajan sessions continue to stress openness to people of all social strata and are a frequent component of congregational rites in which there is a sharing of bhakti experiences.

Bhajan gatherings—whether male, female, or mixed—tend to be flexible regarding attendance and may take place anytime. Some bhajan sessions last continuously (24 hours) for several days, particularly in Bengal, where intensive *akhanda* (“unbroken”) sessions of Nam-Kirtan are regularly held. The atmosphere of the bhajan session fosters intimate and informal social relationships where all participants sit, sing, and eat together regardless of caste, gender or religious viewpoint.

Beginning with the chanting of Om, a bhajan session proceeds with invocations in Sanskrit in honor of a guru, master, or Deity, followed by sequences of bhajan songs that reflect the group’s distinct or eclectic religious outlook, sometimes punctuated by short sermons or meditative recitations of Sanskrit verses from scriptures. Toward the closing, an *arati* (flame-waving) ceremony is conducted as part of the puja (worship service), which includes offerings of food, flowers, incense, lamps, and the blowing of conches. The puja concludes with the passing of the flame and distribution of food, flowers and holy water to the devotees.

Bhajan can also be part of one’s private worship, in conjunction with chanting on rosary beads, singing to oneself during personal puja activities and the chanting of scripture. The rosary chanting of mantras, called *japa*, is not done in a singing style with a melody but normally rendered in declamatory fashion in one or two monotones. Indeed, from Vedic chanting to classical singing to bhajan, the power of the sustained musical tone or note within the Indian consciousness cannot be overemphasized.

As musical compositions, bhajan songs in the current context range from complex structures to simple refrains or litanies containing divine names. Most have their own

distinctive tune and rhythm that is easily followed by the public, though some are based on classical ragas and talas and require musical skill. The most common talas are up-tempo, such as *keherva*, eight beats roughly corresponding to a Western cut-time in 4/4. This rhythm, along with the use of the harmonium and the dholak drum, became prominent in the Muslim Sufi singing tradition known as Qawwali. The sixteen-beat *tin-tal* tala serves as a variable straight 4/4 time sequence with an accent on the first beat. Another common rhythm is *dadra*, a six-beat tala corresponding to Western 3/4 or 6/8.

One of the most refined forms of devotional music in India is the Padavali-Kirtan of Bengal. This form extends back almost 500 years to the time of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who is viewed as an incarnation of

Krishna. It combines recitation of religious narratives with songs composed by Bhakti saints in Bengali or Brajbuli language. The songs include short improvisatory phrases called *akhar* added into the song-texts by the singers themselves in order to interpret or reiterate the meaning in colloquial language for the benefit of the audience. The performers usually include one or more vocalists, a *khole* player (drummer), a hand cymbal player and sometimes a violinist or flautist.

The public or group singing of the names of God, as in Sita-Ram, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Radhe Shyam, Om Namah Sivaya, Jai Mata Di, etc., is very popular everywhere in India and is called Nam-Kirtan, Nam-Sankirtan or Nam-Bhajan. In the South, the Nama-Siddhanta tradition of Bodhendra, Sri Venkatesha and Sadguruswami developed a distinctive Advaitic tradition of Nam-Bhajan. Many South Indian bhajans are adaptations of these original songs. Sung to simple melodies accompanied by drums and cymbals, Nam-Kirtan or Nam-Bhajan expresses fervent devotion and serves as a means of spiritual release.

Religious and devotional music permeate the modern movements of Hindu leaders such as Swami Sivananda, Satya Sai Baba, Anandamayi Ma, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Rama, Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and many others. Bhajans are also widely performed, even among non-Indians and non-Hindus. A new style of improvised solo bhajan has entered the classical concert stage. The “Pop Bhajan” has achieved great success, along with devotional songs sung by playback singers in Indian films. Film *aratis* such as “Om Jaya Jagadish Hare” (heard in the Hindi film *Purab aur Paschim*) are now widely used in both home and temple worship ceremonies all over the world.

Conclusion

Indian music remains an extraordinarily significant component of all aspects of secular life and religious practice wherever Indian culture is present. It aids in maintaining cultural ties, religious faith and moral discipline. Performed by skilled musicians or lay enthusiasts, Indian music continues to serve as both a vehicle for entertainment and a source of spiritual renewal and ecstasy. Alongside the modern popular, film and bhajan forms, the traditional religious and devotional music endures in temples, shrines and domestic chapels throughout India and the Hindu diaspora. And India’s classical music is steadily gaining world attention on a serious scale.



Artist at work: Indian classical music maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia playing the bansuri flute. Soundclip: <http://cdbaby.com/cd/chauriasia4>

Flute

The bamboo flute is one of the oldest instruments of Indian classical music. Developed independently of the Western flute, it is simple and keyless; sliding the fingers over the holes allows for the ornamentation so important in raga-based music. There are two main varieties of Indian flutes: the *bansuri*, with six finger holes and one blowing hole, is used predominantly in Hindustani music; and the *venu* or *pullanguzhal*, with eight finger holes, is primarily used in Carnatic music.

Soundclip: www.chandrakantha.com/audio/bhajans/shiva_shankar.ram

Hindu music, now and into the future

Guy Beck is one of the first Americans to become proficient in the tradition of North Indian Hindustani vocal music and the first to appear in an All-India Music Conference (Tansen Sangit Sammelan, 1977, 1979, 1992). He has performed at the International Congress of Vedanta (1994), the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (1998) and at Oxford University (2001). He has performed on Radio Nepal (1980) and on Indian TV Doordarshan (1993).

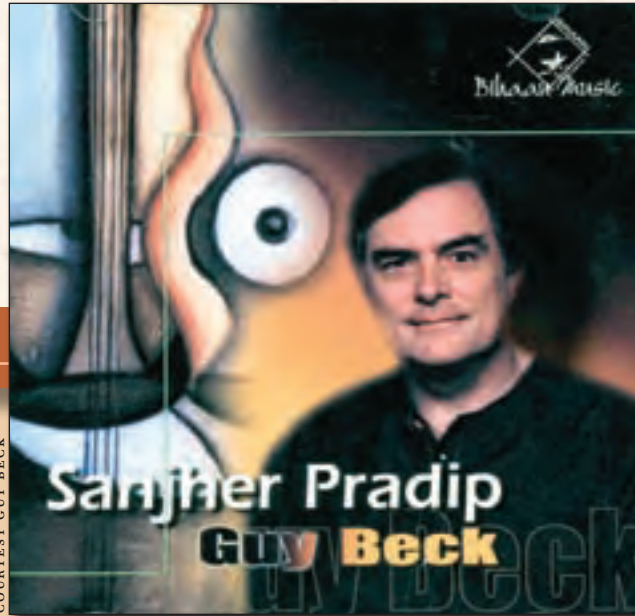
Dr. Beck, what is the current state of traditional Hindu music?

Indian classical music has slowly evolved into a polished art form that is being disseminated throughout India and abroad by a rapidly developing coterie of celebrity performers on radio, television, concert stages and on recorded media.

Prior to the twentieth century, the primary means of learning North Indian classical music was to be born into a *gharana* (see sidebar, p. 23) of musicians that were patronized by the royal courts, many of which were Muslim. Under British rule, the *gharanas* deteriorated rapidly. Beginning around 1910, a number of bold and aggressive pioneers among the Hindu intelligentsia, who had taken training from many of the Muslim Ustads (maestros), set out to establish

open-enrollment music schools that would allow students from all backgrounds to learn classical ragas and talas in vocal and instrumental music. The names of Pandit V.D. Paluskar and Pandit V.N. Bhatkhande stand out in this regard, as they worked hard to bring Hindustani classical music to the general population. All-India Music conferences were soon held that showcased great artists before the general public and paved the way for the concert hall recitals of today. During the period from 1930 to 1950, after the establishment of democratized learning facilities, classical music also became a source of patriotic pride among the Indian population, as it supported the freedom movement toward Indian Independence. Classical renditions of anthems like Vande Mataram ("Glory to Mother India") became widely popular, and there developed a close rapport between Hindu and Muslim musicians as they performed together and learned from one another.

The *gharana* system in the North and the *guru-shishya* system in the South maintained the traditional focus whereby a student would learn, perfect and perpetuate a distinct style of music. This is still observed by conservative artists; but there is a growing tendency, especially among younger musicians, to mix traditions and to give emphasis to creativity of



CD cover design painted by Dr. Beck's wife, Kajal Beck, an artist from Kolkata

My personal journey into Indian music began in childhood with a fascination for yoga and the stories of Rudyard Kipling. During my teenage years, as I studied classical piano, I noticed that several western composers, such as Liszt, Saint-Saens, Rimsky-Korsakov, etc., utilized oriental or Middle-Eastern sounding scales or modes in their music, producing different emotional effects that conjured up exotic lands and cultures.

When the music of Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan became popular in the 1960s, I felt similar effects in their renditions of certain ragas and improvisations, drawing me into their enchanting world of tone and rhythm. I had a natural urge to learn to play the sitar, and I even contemplated ordering one from a shop in New York. However, since I was already a pianist, and to some extent a singer in school choirs and ensembles, I decided to explore the vocal tradition of North Indian music, aided by the harmonium, a reed-driven portable organ often used to accompany Indian devotional and classical singing. I had first heard this instrument in the Hare Krishna Temples of New York and Los An-

geles, as well as at the yoga ashrams of the Divine Life Society and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Hearing the devotional singing and harmonium playing of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1972-1974 introduced me to the potency of the voice in rendering a vernacular devotional lyric. Furthermore, visits to Swami Nadabrahmananda at the Divine Life Society in New York, in 1975 and 1976, first exposed me to the classical North Indian music tradition of singing with harmonium and tabla accompaniment.

Swami Nadabrahmananda described music as "Nada-Brahman," or causal sound, and taught that it was meant for much more than mere entertainment. It was supposed to become a vehicle for attaining release

from rebirth and for realization of Brahman. That was all I needed to know to embark on a trip to India in search of a musical guru in 1976. I initially traveled far and wide—to Hardwar, Rishikesh, Mathura, Varanasi, Jaipur, etc.—but it seemed most prudent to settle in a large city and seek out a reputable music academy. Just as if I were an Indian native, I enrolled as a beginning student at the Tansen Music College in Kolkata in June 1976, fell in love with Indian music and remained there in intensive training until October, 1980, when I came back to America—making return visits in 1988 and 1992. My teacher and guru, Sri Sailen Banerjee, Principal of Tansen Music College, patiently trained me in the *Seniya* tradition ("Tansen") of *khayal* singing in various ragas. Early in 1978, he performed the Narabandan ceremony in his house, in front of an image of the Goddess Sarasvati, which officially initiated me as his disciple in the traditional manner.

The legacy of Tansen is important for the performing tradition of Hindustani music. Tansen was the principal singer in the court of Emperor Akbar during the 16th century.

expression. In many music schools, however, adherence to the purity of one's specific tradition remains the norm and guideline for the transmission of musical education, especially in the context of one-on-one music lessons.

How do you see this music fifty to a hundred years from now?

When Westerners first encountered Indian music, there was much potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. To the Western ear, habituated to soothing harmonies and chord resolutions, the modal sounds of the raga structures were unfamiliar; and the rhythms seemed too complex to grasp, as they ventured far beyond the 4/4, 3/4, or 6/8 timing to which Europeans had become accustomed. In terms of the vocalizations, there were very unflattering responses to the long *alaps* and *vistar* (development) characteristic of Dhrupad and Khayal passages, which sound like long extensions of vowels without meaning. But as European musicologists began to study the theory of Indian music, they were astonished to find great profundity and depth of religious meaning. Despite the fact that many of the musicians were Muslim, those Europeans who knew some Hindi could detect the presence of names and pastimes of Hindu Gods in the lyrics.

With the fall of the courts of the Hindu maharajas and Muslim nawabs toward the end of the 19th century, Indian musicians gradually made the transition to the concert stage, radio station and recording studio as these maestros became known to the general public. In the late nineteenth century, the harmonium was introduced from the West and rapidly became a staple in teaching Indian music to new students. It was well suited to that use, allowing ragas to be played in accompaniment of voice with greater ease than on the vina or sarangi. Although used in major music conferences since the beginning of the 20th century, for many years the harmonium was banned by the All India Radio

as unsuitable for Indian music. That ban was finally lifted during the 1990s. There continues to be opposition from conservative factions such as purists of Rabindra-Sangit (the musical rendering of the poems of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore).

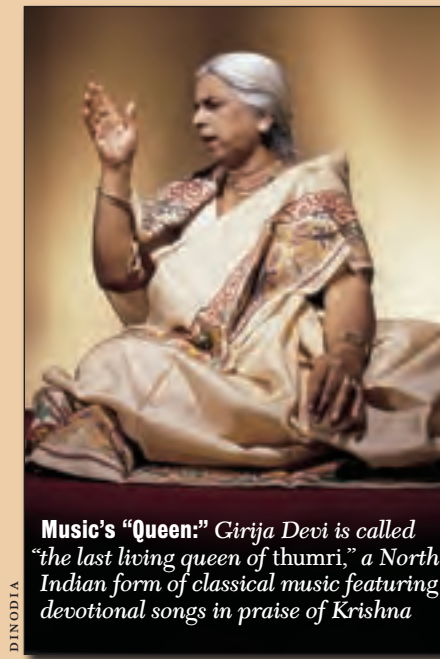
Since the middle of the 20th century there has been a consensus among teachers and institutions of Indian music to strictly maintain the integrity of the music according to the *gharana* and *guru-shishya* systems, which have preserved the purity of the various singing and playing styles over many generations. Indians were also, since Independence, developing a new-found pride in their heritage and culture. With the classical rendering of Vande Mataram, Indian classical music even became a symbol of the struggle for self-rule.

New types of Indian music are being created all the time. Western jazz and popular musicians have shown a growing fascination with Indian classical sounds, although many of these musicians do not take the trouble to get formal training. There have been many experiments in New Age and jazz fusion that have caught public attention. However, none of this has had much impact on the course of Indian classical traditions. There remains a solid group of players and listeners dedicated to the survival into the future of the rich traditions of the classical masters.

How would you assess the expertise and education of young Indian musicians? Today's younger musicians hold a great deal of responsibility in preserving and transmitting Indian classical music to the next generation. From what I have heard, there are many outstanding younger musicians very successfully delivering this product. For example, Pandit Ravi Shankar's daughter Anoushka is a fine sitar player who has recently performed at Carnegie Hall and is capable of attracting many new Western listeners. Pandit Ajay Cakravarti's daughter Kausiki is an out-

My Continuing Journey into the World of Indian Music, by Dr. Guy Beck

His style of Dhrupad singing played a pivotal role in the development of the vocal tradition of *khayal* as well as instrumental styles. Most Hindustani musicians today, including Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, trace their musical heritage to Tansen. Prof. Banerjee of the Tansen Music College continued this vocal tradition, as he was a disciple of Ustad Dabir Khan, a vocalist and vina player descended from the family of Tansen. As his student and disciple, I practiced vocal exercises four to six hours daily and reported to him twice a week for lessons. After an initial period of one and one-half years, he judged and evaluated me as ready to perform in a recital before the public. He arranged for my concert as part of the annual Tansen Sangit Sammelan (Tansen All-India Music Conference) in December of 1977 at the Mahajati Sadan in Kolkata. Many famous artists such as Ustad Bismillah Khan, Ustad Sharafat Khan, Pandit Jasraj and Sunanda Patnaik performed at this conference. I was nervous, but I rendered Rag Kedar in slow *vilambit* and in fast *drut* style to a large audience—and was given a standing ovation! There was wide newspaper and radio publicity, as this was the first time that an American had performed *khay-*



Music's "Queen:" Girija Devi is called "the last living queen of thumri," a North Indian form of classical music featuring devotional songs in praise of Krishna

al vocal music in an All-India conference.

After the initial success at the Tansen Music Conference, I began to supplement my music training by learning songs from other

maestros in Kolkata, especially Sri Ashish Goswami, who also sang in the Tansen and other local conferences. Goswami had been a serious student of a very famous musician, the late Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, for several years, and was willing to teach me his style and compositions. Weekly journeys over three years to his residence in a remote area of northern Kolkata for this training helped me to develop my vocal style. Sri Goswami also coached me for the state exams in music, which I passed in 1980.

Also in north Kolkata, from 1978-1980, I studied Dhrupad at the Chhandam Dhrupad Academy and studied the Padavali Kir-tan of Bengal from Prof. Mriganka Chakravarti of Rabindra Bharati University. And during a visit to Nepal in 1980, I was invited to sing on Radio Nepal and at the palace of King Vikram.

In 1978, I had spent four months in New Delhi, studying vocal music under the Dagar Brothers of Delhi, two renowned artists of Dhrupad. I also learned devotional bhajans from the Sangeet Kala Akademi. During this time I learned of a new music academy to be inaugurated soon in south Kolkata, in Tollygunge, called the ITC Sangeet Research Academy. Returning to Kolkata in

standing vocalist who is carrying on the authentic tradition of the Patiala Gharana. Ajay Cakravarti is also training a group of younger vocalists at his new school, Abhinandan, in Kolkata. This complements the great work of the Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata that has been training younger vocalists since 1978 under the original direction of Pandit Vijay Kichlu, and now under Pandit Amit Mukherjee. So, I see a very bright future for Indian classical music and its timeless message of peace and serenity.

How strong is enthusiasm for Indian music today? There are more classical music conferences today than ever before. There are also many more new venues for classical music than when I was studying in the 1970s. There has been a corresponding rise in the music industry and in the number of retailers of classical music. Previously, beside HMV Gramophone, few recording companies were willing to risk expanding their catalogs of classical artists. Today there are many more labels, with new ones on the rise. One new label, Bihaan Music based out of Kolkata, has been releasing CDs of many lesser-known classical artists, such as myself, as well as younger performers seeking a consumer market. When in Kolkata in 2004, I was told by the managers of both Music World, Inc. and Planet M, two of the biggest new chains of music and media retailing in India, that the sales of Indian classical music has risen so sharply that they have been overwhelmed with customers. This also includes many varieties of religious and devotional music. The musical genres in India are so finely divided that there really isn't a generic category known as "folk" music as understood in the West. There are types of Lok-Sangit, music with limited regional or linguistic outreach, that may be considered as folk, but most of this remains largely unrecorded today.

Is there enthusiasm for Indian music in the Western audience? Many recall that before the popularization of Pt. Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan in the Western music scene in the 1960s, hardly anyone in the West had heard of Hindustani classical music. Then it became something of a fad that was combined with the emerging hippie subculture. I remember speaking with Pandit Ravi Shankar in Kolkata in 1979, and he sincerely regretted that his music was still associated with the drug culture in the US and

had been stereotyped as a kind of soundtrack for the psychedelic experience. I had attended several of his US concerts in the 70s, and his statements rang true. But as I studied the tradition further in India, I quickly realized that it had nothing to do with artificial intoxication, but had its own euphoric dimension completely unrelated to rebellious underground cultures. Listening to sitar music was actually kind of an "elite" occupation.

In order for Indian music to receive the respect and acclaim that it deserves in the West, these stereotypes associated with hippie



PHOTOS BY DINODIA

Music is divine: Lord Ganesha, in gilded marble, plays the flute

culture must be broken through proper media attention. Sadly, as of today, I have not seen or heard any concert or interview broadcast on network (or cable) TV in respect of Indian classical music or its history. We are long overdue in this country for a proper documentary on public television, A&E or the History Channel. There are many great masters of Indian music who are still alive and performing. Why hasn't Pandit Ravi Shankar appeared on any feature talk shows or investigative reports? I nominate him for the Kennedy Center award.

Life Story

May, I quickly applied for admission and was accepted in the first class of students.

This academy, formally inaugurated in September of 1978 and directed by Pandit Vijay Kichlu, had an excellent faculty which included such famous musicians as Pandit A. Kanan, Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan, Ustad Latafat Hussain Khan, Smt. Hirabai Barodekar and Smt. Girija Devi. Scholars like Pandit Ajay Cakravarti and Pandit Arun Bhaduri had begun their successful careers there.

I studied for a time with both Pandit Kanan and Pandit Kichlu; and following the demise of Sri Banerjee, I have had the honor of taking lessons from Pandit Arun Bhaduri, my present guru. Whenever I visit India, I continue taking lessons from Pandit Bhaduri, a senior guru at ITC, a Class A recording artist on All India Radio and a

singer of outstanding abilities.

The careful foundation that was laid by Sri Banerjee provided the solid basis upon which I have been able to go on learning newer styles and compositions. His axiom was that once one had learned a few ragas thoroughly, the sky was the limit.

Yet the political climate of that time in India had its own limits. In the seventies, the Government of India, under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was awarding one-year visas to American students who wished to study Indian culture. I availed myself of this opportunity, but had to renew the visa each year for the duration. My stay was finally exhausted when there were rumors that I was a CIA agent in disguise! Despite letters from my music teacher and other supporters, I was unable to convince the Government

of India Home Ministry of my innocent designs and was advised to return to the USA. I am very thankful that before my forced return, I had reached a level of competency to have performed in several All-India Music Conferences and on Radio Nepal and to have successfully passed the theoretical and practical exams for the five-year Sangit Bivakar degree of Indian Music awarded by the Government of West Bengal.

On my return to America, I enrolled in graduate study in Religious Studies at the University of South Florida and studied Musicology and Religion at Syracuse University, receiving a Ph.D. in 1989. During this period, I began giving lecture demonstrations on Indian music to fellow students and faculty. I started my teaching career at Louisiana State University in 1990 and have since

How have instruments evolved through the years? The same basic instruments that have been prominent in the last hundred years are still the most important in Hindustani and Carnatic music. However, innovative musicians have successfully brought in the violin, guitar, saxophone and even piano (to a limited extent), to the concert stage and recording studios. Even hybrid instruments are gaining a foothold. I recently performed a concert at the Snug Har-



A popular ensemble: A standard North Indian classical music concert might feature (from left to right) harmonium, flute, sitar, swaramandala and tabla. The harmonium (a Western import brought to India by the British) or reed organ is similar to a pipe organ. Sound is produced by air being pushed or sucked over free reed pipes, resulting in a sound not unlike an accordion.

bor Jazz Bistro in New Orleans with Andrew McLean on tabla and Tony Dagradi on saxophone. While I wasn't used to working with saxophone, the musician was capable of blending with the mood of the raga, and this innovation created many new effects. Andrew also played electric sitar by placing an electronic sitar pick-up on his Fender Stratocaster! The crowd was delighted.

Will synthesizers have impact? While there has been the successful adoption of music synthesizers in pop music and to some extent in fusion, I don't believe that they will alter Indian classical music, which requires its own particular blend of acoustic sound to create and sustain the ideal listening experience. Music technology has advanced the access to good Indian sound beyond the need to acquire traditional instruments, however. The *tanpura* sound created by electronic devices like "Ragini Pro" and the tabla sounds of "Tal Tarang" are excellent, and remove the need of carrying around the larger instruments for informal use. Though nothing can substitute the real thing on the concert stage, electronic instruments are useful for practicing and small gatherings, and thus help to sustain the interest and accessibility of Indian classical music. The Ali Akbar Khan School of Music in San Francisco, besides providing lessons and instruction, is performing an important task in stocking and selling all types of acoustic and electronic instruments.

What do you consider the most religious musical expression?

There is much folk music in India that appears non-religious, such as wedding songs, work songs, recitations of village life, love songs, etc. Seen in the context of the Hindu world view, these also can be considered "religious." However, as most of the classical song lyrics are directly based on theological themes (i.e., Krishna's pastimes, praise of Siva or the Goddess, etc.), then I would place these compositions squarely within the religious category.

How do you see information technology impacting the music? The rapid rise in technological innovations has made music much more available (on the Web, iPods, etc.), making it possible for many individuals, who otherwise would have no exposure, to learn about and listen to Indian classical music. Many new CD recordings of the old masters have been released, or re-released, providing an unprecedented opportunity for collectors and connoisseurs, as well as newcomers, to gain free access to many treasures. The world community is thus much more interconnected than ever before; however, some religious ideologies reject technology and musical development. I think that major changes must be made in the basic structure of human values worldwide if Indian music is to reach those segments of the population. Furthering the goal of mutual understanding, 2006 saw the publication of my second book, *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions* (www.wlu.ca/press/Catalog/beck.shtm).

taught at Loyola University, the College of Charleston and Tulane University, where I am currently affiliated (although this year I am teaching at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington).

In each place, I performed a series of concerts and lectures, which led to the recording of two CDs: *Sacred Raga*, recorded by Prof. Sanford Hinderlie of the College of Music at Loyola University under the STR Digital Record label in 1999 and *Sanjher Pradip*, recorded at Plus Good Studios in Baton Rouge, LA, but released in Kolkata in 2004 by Bihaan Records. I remain dedicated to spreading the art of Indian music. (see www.strdigital.com/beck.htm and www.bihaanmusic.com/guy-beck.htm)

For centuries, the intellectual, cognitive and spiritual dimensions of Indian philoso-

phy and science have positively influenced the slow but gradual rise of world civilization. I believe that India's vast cultural storehouse, especially its classical and devotional music, will come to play an increasingly important role in the world's much-needed evolution toward peace and harmony. From its sacred origins in Vedic sacrifices and Hindu temples, Indian music is already considered one of the great artistic contributions to world culture.

Since the arrival in the West of Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan in the 1950s, several American and European performers have taken up instruments like the sitar and sarod and have become well regarded. Yet, the scarcity of American vocalists of Indian music has precluded the process of deep cultural assimilation, since

the underlying basis of Indian music is the vocal or singing tradition.

As one of very few American-born students of Hindustani or northern Indian vocal music, I have been working to expand and further the aim of deeper cross-cultural fertilization through lecture/demonstrations of Indian music at American colleges and universities, pointing out that Indian vocal music can be effectively learned and appreciated by non-Indians and Westerners. By traversing cultural boundaries and helping to overcome the initial obstacles of language and intonation differences, such presentations may help to foster global harmony and world peace through promoting a much wider and deeper appreciation of Vedic and Hindu ideals and cultural traditions.

E-MAIL DR. BECK AT BECKG@TULANE.EDU.

East Meets West

RAVI SHANKAR, BORN APRIL 7, 1920, in Varanasi, is the most famous sitarist in recent history, renowned for compositions of varying musical styles and techniques. He is best known for his pioneering work in bringing the Indian classical music tradition to the West. This was aided by association with The Beatles (notably George Harrison) as well as his own personal charisma. With a career spanning six decades, he holds the Guinness Record for the longest international career.

Ravi Shankar renounced a dance career to learn sitar and began performing in 1938. In the 1950s, he became music director of All India Radio. He has written two concertos for sitar and orchestra; violin-sitar compositions for Yehudi Menuhin and himself; and music for flute virtuoso Jean Pierre Rampal, for Hozan Yamamoto, master of the shakuhachi (Japanese flute) and for koto virtuoso Musumi Miyashita. He has composed extensively for films and ballets in India, Canada, Europe and the United States, including *Chappaqua*, *Charly*, *Gandhi* and the *Apu Trilogy*. Classical composer Philip Glass acknowledges Shan-

kar as a major influence, and the two collaborated to produce "Passages," a recording of compositions in which each reworks themes composed by the other.

Shankar married Annapurna Devi, daughter of his guru, Baba Allauidin Khan, and sister of Ali Akbar Khan, in Almora. The marriage produced one son, Shubhendra Shankar, but ended in divorce. He be-

came involved with American concert promoter Sue Jones; they did not marry, but their union produced one daughter, **Norah Jones**. He later married an admirer, Sukanya Kotiyan (born Rajan), with whom he had a second daughter, **Anoushka** (photo above).

Anoushka and Norah are also musicians. Anoushka is a sitarist who performs frequently with Shankar, in addition to having her own recording career. Jones has achieved considerable professional success, including several Grammy Awards. Shankar is also the uncle of late sitarist **Ananda Shankar**.



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Ustad Alla Rakha and Zakir Hussain

Ustad Alla Rakha was born in 1919 in the village of Phagwal, near Jammu, India. He began studying tabla at the age of 12. The combination of good training and hours of disciplined practice culminated in skills that would make him one of the greatest tabla players of all time. He began his musical career as an All India Radio performer in Mumbai, playing the station's first tabla solo. From 1943 through 1948, he composed music and performed; but it was during the 1960's, with the legendary Ravi Shankar, that he achieved his greatest fame in the West. He was not only a masterful accompanist with flawless timing and sensitivity, he was also a uniquely creative soloist and an electric showman. Alla Rakha passed away on February 3, 2000 at the age of 80.

Following family tradition, Alla Rakha's son, **Ustad Zakir Hussain**, has become a most renowned tabla virtuoso. Zakir has won many awards and recognitions for his musical contributions. His performances have gained worldwide fame.

John McLaughlin, also known as **Mahavishnu John McLaughlin**, is a highly accomplished guitarist from Doncaster, Yorkshire, England, who came to prominence with the Miles Davis group during the late 1960s. He helped form the The Mahavishnu Orchestra in the 1970s.

The band was respected for their technical virtuosity and complex fusion of jazz and rock with a strong Indian influence. McLaughlin was influenced in his conception of this band by his studies with his guru, Sri Chinmoy, who encouraged him to take the name "Mahavishnu."

McLaughlin later worked with Shakti, which combined Indian music with jazz. In addition to amalgamating Western and Indian

music, Shakti also blended the Hindustani and Carnatic music traditions, since drummer Zakir Hussain (see left) is from the North and the other Indian drummers used were from the South. In recent times Shakti reincarnated as Remember Shakti, featuring eminent Indian musicians such as **U. Srinivas, V. Selvaganesh, Shivkumar Sharma** and **Hariprasad Chaurasia**.

A Bond Born of Music

Ty Burhoe, a disciple of the great tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain (see page 33) since 1990, works with a broad range of artists including Art Lande, Krishna Das, Bill Douglas, Kai Eckhardt, Curandero, Ustad Sultan Khan, Bela Fleck, Kitaro and many more. Ty also teaches drumming at music and yoga retreats around the world, composes sound tracks and performs for film and video.

What attracted you to the tabla and how did you get to know Zakir Hussain? I first heard about tabla when I was 27 years old and just graduating from college with a psychology degree. I wanted to learn some kind of drumming and had tried several things, including playing in a Balinese gamelan; but it wasn't until I heard Ustad Zakir Hussain that I fell in love with the tabla. I couldn't believe how deep the fusion of melodic and rhythmic expression could be within a single instrument, especially a drum. Inspired by Ustad Zakir Hussain's virtuosity, learning the tabla became an obsession for me. Although most Indians would never consider starting classical musical training at my age, I had a gut



feeling that this single pursuit would redirect my entire life. It did. I became focused on practicing and listening to everything I could get my hands on. I never thought I would ever have the blessing of studying with Ustad Zakir Hussain, but I did. My training with him began in 1990. I would drive 1,400 miles from Boulder, Colorado, to his home in Marin County, California, for a single lesson—then turn around and drive home. I was living very simply in a

cabin in the mountains. Because I was a single father, I could only make brief trips. My devotion to tabla and Zakir was difficult to explain, even to my friends and family. I was pretty much ready to do anything to make sure I was practicing every day. I never missed my lesson-pilgrimage. I felt truly blessed—as if a greater force than my own was at work. In this way music became the guiding force in my life, and has remained so to this day.

What are the differences for you between accompanying kirtan (devotional singing) and other more formal forms of music?

In most every musical environment, an artist generally works to refine and expand his ability to express himself on his chosen instrument. A soloist who can express the inspired complexity and multiplicity of human feeling is considered a maestro. In *kirtan*, however, complexity becomes a distraction. *Kirtan* is a call-and-response between the divine and our spirit. It can be a very intimate and spiritual practice. I love the environment of the *kirtan* because there is no real separation between being a performer and listener. Although *kirtan* is

group singing, each participant is directly involved in his or her own personal spiritual practice. I feel blessed to be a part of this process, and the best way I can serve is to understand how my roll as a timekeeper is like a glue. The drum provides the pulse which keeps everyone in sync. My main duty is to lay down a solid and good-feeling heartbeat. I am also a great lover of traditional and world music. I feel that both of these worlds are very important.

Can you share your thoughts on the relationship of music, improvisation and spiritual life? I would say that "sound" is certainly a key way in which I relate directly to the divine. For many years I have been fascinated with the physics of sound, the implications of semantics and the more esoteric path of Nada Brahma. Since I was very young, music has been a major source of inspiration. Music became a kind of "medicine for my heart." I've been finding that really listening to something can be a type of "yoga" in and of itself. Simply dropping our preferences, in order to let the artist show us new landscapes, becomes a process of stretching and expanding our

perspectives and inner experiences. This is especially true when an artist improvises. It is amazing to listen to an artist who pushes the bounds of his or her personal experience and vision. This "risk taking" demands being in the moment.

Do you still study with Zakir Hussain?

Absolutely, I will always be taking lessons with Guruji. To me, the freedom and power he has developed seems to have no limit, either in the outward musical sense or in the inward spiritual sense. My relationship with him is one of devotion and thus has no sense of beginning or end. Every time I sit with him, I become a beginner again. As a teacher, he is able to point out weaknesses in a student's performance that the student cannot see. This kind of in-depth teaching is invaluable for the sincere student. My 15 years of training with Zakir have completely changed my life. It is because of him that I started playing, and it is his guidance that influenced my decision to make a profession out of my passion for music. I feel very blessed to have been taken in by him. In my mind, we've only just begun our journey together.



Trilok Gurtu was born into a highly musical family in Mumbai. His grandfather was a noted sitar player and his mother, **Shobha Gurtu**, is a famous classical singer. Trained classically on tabla from the age of four and, today, equally proficient in both Eastern and Western percussion techniques, Trilok is recognized as the Indian tabla maestro who has most successfully bridged the gap between Eastern and Western percussion to merge the best of both.



Preserving a treasure: (clockwise from above) Bundles inscribed with the Krishna Yajur Veda and commentaries. Library pundit demonstrates the writing process. The metal scribe is held in the right hand and rests in a notch cut in the left thumb nail. The right hand applies pressure while the left thumb shapes the letters. (inset) Tools for cutting and scribing the leaves. Librarians sort requested manuscripts.



ALL PHOTOS: M. U. DEVAYAN



HERITAGE

A Royal Library

The Thanjavur kings created one of India's greatest palm-leaf manuscript collections

THE SARASVATI MAHAL LIBRARY IS a cavernous building not far from Thanjavur's famous Brihadisvara Temple, with its 200-foot central tower built by Rajaraja Chola in the 11th century. Now nestled in a warren of narrow streets, the library was established by Raghunatha Nayak in the early 17th century and maintained by successive kings over the years. Serfoji II ceded the kingdom to the British East India Company in 1799, but his far-reaching cultural contributions to Thanjavur included a major expansion of the library.

Under British rule, Serfoji retained the right to manage the temples and related activities, including this library. Serfoji knew Sanskrit, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and English. He had a particular interest in medicine, specifically ophthalmology, and was an accomplished eye surgeon. Through his patronage from 1798 to 1832, Thanjavur became a major scientific, literary and cultural center. The Thanjavur school of painting, for example, remains influential to this day.

The main library is housed in an im-

mense L-shaped room several hundred feet long, with a 20-foot ceiling. Here 46,000 manuscripts, both palm leaf and paper, are kept in tall cabinets and on long shelves. In addition to scripture, the collection contains documentation of the kingdom, such as land transactions recorded on narrow leaves three to four feet long. One huge section is devoted to medical texts. Most of the works—36,923 manuscripts, including some not available anywhere else—are in Sanskrit. There are 3,780 texts in Tamil and 3,060 in Marathi.

Four dozen workers scattered throughout the library are involved in preservation and cataloging. A visitor is struck with the enormity of their task and the vulnerability of the collection. The leaves are perfect tinder—moreover, they are treated with lemon oil as a preservative, which is flammable. The fire response system comprises just a few stations, each with a single extinguisher and two buckets of sand. Also, as the palm leaves are organic, they are in a continuing process of decomposition. Under the kings, the bundles were regularly recopied every hundred years or so. In the 19th century, that process ceased. Paper manuscripts, created since that time, are even less durable.

The library has been microfilming the collection since 1980, and has plans for full digitization. One method is to use the new high-megapixel digital cameras to photograph the leaves. A study (www.ias.ac.in/currensci/may25/articles12.htm) by Sangeetha Menon and George Williams of the National Institute of Advanced Studies concluded, "Digital camera technology is far cheaper than conventional preservation methods (microfilm), and the learning time is minimal." The government of India and a number of private institutions are devising projects to use this technology (see www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/books/agamas/palm-leaf-demo/) to preserve these ancient, fragile and priceless collections.

WEBSITE: WWW.SARASVATIMAHALLIBRARY.TN.NIC.IN

How writing technology changed a script:

(left) The Tamil script evolved from straight lines in the 3rd century BCE (second to top row) into a rounded script more easily etched on ola leaves; (right) neatly packaged bundles of Sanskrit texts.

சரஸ்வதி Century	தமிழ்
கி.மு. 3	† [d h C I h
கி.மு. 2	† [d h C I h
கி.மு. 3	† d Z h
கி.மு. 4	† d 3
கி.மு. 5	† d C 3 3
கி.மு. 6	† d 3 < ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 7	† d 3 < ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 8	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 9	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 10	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 11	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 12	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 13	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮
கி.மு. 14	† d 3 ௮ ௮ ௮



M. U. DEVAYAN

To Catch Your Eyes

The traditional bindi is an expression of one's religion and a symbol of our spiritual sight

AH, THE BINDI, THAT UNMISTAKABLE dot on the forehead of a Hindu. It is worn by the woman to attract and by the saint to display detachment; mysterious to Westerners, revered by mystics, traditional to all Hindus. The most visible, in-your-face symbol of Hinduism, the bindi can be as multifaceted, lofty or mundane as the all-encompassing religion that it represents.

The use of the bindi is as old in Indian life as it is widespread. Though many millions wear it every day, few know much about its significance, mystical meanings or varied forms. In all cases, however, the bindi is a display of one's faith, a proud statement that one follows the great Sanatana Dharma.

Jewels and ashes

The word *bindi* comes from the Sanskrit *bindu*, meaning "a drop, small particle, dot." Mystically, it represents the "third eye," or the "mind's eye," which sees into the spiritual world. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and cultivate this spiritual vision, to perceive and understand beyond physical appearances. Hindu scriptures have a powerful place for the dot. It is said that, in the beginning, all 36 *tattvas*—the primeval categories of existence that comprise the whole universe—were condensed in one single dot, called the Parabindu. One could claim the bindi to be India's prescient acknowledgment of cosmic singularity.

Deep metaphysical roots have never been a barrier for esoteric wisdom to manifest in a Hindu's daily life. The *bindu* takes a much more known and visible form as the widely-known, traditional mark that is worn by most Hindu women. Over the centuries, feminine creativity turned the simple dot into works of art—princesses had theirs made in the most intricate jeweled patterns; delicate designs are painted on a bride's forehead for her wedding; and the modern cosmetic industry offers them in endless shapes, styles and colors, even including innovative stick-ons.

The other end of the spectrum has the devout Hindu religious man and women, and often rishis and saints, piously wearing the bindi on their foreheads as part of a *tilaka*. A *tilaka* is a mark made with clay, sandalwood paste or, in some cases, ashes, using sacred *vibhuti*. It indicates affiliation



with a specific denomination of Hinduism. Vaishnavas, who worship God as Vishnu and His incarnations, wear a vertical V-shaped tilaka called *urdhwapundra* made from clay or sandalwood paste. The Saivite, who worship God as Siva, wears the *tripundra*, three horizontal strips of holy ash with a red bindi between the eyebrows or centered on the forehead. There are countless variations, and all honor the central dot.



In fashion and faith: Hindus have worn forehead marks with pride and distinction for thousands of years

Roaring red

It is said in common lore that a bindi on the forehead is supposed to enchant the lover. Poems have been written through time about a lady's beautiful bindi. Whether the seductive powers of the bindi are fictional or real, it does catch people's attention and draws their eyes, which is certainly true of a lady's prospective husband.

An old custom that well states the attractive power of a red bindi is that a widow, in her modesty, will not wear it unless she is willing to find a new husband. She will still wear the bindi, symbol of her religion, but it will be black and unassuming. In northern India, only married women will wear bindis.

Red in Hindu symbology represents shakti, power and energy, a fact that finds a parallel in many of the world's religions. In human color psychology, red is associated with emotions that stir the person, including anger, passion and love. For Saivite and Shakta mystics, red signifies the manifest shakti, while white stands for transcendent Siva.

The point between a person's eyebrows is the seat of the *ajna* chakra, the energy center present in all humans that controls and evokes divine insight. Its name means

"command." A common yogic discipline is to focus awareness on that point, letting all other thoughts subside. As one goes deeper in mystical contemplation toward samadhi, the physical eyes naturally roll a little upwards, as if focusing on the inner third eye. It is said that the energy accumulated by an adept yogi in meditation will manifest in the *ajna* chakra as wisdom, divine sight and power.

The bindi and the tilaka are also used in pujas, ceremonies that honor and invoke God and the Gods. During puja, the red powder is applied to the Deity and then passed to all who attend as *prasadam*, blessed offerings that carry the God's vibration. It is following a puja, in fact, that most Hindu men will be found wearing the sacred marks. A temple *murti* will have many bindis applied to it, in addition to the customary one on the spot of the *ajna* chakra, accounting for the manifold powers, shaktis, that a Deity emanates.

There is no one recipe to make the red *kumkum* powder used for a bindi. Common ingredients include turmeric, lime (calcium carbonate, not the fruit) and various natural and man-made dyes, some of which have proven to be toxic. A silent watcher, the *kumkum* has travelled thousands of years through time until today. Hindu religious stories mention it in their ancient pages: Radha turned her *kumkum* tilaka into a flame-like design; Draupadi, in despair and disillusion, wiped the *kumkum* off her forehead at Hastinapur.

Today, a bindi can even be applied as a "sticker-bindi" made of felt, an easy-to-use substitute. The sticker-bindi is found in many creative forms and different sizes: sequined, dusted with gold powder, studded with beads or glittering stones. Some are exotic creations, using thin metal encrusted with jewels. Even the red color is not necessarily the norm in today's fashion, and many women choose a color to match their saris. But beware that serious skin reactions have occurred from the glue.

The Western fad

The elegance and silent appeal of the bindi has not gone unnoticed in such places as Hollywood or London. Singing star Madonna has sported a bindi in her show—not to mention accoutrements derived from a variety of religions. Actress Uma Thurman has also been spotted in New York with a jeweled one.

The bindi has even been used as a tool for promoting religious tolerance. In 1998, a documentary was produced in Canada called "Just a Little Red Dot," telling the



Noble greeting: Prince Charles gamely receives a bindi from Swami Atmaswarupdas of BAPS Swaminarayan

story of a little Hindu girl who was assailed by classmates because of her bindi and how her teacher used the incident to teach the class tolerance and respect for differences.

From the foreheads of saints to the make-up of brides, in the East or in the West, the bindi is a humble dot with many faces and no boundaries. A truly apt symbol for broad, all-encompassing Hinduism.

Seeta Lakhani of London, England, contributed to this article.

A Bindi for the Guest

A non-Hindu may first encounter the bindi when visiting a Hindu home, temple or ashram. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* encapsulates the Hindu attitude toward care of the guest in the statement, *atithi devo bhava*, meaning "Revere your guest as God." The reverence starts right at the front door as a guest is adorned with a bindi upon the threshold, just as one adorns the Deity in the temple or home shrine.

Application of the bindi is the minimal portion of a larger ceremony wherein a guest to a traditional home will be greeted with an offering of rice and waving of a lit oil lamp, usually by two women. When visiting a temple, it may be the head priest or, in case of Prince Charles' visit to the Swaminarayan Mandir in Naesden, England (above), the head swami, who applies the bindi. In the home, however, the welcome is under the purview of the women of the family, and serves to protect the home's spiritual vibration.

In ancient times, the greeting of a guest included not only the bindi, rice and lamp, but foot-washing, offering of new clothes and more. When guests arrived for the coronation of Yudhishthira, Lord Krishna personally attended to these duties.



Perspective: Viewing Tamil Nadu as if hovering above Sri Lanka, devotees of Lord Murugan follow the mystically circuitous route of His six-temple pilgrimage, the spiritual power of each bringing them deeper within themselves and closer to Him. Murugan looks on, blessing devotees as He flies through the ether on His peacock. (inset) A map of South India showing the temple towns.



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Journey to Murugan

A sacred pilgrimage to the *arupadaiveedu*, Lord Karttikeya's six renowned temples in the land of Tamil Saivism



THE DEVOTEE WHO SEEKS THE DARSHAN OF LORD MURUGAN, the Tamils' most beloved God, no doubt finds Him at all of His temples. But those who really want to get Murugan's attention set out on an unforgettable journey, one both within and without. For those who seek His blessings for the upward climb of kundalini, the *arupadaiveedu*, meaning "six encampments," is the pilgrimage of choice. The destinations of this journey are first Tirupparankundram, then Tiruchendur, followed by Palani, Swamimalai, Tiruttani and finally Palamuthirsolai. The fact that this sequence is far from geographically convenient is part of the austerity that comes with any true pilgrimage.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, sent a number of his monks on this sacred pilgrimage in the 1970s,

80s and 90s. In December, 2006, his successor, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, continued the tradition, sending three monks from his Hawaii monastery, including one of the magazine's editors, to South India for the pilgrimage. This Educational Insight has been developed from their collective experience. It contains spiritual and practical information on the pilgrimage to serve as inspiration for devotees of Lord Murugan to set out upon it and tips for a successful journey.

Skanda, as Murugan is called in the *Vedas*, was born of a red spark from Supreme God Siva's third eye. This Deity of the spiritual path is held in highest regard by the Tamil people, who call Him *Murugan*, meaning "beautiful." Thousands of His temples dot the landscape of South India and Sri Lanka—and in modern times, ev-

erywhere the Tamil people have migrated, including England, Germany, Fiji, Australia, America, Canada, Malaysia and France. Of all the Murugan temples in Tamil Nadu, the six in this pilgrimage are most revered. They were collectively immortalized by Saint Nakkirar in his second-century song *Tirumurugarrupadai*, hailed as one of the most important works of Tamil Sangam literature. And they were given special renown in the songs of saints Arunagirinathar, Kumaraguruparar and other luminaries.

A lyrical narrative, both philosophical and theological, *Tirumurugarrupadai* was instrumental in propagating Murugan worship in its time. Well known today, it is often sung by devotees as a hymn of protection. Saint Nakkirar enunciates a concept central to the Saiva Siddhanta theology of South India, that in the act of spiritual liberation, God's initiative is as intense and indispensable as that of the devotee. Nakkirar invokes the grace of Murugan to take the initiative and shower grace upon the seeker who visits His six abodes.

The significance goes beyond Saint Nakkirar's having woven the temples into his enchanting poem in specified order. There is metaphysical meaning, too. Yogis of yore determined that each temple stimulates a specific chakra in the subtle body of man: Tirupparankundram lights a fire in the *muladhara* chakra governing memory at the base of the spine. Tiruchendur moves the next chakra, *svadhishtana*, below the navel, governing reason. Palani animates the *manipura* chakra of willpower at the solar plexus. Swamimalai spins the heart chakra, *anahata*, the center of direct cognition. Tiruttani opens the *vishuddha* chakra of divine love at the throat, and Palamuthirsolai electrifies the third eye of divine sight, *ajna chakra*.

Nowadays, each temple is thronged by thousands, or tens of thousands, of devotees every day, and many more during annual festivals. Multitudes of sincere seekers of every generation since Nakkirar have wended their way through the life-transforming experience of the *arupadaiveedu* pilgrimage. At the outset of *Tirumurugarrupadai*, Nakkirar assures us, "With a heart imbued with love and purity, and a will tuned to do His bidding in virtuous acts, if you seek His abodes, then shall be fulfilled all your cherished desires and objects."

Tirupparankundram

Mount of Beauty



THE DEVOTEE IN SEARCH OF LORD MURUGAN'S GRACE BEGINS the fortnight-long six-temple pilgrimage at Madurai, the famous temple city, an ancient capital of the Pandya kings and hub of South Indian art, literature, architecture and sculpture for millennia. This "Athens of the Orient" was the seat of the Tamil Sangams, producing some of the finest philosophical treatises and exquisite, heart-melting devotional poetry during a golden age of Tamil civilization.

We arrive in Madurai via a short flight from Chennai, though it is more common to travel the 460 kilometers by overnight train or bus. Driving north into the city from Madurai's modest airport, the pilgrim is blessed with the sight of Tirupparankundram to the West. This hill, easily seen perched 550 feet above the otherwise flat landscape, is a massive granite rock at which Lord Murugan's first encampment is situated.

Madurai is given life by the famous Meenakshi-Sundareshvara temple, which lies at its center. This vast citadel, rebuilt by the Nayak kings between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, thrives with the constant bustle of hundreds of thousands of worshippers every day. Lodgings of all grades are abundant in the city, most of

them located conveniently near the temple.

Traditionally, the devotee visits a Ganesha shrine at the inception of the *arupadaiveedu* pilgrimage. Our Gurudeva advised going to the massive, obstacle-removing Ganesha, called Mukkuruni Vinayagar, inside the Meenakshi-Sundareshvara temple itself. So, after getting settled, we depart for the east entrance of Madurai's massive temple complex.

Resolving to follow the strictest protocol on our *yatra*, we go only to the temple's Ganesha shrine, respectfully resisting the powerful pull to have darshan at the main Siva and Shakti shrines. From this moment on, until the pilgrimage is complete, we will visit no

temples or shrines other than the six prescribed Murugan temples. Proceeding to the *kodimaram* (flagpole) and turning right before the main shrine, we wend our way through the labyrinthine complex and soon stand before the ten-foot-tall *murti* of Mukkuruni Vinayagar. The priest attending the shrine performs a short *arati* on our behalf. This is a quiet area, and devotees nearby are meditating on the Lord of Obstacles. Sitting with eyes closed, we beseech His inner assistance with the sacred trek we are about to undertake to His brother's abodes. Sounds of all kinds overwhelm our ears: priests



Holy hill: (above) Tirupparankundram hillock with the temple at its base; the entrance tower can be seen at right. (top) The temple entrance bustles with devotees.

If with piety and merit of former birth thou doth aspire to the goal of liberation, strive for the wisdom that radiates from virtuous deeds, and may yearning sweet for His roseate feet animate thy mind and lead thee to attainment divine. TIRUMURUGARRUPADAI, LINES 62-67



chanting, bells ringing, votaries singing, children playing and the shuffling feet of countless devotees streaming by as they move from shrine to shrine for darshan.

The first day of our pilgrimage now complete, Lord Murugan's first abode is on our minds' horizon. Arising early the next morning, we drive just seven kilometers southwest to Tirupparankundram, a large hill and favorite resort of Murugan, extolled as a mount of beauty in Saint Nakkirar's poem. In fact, this is where the poet wrote his famous hymn. Ratna Navaratnam tells us in *Karttikeya, The Divine Child*, "The beautiful setting of this hill with its lotus ponds, trailing carpets of flowers and swarms of bees and water fronts are described in *Tirumurugarrupadai*," which in Tamil means "Holy Guide to Lord Murugan."

The Tirupparankundram Arulmigu Sri Subrahmanya Swami Tirukkoyil lies at the foot of the hill, on the north side. Entering the temple through the tall, ornately carved and colorful *gopuram*, we ascend steps leading through pillared halls, rich with sculpture and art, a windfall of being near the central hub of Madurai. We chose the holiest month of the Tamil calendar, for our pilgrimage. This is the same time when Ayyappaswami devotees from across South India perform their annual *yatra* to Sabarimalai in Kerala. Many of them follow the strict practice of paying their respects at every temple along the way, so this popular temple is brimming with excited, black- and orange-clad followers of Ayyappaswami.

The entire cave-like shrine, including the *murtis*, is carved right out of the side of the granite hill. The temple precincts grow tighter and tighter as devotees ascend toward the inner sanctum. Squeezing together with hundreds of others, winding their way through a maze of metal railings designed to keep everyone flowing along in an organized fashion, worshipers arrive at the inner sanctum. We experience an odd juxtaposition of nearness and swiftness in this process. Moving single-file past the shrine, we find ourselves a few feet from Lord Murugan—and for a mere mo-

Agamic worship: (left) Priests perform daily abhishekam to the festival Deity of Arumugam, Lord Murugan with six faces; (right) boys learn ancient mantras from the Vedas and Agamas at the priest training school, pathashala, located in the temple precincts

ment, we can almost reach out and touch Him.

Murugan is known as Subrahmanya Swami at Tirupparankundram. Our guide, a boy who attends the temple's *pathashala*, explains that this is the famed site where, according to legend, Murugan married Devayanai after defeating the demon Surapadman. This marriage symbolizes the devotee's uniting with God after transcending his own lower nature. The rock-cut shrine depicts the story of the procession of Gods, seers, men and animals who came to this mount to witness the mystical wedding. Holding His *vel*, or lance, Murugan is enshrined with Devayanai at His side, as well as Sage Narada, who performed the wedding. Above are the Sun and Moon; below are goats, cocks, elephants and peacocks. There are shrines on either side for Karpaga Vinayagar, Durga, Sivalingam, Perumal (Vishnu), as well as Saint Nakkirar. We are surprised to find that Durga's shrine is the center-most, intimating that it could have been the original sanctum of the temple.

Our guide informs us that in Murugan's shrine *abhishekam* is not performed to the main rock-hewn *murti*, but only to His silver *vel*. In honor of our visit, the head priest takes hold of Murugan's *vel* and performs a brief but powerful *abhishekam* to it with milk and *vibhuti*, or holy ash, and then deftly packages the ash and gives it to us to take away as *prasadam*. Descending the steps as quickly as we came up, we discover a small, pillared hall off to the side that is a perfect place to sit and meditate a while before leaving.

What was initiated here will grow and blossom through the rest of the pilgrimage. The experience burns deeply into our souls, but little prepares us for what we are to experience at Murugan's seaside abode.



Enshrined Deity: An artist's rendition of the temple's Murugan sanctum



Tiruchendur

Abode of Fulfillment

DEEP IN THE SOUTH OF TAMIL NADU LIES THE FAMED SPIRITUAL center called Tiruchendur. Trains and buses ply their way incessantly from Madurai. We take the early morning train to Tirunelveli, and then a 41-km taxi ride to Tiruchendur, winding through the traditional rural landscape, unchanged for centuries. Driving by rice paddies and groves of palmyra and banana, we feel we are journeying back in time.

Pilgrims approach the Arulmigu Sri Subrahmanya Swami Tirukoyil via a magnificent, covered, open-air walkway that extends 750 meters from the town's center. It is flanked by an overwhelming menagerie of stalls selling garlands, fruits and other offerings, religious music, colorful cloth and objects for the home shrine. Approaching slowly, we soon spot the temple's grand, nine-tiered *mela gopuram*. This white stone tower displaying an enormous blue *vel* is a striking landmark, visible to sailors from miles away at sea and beckoning devotees from all around. This west entrance, we are told, is only opened during the temple's annual festival.

Catching the smell of sea air, we know we are near. Exiting the corridor, we take in the full view of the seashore, the temple perched on a gentle slope only a few meters to the left. Here the salty waters of the Gulf of Mannar lap against a broad, sandy beach where pilgrims bathe in the sea before entering the temple. The primary entrance to the



Rising high: (above) Tiruchendur's 140-foot-tall gopuram; (top) sunrise at the Shanmuga Vilasam

temple is here, facing south. Called the Shanmuga Vilasa *mandapam*, it is an ornately carved, 124-pillar hall standing as a testament to the craftsmanship that prevailed in the era when this temple was built. We are told the temple was originally built of sandstone, thus the name Tiruchendur, "Holy Red City." When that eroded away, it was rebuilt in granite. Priests are everywhere. We speak with a few in hopes of making arrangements to have darshan of Murugan at tomorrow's early morning *abhishekam*.

In the month of Markali, worship begins at Tiruchendur at 3 am. We arise before dawn and take the short walk to the temple. The dimly lit sanctuary is already crowded with devotees. At 5:30 we are ushered to the ocean-facing main shrine. We are three of fifteen people paying Rs 200 (US\$5) for tickets allowing us to sit right before the sanctum.

The granite statue is Balasubrahmanyaswami, the pious young ascetic. Several paintings in the temple describe the legend: Murugan encamped at Tiruchendur before and after defeating the demon Surapadman and his malevolent band. Kneeling by a small Lingam, He worshiped His Father, Siva, seeking forgiveness for his necessary but regrettable act of killing. Devas arrived in multitudes to thank Murugan for saving them from the demons' wrath, and He quickly stood up to bless them. It is this position in which the *murti* was created,

That those who seek His love be blessed with boons, one face responds in melting love to their behest. That no ills befall the devout who offer oblation ordained in the sacred *Vedas*, one face benign takes care. That the seers be enlightened on the many hidden truths, one face resplendent illumines every quarter like the moon.

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holding flowers in one hand and a *mala* of *rudraksha* beads in the other, utterly absorbed in adoration of God Siva.

We sit humbly before the Deity, a striking image coated from head to toe with sandalwood paste. The priest deftly removes the fragrant covering and proceeds to pour oil, *panchamritam* and later after liter of milk—so much milk, the ablution seems to last an eternity. When milk is poured, this glorious *murti* turns evenly white all over, revealing details in the dark stone and evoking intense devotion among the priests and devotees. The final ablution is with *vibhuti*, holy ash. The priest carves out a beaming smile for Murugan in the white coating. This evokes a spectrum of emotions among the devotees—from energetic bhakti to delicate smiles and quiet laughter. We find that this deeply devotional rite has connected us to Murugan in a new way. A half-hour after the puja began, it is complete, and we are quickly ejected back out into the crush of devotees streaming by the shrine for a glimpse of Murugan in the day's regal attire.

Not far from the main sanctum, we come upon the south-facing shrine of the *utsava murti*. This bronze image, which is pa-

Ubiquitous devotion: (clockwise from top-left) Stalls selling religious items clutter the covered walkway leading to the temple; inside the Shanmuga Vilasa mandapam; families joyously bathe in the ocean prior to entering the temple; a painting of the main murti

rated around the temple during festivals, is so bright it looks as if its composition could be mostly gold. We learn from a fascinating collection of paintings displayed in the third *prakaram* that Dutch invaders arrived in the 17th century and stole the precious *murti*. Encountering a massive thunderstorm at sea, the plunderers grew fearful, believing their crime had cursed them, and heaved the booty overboard. The Nayak king who patronized the temple at the time instructed his local representative, Vadamalaiappa Pillai, to have a new *murti* made. In the meantime, Lord Subrahmanya appeared to Vadamalaiappa in a dream, indicating the exact spot where the *murti* lay. Men were sent out in ships to recover it. As foretold in the dream, a lime floating in the water and a kite bird flying directly above marked the Deity's location on the sea floor. Retrieving the *murti*, they returned it to the temple. But the tem-





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Holy precincts: (left to right) A peacock settles in for the night atop the south gopuram; devotees enjoy art which tells the story of 17th-century Dutch thieves; this temple, right on the sea, was miraculously spared when the 2004 Asian Tsunami devastated neighboring towns

ple's hereditary priesthood refused the king's order to welcome the desecrated image. The king, adamant that the Deity be restored to its respected position, commissioned a separate family of Adisaiva priests to reinstall it and conduct the daily rites. To this day, that same clan of Adisaivas operates the shrine, completely independent of the other shrines and activities at the temple.

One afternoon we visit Nalikkinaru, the fresh-water well only meters from the shore, where Murugan is said to have cleaned His *vel*. Fed by an underground spring, it never dries up, even in severe drought. The water is believed to heal ailments of all kinds.

On our third day, we rise just before the Sun. Making our way to the temple, we enjoy the morning fragrances as the town awakes and prepares for its day: fresh *dosai*, hot *sambar*, sweet rose milk. The bliss permeating this town is amazing. Every time we stop and stand quietly, all we can feel is this sublimity. All here rings with a happy contentedness, a feeling that everything is all right, right now. Perhaps it's the location at the seaside, the clean air or the presence of the playful child Murugan that lends a sweetness and mellowness to everyone and everything at Tiruchendur.

Hundreds of Ayyappaswami's pilgrims on their way to Kerala are bathing in the ocean in anticipation of the sun's imminent rising. A peacock, perched royally atop the *gopuram* of the Shanmuga Vilasam, calls out. Is he the same one we saw there at dusk last night? Kites circle overhead just offshore, bringing to mind the story of the Dutch and the *utsava murti*. Devotees are gathered out on the rocks, others on the beach, still others in an open-air *mandapam* abutting the temple. Cows saunter through the dispersed crowd; pilgrims like us touch them for blessings. Goats and dogs, young and old, and one cat, meander among pilgrims as the rising Sun marks the new day's beginning.

After darshan of Lord Murugan in



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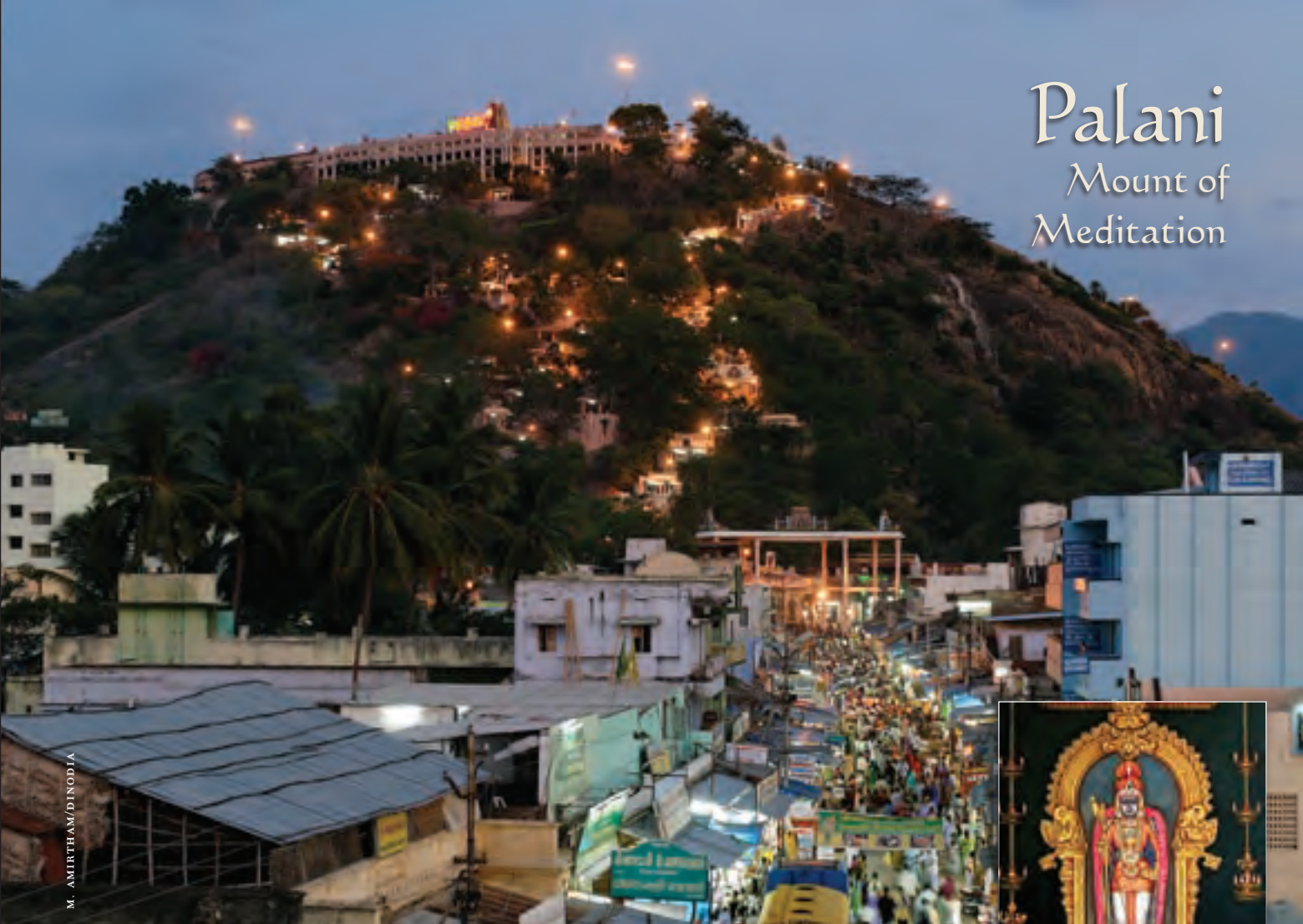
the sanctum, we continue our exploration of this cavernous edifice. Vast halls and corridors have been added over centuries. One of the delights is to roam these passageways as the sea breeze blows through. This is a grand temple, a true work of art and devotion in granite. It gets quieter and quieter as ones goes 'round the second *prakaram* and further out into the third. There are solitary hideaways for private meditation. On the north side of the third *prakaram* we encounter a shrine for Vishnu carved out of the rock itself, with a monolithic, larger-than-life, reclining *murti*.

Continuing our *pradakshina*, we notice two men working quietly inside a small, granite-walled chamber. They are laboriously grinding sandalwood on a big, wet, granite slab, slightly funnel-shaped toward one end to collect the paste.

The use of sandalwood is famous here at Tiruchendur. According to Sivakamasundari Shanmugasundaram, reporting for HINDUISM TODAY in 2002, the temple spends about \$150,000 per year for this aromatic, yellowish heartwood. While sandalwood is a primary sacrament used abundantly in Hindu worship, doubtless no other temple in India buys as much of it. Huge amounts are ground fresh daily right here as has been done for millennia. Applied to the Deity during puja, the cooling, fragrant paste is then given as *prasadam* to devotees who lavishly smear it on their face, arms and body, to soothe, to bless, to heal.

For the 30,000 devotees who visit every day, this ocean-side temple of magic radiates the peace that remains after all desires have been fulfilled. The serenity makes an durable mark in the mind, concealing any hint of the intensity that awaits us at Murugan's next encampment.

Traditional resource: Ever-useful palmyra trees dominate the seaside landscape around Tiruchendur



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THE MOST REVERED OF ALL TEMPLES TO LORD MURUGAN is the Arulmigu Sri Dandayuthapani Swami Tirukkoyil at Palani. This third abode is 137 km northwest from Madurai, and reached via Madurai by train, bus or car. The countryside here has a pre-historic feel to it—lone, worn hills that rise abruptly from the ground like rough-hewn tortoises. At any time of year, devotees are seen walking alongside the roads leading to Palani. Carrying only a small yellow bundle of necessities, they undertake this difficult trek, coming from all over South India. As we near Palani, the temple comes into focus at the top of the rounded hill, a verdant mountain range in its background. Accommodations are simple here, even austere. The temple *devasthanam* runs a huge hostelry near the temple steps, and there are private hotels and lodges in town.

We are excited to arrive at Palani. While Murugan in any form is dear to Saivite monks, here He appears as the loincloth-clad renunciate, called Dandayuthapani-swami. *Palani* means "You are the fruit," an allusion to a tale in which Murugan learned that He is the fruit of wisdom of the sages.

After settling in, we meet our guide, Mr. M. Muthumanickam, a member of the government endowment board that administers the temple. He takes us by auto-rickshaw to the bottom of the hill, where a road circuits the hill. Muthumanickam informs

us that circumambulation of the hill is best done in the early morning or at twilight. It is now late in the afternoon, and we are eager to get to the temple. So, we worship briefly at the Vinayagar shrine and ardently climb the 697 steep, stone steps that zig-zag their way to the top. On subsequent visits, we explore the other ways provided to ascend the hill—rope car, winch trolley and an alternate, less steep pathway

built for the temple elephant which is also used by children and the elderly.

At the top, the steps give way to a wide, paved walkway surrounding the temple. Muthumanickam tells us, "It is traditional to go around three times." This *pradakshina* gives pilgrims an opportunity to leave their journey behind and attune their minds to Lord Murugan before entering the temple. Wending our way through endless lines of devotees, passing through stainless steel gates and countless barriers, we arrive just outside the inner sanctum. We pay for special tickets to gain direct access to the shrine. Minutes later we are ushered in front of Lord Murugan for darshan.

The unique *murti* here was created by Bhogar Rishi, one of the eighteen *siddhars* of Saiva tradition. He formed the image centuries ago from an amalgam of nine



DAVE TROPE

On the hilltop: (above) The gold-covered tower; (top) as night falls, devotees proceed to Palani's steps; (inset) a painting of the Dandayuthapaniswami murti in regal attire



A. MANIVEL

In garments of bark these hoary seers are clad, their braided hair gleaming white like valampuri conch, their body so immaculately clean and fair, their high chest of bony ribs wrapped in deer skin, bodies lean with austere meals after days of fast; their minds unsullied and

free from guile and hate; they are wise beyond the wisdom of the learned; they act as the goal and pivot of the knowers free from anger, greed and sufferings sore; with cheerful hearts and gracious mien they lead the way.

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herbs and minerals. *Abhishekam* is the most important form of worship at Palani—the Deity is bathed six times a day. Muthumanickam relates, “These abundant ablutions over hundreds of years slowly deteriorated the *murti*. Sixty years ago the temple administration stopped all worship to the original *murti* and had a bronze replica installed directly in front of it for bathing.” In 2006, R. Selvanathan, Chief Executive Sthapati of Sri Vaithyanatha Sthapati Associates, Chennai, was commissioned to perform the delicate and complex task of restoring the ancient image. Sthapati explains, “The *murti* was found to be infirm and unstable, presenting a frail appearance. Body parts were in a very dilapidated condition and may have broken up any moment if not attended to.” Selvanathan’s repair work was successful, and ablutions to the original *murti* resumed.

Watching the puja is like watching an intricate dance. While only Adisaiva priests enter the inner sanctum, a clan of *pandaram* priests serves in the preparation of all offerings. Everything passes through their hands before being presented: *abhishekam* ingredients, clothing, garlands, food, incense and all the lamps. Every priest is dressed impeccably, his spotless *veshti* wrapped just right. Traditional Sanskrit Vedic mantras are chanted in the inner sanctum, but we hear a priest chant Murugan’s 108 names in Tamil over a PA system. We later see a sign near the shrine stating that, according to the requirements of the temple endowment board, *archanas* will be performed in Tamil upon request.

While the Deity is being dressed, the crowd’s anticipation grows. Behind us hundreds are chanting, singing, praying. When the curtain finally opens, Murugan is adorned in *raja alankaram*, dressed like a king—so majestic, so magnetic. A cacophony of sounds envelops us as the *arati* swoops past and priests smear *vibhuti* on the forehead of each one present.

Inside the temple, we notice that a significant amount of renovation work has occurred since our 2004 visit. Particularly evident is the polished granite tile on the floors and walls inside and around the temple. The temple’s most recent *kumbhabhishekam* was on April 3, 2005. Former Joint Commissioner of the temple, Mr. D. Sundaram, reports, “The renovation work started on March 9, 2005, and finished on March 29. Amazingly, the task was performed by 1,000 workers per shift, three shifts per day. New *mandapams* in the first *prakaram* and all the granite floor and wall tile work was completed in just twenty days.”

Muthumanickam informs us that Palani has the highest income of any temple in Tamil Nadu and is second in all of India only to Tirupati’s Venkateswara temple. That doesn’t count the enormous sums of money devotees spend in town on supplies—milk, yogurt, honey, ghee, *vibhuti*—which they bring to the temple in huge quantities for the daily *abhishekams*. He amplifies, “There is so much money, more than we can use here. We donate the rest to many of the poorer temples in Tamil Nadu—just enough to each one to keep the basic practices of lighting lamps and simple, daily puja going.” One of the ways in which Palani’s wealth manifests is in its cleaning program. There are workers collecting trash and sweeping and spraying down the walkways all through the day. They set a great example for other temples to follow.

Sunset is nearing. Muthumanickam urges us to stay for the nighttime golden chariot procession. We sit down to talk near the Ganesha shrine as the crowds gather. Nakkirar names the third *padai-veedu*, Avinankudi, and frequently it is said that this temple near the base of the hill is the true abode of Lord Murugan. We ask Muthumanickam about this, and he quickly dismisses the misconception: “The two are really to be considered one temple. They

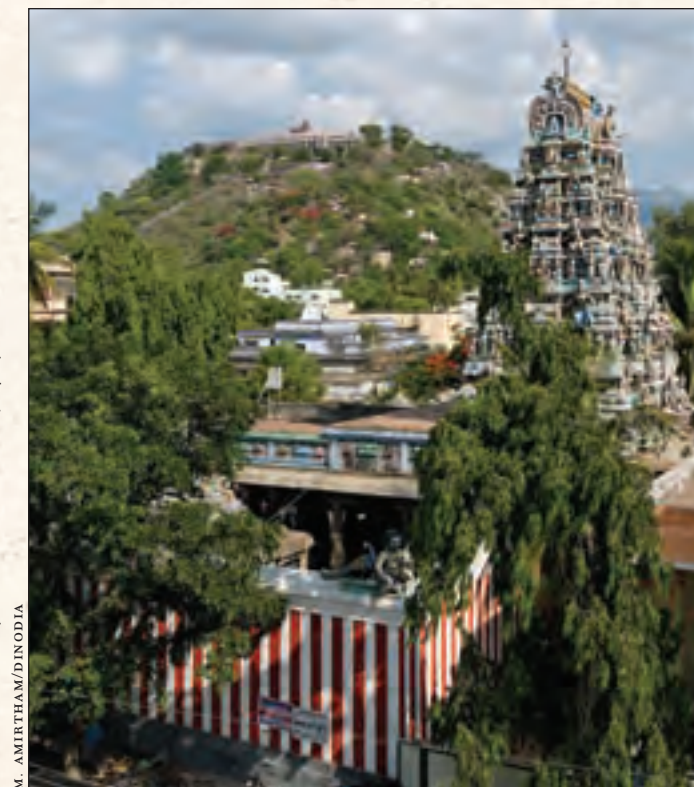
Jai Murugan: (clockwise from left) A resident sadhu begs alms; devotees climb the 697 steps to and from the hilltop; pilgrims make offerings of camphor, coconuts and flower garlands; Tiruvavinankudi, the nearby temple that is mystically connected to Palani

..... come under the same management and share the same priesthood. It is customary to visit there before coming up the hill to worship here.”

By 7 pm nearly 100,000 people have amassed atop the hill. The devotion reaches a crescendo as the doors of the chariot shed are flung open. Accompanied by *nadaswaram* and *tavil*, the chariot begins to roll. This small, ornate carriage and the *utsava murti* that rides in it are solid gold. A company of police officers with guns and a set of wooden barriers surrounds the chariot from the moment the shed doors are opened until they are locked again. Devotees pay Rs 1,000 (US\$25) for the privilege of going inside the barrier to more intimately worship the *murti*.

The shrine to Bhogar Rishi in the southwest corridor provides a serene and quiet sanctuary in this bustling complex. Very much like a cave, it is a great place for quiet meditation. Introspective devotees can be seen here throughout the day, absorbed within themselves.

The temple’s magic is potent, its vibration ever powerful. So many are captured by Palani. By what seems only to be grace they appear in front of the Deity. They watch an *abhishekam* and have an *archana* performed. An *arati* is passed. The priests put a garland from Murugan around pilgrims’ necks and smear *vibhuti* on their foreheads, and they go away transfixed. Even if they go to no other temple, their lives are transformed by the Lord of Palani in that single moment.



M. AMIRTHAM/DINODIA

Swamimalai

Abode of the Guru



RIDING ON THE INTENSITY OF PALANI, WE PREPARE OURSELVES for the serene rapture of Murugan's fourth abode. Known in ancient days as Tiruveragam, the wooded village of Swamimalai is located five kilometers west of Kumbakonam on the banks of a tributary of the Kaveri River. We drive to Trichy, then take the train to Kumbakonam. Accommodations in Swamimalai are almost nonexistent, so it is best to stay in Kumbakonam or Tanjavur (32 km away) and take a bus or hired car to Swamimalai for the day.

The Arulmigu Sri Swaminatha Swami Tirukkoyil is a small, well-maintained temple rising to 60 feet on an artificial hillock constructed from granite stones. One enters from the south or east side and arrives within the third *prakaram*, at ground level. A thick, high wall protects the complex from the sounds and vibrations of the outside world. Here there are shrines to God Siva as Sundareswarar and Shakti as the Goddess Meenakshi.

After circumambulating in the third *prakaram*, we ascend the steep steps to the second *prakaram*. Other than a family of green parrots who enjoy the temple's outer precincts, this is a quiet, austere place. There is a small *mandapam* on the east side dedicated to Saint Arunagirinathar and the *Tiruppugal* he sang in devotional wonder of Murugan. This small open-air pavilion, situated directly underneath the *kodimaram*, or temple flagpole, is a wonderful place for undisturbed meditation.



The guru: (above) A painting of Swaminatha Swami; (top) viewing Swamimalai's three levels from the Northeast

Another flight of steps leads to the *kodimaram* and Vinayagar shrine. There are sixty steps in all, representing the sixty-year cycle of the Hindu calendar. This cycle is based on the planet Jupiter, symbol of the guru in Hindu astrology. This is especially significant at Swamimalai, as it is here that Murugan is the guru, known as Swaminathan.

The first *prakaram* is enclosed, giving us the feeling of being in a cave. Only small openings vent the abundant camphor and *homa* smoke. Deities line the north wall. A glorious, silver-clad shrine for the *utsava murti* draws almost as much attention as the main sanctum.

Instead of Murugan's usual peacock, we are surprised to find an elephant *vahana* facing the main shrine. The priest who was our guide, Sivasri P. Ganesa Gurukkal, senses our wondering and explains, "Swaminathan rides Indra's elephant." As the story goes, Indra, the King of Gods, left behind His white elephant when He stopped here to worship Murugan.

From here devotees ascend a few steps and pass through a brass-covered doorway onto a raised platform for standing darshan. There is room for many to stand, but those who pay are allowed to sit directly in front of the sanctum on a marble floor during the puja.

With hair in topknot and a large preceptor's *danda* in hand, the black stone *murti* is a full six feet tall. It is dark inside the shrine, but the power of the guru can be felt like an

These twice-born, tuned to the hour of worship in wet clothes clad, and palms lifted overhead, laud themselves and chant the Vedic lore enshrined in the secret word of letters six, oft repeated and flowers offered at proper time. Thus they glorify Him, and for such worship, our Lord doth dwell in Eragam in joyful bliss.

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ALL PHOTOS: M. AMIRTHAM/DINODIA

outpouring of love and wisdom. An *abhishekam* begins just as we sit down. Oil, a mixture of herbs, spices and water called *kootu*, abundant milk, yogurt and sandalwood paste are poured over the life-size *murti* in rapid succession.

The sandalwood is mixed to such a smooth consistency that it covers the body thickly and remains like a coat of amber paint. The priest then draws eyebrows, eyes and mouth on the face. He performs a prolonged *arati*. Passing the lamp before Murugan with

steady deliberation, he lingers now and again to allow us all to see the *murti*'s refined features. Accented by the yellow sandalwood and illumined by the delicate flame, Murugan's form draws us into rapt attention. Time stands still. Swaminathan is then rinsed, and the *panchamritam* and *vibhuti* are poured. The curtain is closed longer than usual while the Deity and shrine are meticulously cleaned and fresh white clothing and a silver crown and *kavacham* (ornate metal covering) for hands and feet are put on. A priest pours oil onto and then speedily lights the huge *alankara dipam*, a multi-tiered lamp with 108 wicks. Suddenly one priest throws the curtain open and a second offers the lamp amidst a flurry of chanting, then quickly passes it back out of the shrine where a helper puts it out with a few deft waves of the hand.

After the head priest offers a multitude of other lamps, *mudras* and mantras, he performs the final *arati*. The priests take off the *murti* gigantic garlands that have been offered throughout the day and give them to devotees. As this evening *abhishekam* finishes, everyone feels copiously blessed.

Escorting the three of us around a

Going in and in: (left) The south entrance is surrounded by vendors offering kumkum, turmeric and sacred threads; devotees line up by Murugan's elephant vahana on their way to the main mandapam

profusion of subsidiary shrines, Ganesa Gurukkal proudly declares, "As Adisaivas, we maintain the tradition of chanting only Sanskrit inside the *sannadhi* (sanctum)." He is referring to the modern-day trend, followed in less strict temples, of performing entire pujas in the Tamil language. He is also emphasizing the special importance of Sanskrit chants at this temple.

According to Ratna Navaratnam, the brahmin priests at Swamimalai traditionally chant Murugan's six-lettered Sanskrit mantra, "*Sa-ra-va-na-bha-va*," during long periods of meditative *japa*. She observes that Swamimalai is linked to the *anahata* chakra, the heart center, which powers the faculties of direct cognition and comprehension. Here, the aspirant attains a mountaintop consciousness: an objective apprehension of the whole of existence. In a split second, complete knowledge of a subject may be known, directly as a boon and blessing from Murugan. Navaratnam writes of the metaphysics behind the relationship of Murugan's six temples to the chakras, "The chanting of the mystical letters of spiritual potency is the propelling force of an inward spiritual pilgrimage in the form of an introspective meditation. The focal point of meditation is said to undergo a shifting process from the lower centers to the highest center, passing through six stages. These six stages can be taken to symbolically represent the six abodes of Murugan in Tirumurugarrupadai."



Worship with light: Young devotees offer ghee lamps for Shanmuga, Valli and Devayanai



Tiruttani

Abode of Peace

M. AMIRTHAM/DINODIA

SITUATED 700 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL AMIDST A HILL range with a dramatic panoramic view is the Tiruttani Arulmigu Sri Subrahmanya Swami Tirukkoyil, Murugan's fifth abode. From Swamimalai, the pilgrim usually goes to Trichy, the hub for traveling north to Chennai by bus, train or plane. Tiruttani is a small town located 84 km west of Chennai, 13 km north of Arakonam on the Chennai-Mumbai route. There are basic pilgrim accommodations in Tiruttani, but many choose to stay at Chennai or Kanchipuram (40 km to the south), making a day trip to Tiruttani.

The hill at Tiruttani is known as Tanigaimalai, meaning "peaceful hill." The name refers to the legend of Lord Murugan's choosing this place for peace of mind and quiet relaxation after defeating Surapadman and marrying Devayanai. But there is much more significance to His presence here.

The ode in *Tirumurugarrupadai* calls this place Kunrutoradal and describes Murugan as Ceyon, the "Red God" who loves to sport in the hills. Ratna Navaratnam writes of the ancient tribals and their worship here: "The worship of Murugan takes the form of a dance known as *veriyadal* in the hilly and forest regions. These highlanders celebrated God Murugan as their guardian Deity and believed that the welfare of their tribe was His concern." The hill folk, in long, night-draped dances fueled by honey wine, sought to bring the whole tribe into Murugan's aura, much as the Vedic priests of the North imbibed *soma* to plunge into a vision-quest of Skanda. Na-



HINDUISM TODAY

Placid pond: (above) Tiruttani's tank, called Saravana Poigai, at the bottom of the hill; (top) Murugan delights in red flowers, and Royal Poinciana trees like this one can be seen blooming around Tiruttani in the summertime

varatnam explains that they used dance and music to propitiate Murugan for practical assistance, such as to heal disease or alleviate famine or drought. These tribal dance forms are incorporated into today's *kavadi* (milk-pot-carrying penance to Murugan) processions celebrated worldwide.

This abode of Murugan is also the birthplace of India's first vice-president and second president, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Yet, it holds even more legendary significance. According to Murugan *bhaktar* Patrick Harrigan, a host of Gods, saints and sages are known to have worshiped Lord Subrahmanyam here, including Rama, Arjuna, Vishnu, Sage Agastiyar, Saint Arunagirinathar, Saint Ramalinga Swamigal and Sri Muttuswami Deekshitar.

Arriving at the bottom of the hill, we encounter the enchanting Saravana Poigai. Our priest and guide, Sivasri K.V. Ravi Gurukkal, tells us, "This tank is renowned for its sacred water which is known to have healing effects for both bodily and mental illnesses." After bathing our feet, we turn and ascend the hill via 365 steps, representing the days of the year.

At the top, it is cool and quiet, and one immediately understands why Murugan chose this place for solace. Here it is easy to view the world below from a mountaintop consciousness. A new perspective is gained. In Tiruttani's setting, the *vishuddha* chakra is amplified—the unadulterated energy of cosmic love. When there is an inexpressible love and kinship with mankind and all

As He strides on the peacock with the ram behind, the flawless banner of the cock is raised aloft; adorned with armlets, waist tucked with trailing robes, His stature rises as He roves with bands of singers, their voices sweet as notes of well-tuned lutes.

TIRUMURUGARRUPADAI, LINES 210-214



M. AMIRTHAM/DINODIA



life forms, our consciousness resides in this chakra at the throat. When deeply immersed in this state, there is no consciousness of a physical body, of being a person with emotions or intellect. One just is the light flowing through all form. Ineffable bliss permeates the subtle nerve system as the truth of the oneness of the universe is fully and powerfully realized.

Ascending the final steps to the east entrance, we again encounter Indra's white elephant where one would expect to see Lord Murugan's peacock mount. In an even more unusual twist, the elephant faces east, away from the shrine. T.G.S. Balam Iyer, in his book *South Temples*, offers, "Some consider that the Lord is ever ready to start on His carrier and rush to the aid of devotees"—meaning the elephant would not even have to turn around to begin a campaign.

Ravi Gurukkal takes us aside to tell more about the temple and its priesthood. There are 27 Adisaiva families serving the temple. He proudly explained, "We follow a strict discipline here. When it

Worship's way: (clockwise from left) Tiny shops and the occasional beggar line the steps going up the hill; head priest Sivasri K.V. Ravi Gurukkal performs arati for the utsava murti; a bird's eye view of the temple; artist's rendition of the main shrine

is a priest's turn to do the puja, he must fast, bathe in a designated place inside the temple, then meditate in front of the shrine. Only then can he go inside the sanctum and do the puja." This *sadhana* clearly has an effect, as we found them all so humble and content, quiet and composed.

As the puja begins, we are once again captured by Lord Subrahmanyam. Unlike most temple protocols, all offerings except the *abhishekam* itself are made from outside the shrine, right in front of us. There is something exceptionally sweet about the ritual here: the priests are unhurried and unusually present. Performing the sacred rites is, for these priests, a delightful dance of divine communion, as it was for the tribals of ancient times.



A. MANTVEL



M. AMIRTHAM/DINODIA



Palamuthirsolai

Grove of Grace

THE LAST LEG OF OUR PILGRIMAGE RETURNS US TO MADURAI, the nearest town to Palamuthirsolai, “grove of ripe fruit.” Trains, buses and flights go daily from Chennai back to Madurai. Once there, it is best to hire a car to get to the Palamuthirsolai Arulmigu Sri Subrahmanya Swami Tirukkoyil. Located 19 km north of the temple city in the Alagar Hills above the Alagarkoil of Lord Vishnu, it is the most remote and spartan of the *arupadaiveedu*.

As we drive through the entry gate and head up the winding road, we are quickly enveloped in the clean, cool air of the thick forest. Soon we arrive at Lord Murugan’s sixth and final encampment. Says Vellayapettai Radhakrishnan for Murugan.org, “While this temple is not as large or bustling as the other five recognized shrines, it is just as incredible to visit. Even today the place is very fertile with many trees and different flora and fauna, a standing testimony to the vivid description of its natural beauty as found in *Tirumurugarrupadai*.” Though tranquil, the environs here are permeated with an electrical shakti that feels, to us, like an approaching lightening storm.

There is a powerful sacredness here, owing to the three things the temple is famous for: a small stone *vel*; a Java Plum tree where Saint Auvaiyar met Lord Murugan; and a spring hailed in Saint Nakkirar’s poem as the source of Murugan’s

grace on Earth.

Our guide is Sivasri Muthukuma Gurukkal, son of the chief priest. He tells us that, while the importance of this spot has been hailed for centuries, the temple that stands here now was constructed recently. “In ancient times, the *vel* was worshiped as the main Deity,” he explains, as he takes us to a shrine holding a stone *vel* just to the right of the main sanctum. “This *vel* is of great significance. It is the original Deity, and it is still highly venerated.” The lancelike *vel* wielded by Lord Karttikeya embodies discrimination and spiritual insight. Our Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, wrote about the importance of Murugan’s *vel* in the lives of seekers on the spiritual path: “The shakti power of the *vel*, the eminent, intricate power of righteousness over wrongdoing, conquers confusion within the realms below. The holy *vel*, that when thrown always hits its mark and of itself returns to Karttikeya’s mighty hand, rewards us when righteousness prevails and becomes the kundalini serpent’s unleashed power thwarting our every effort with punishing remorse when we transgress dharma’s law. Thus, the holy *vel* is our release from ignorance into



In the forest: (above) The way to Palamuthirsolai takes one through the fortified wall of Alagarkoil; (top) the temple’s colorful entrance gopuram amid the forested hills; (inset) artist’s rendition of the main shrine



Worshipping: (above) A monkey frolics near Ganesha at the Java Plum tree; Sivasri Muthukumara Gurukkal shows worshipers the arati

knowledge, our release from vanity into modesty, our release from sinfulness into purity through *tapas*. When we perform penance and beseech His blessing, this merciful God hurls His *vel* into the astral plane, piercing discordant sounds, colors and shapes, removing the mind’s darkness.” Pilgrimage is a penance of sorts, and the power of Murugan’s *vel* is felt throughout the *arupadaiveedu*. It is a force of change that remains with us, feeding and enriching our spiritual life for years to come.

The Java Plum tree (*Syzygium cumini* or jambu) at Palamuthirsolai is the tree where Auvaiyar, a ninth-century saint, encountered Lord Balasubrahmanyam. The classic story relates that the elder woman sat under the shade of this tree to rest on the way to the temple. A boy called out from the branches above and asked her if she would like some hot or cold fruit. Perplexed but curious, she asked for the former. The boy shook the tree, and some of the grape-sized plums fell from its branches onto the sand below. Picking one up, she blew on it to clean off the sand. The boy chortled and asked if she was blowing on the fruit because it was too hot. Only when she entered the temple did she realize that she had just met Lord Murugan Himself, and that she actually didn’t know as much as she thought she did. Through His simple play, Murugan shattered her arrogance. Auvaiyar went on to write some of the sweetest, most celebrated Tamil devotional songs. It is considered a miracle that this tree fruits every year during the six-day Skanda Shashthi festival in October-November, completely off season.

To Saint Nakkirar, the spring above Palamuthirsolai is the waterfall of grace that showers the devotee who reaches the final stop on this profound inner odyssey. The water from this spring is said to have healing qualities. Devotees flock there, filling up bottles to take home with them, bringing them first to the temple for blessings.

Today, the central shrine houses a small, standing *murti* of Lord Murugan, with consorts Valli and Devayanai at His sides. As we sit watching the *abhishekam*, the image of Lord Murugan’s grace as the waterfall comes to the mind’s eye. The joy of completion pours over us. Inwardly quiet, blissfully content, we feel we have accomplished something special. It is an inner fulfillment, arrived at after an outer journey.

For centuries, seekers who have performed this noble pilgrimage have testified that at its end awaits a release from the worries and

In this way have I known His graciousness, whether in these abodes or in other haunts. Wherever thou dost confront Him, be in tune to praise Him, your face in utter gladness beaming. Your hands uplifted above your head in worship, do thou prostrate yourself in surrender, full and fit, and in this manner raise thy voice of prayer:

“Divine child with golden jewels bedecked, Thou art the refuge of those in anguish. Vanquisher with emblazoned chest exultant! Luminous Love, savior of the needy meek! Whose hallowed name the enlightened extol. Thou mighty conqueror who confoundeth titans, dauntless victor, Thou Supreme Lord Divine!”

His immaculate form, majestic and mighty, divine in strength, and stature reaching skyward, manifests itself in sublime splendor. His fiery form instantly He conceals to one of genial youth and utters words of love: “Thy coming I know, fear thee not! Thou shalt surely excel in this world, girt by the furious oceans deep and vast, be thou One indeed, without a parallel.” Thus saying, He will grant everlasting worthy boons, rare indeed to attain by mortals weak.

He is the Lord of the Mount from whose dizzy heights many a waterfall doth spin torrential falls—Lord of abundant fruit groves, too, where luscious fruits ripen.

TIRUMURUGARRUPADAI, LINES 249-254, 271-276, 287-295, 315-317

TRANSLATED BY RATNA NAVARATNAM

concerns of their lives. They are relieved of things long burdening their hearts and minds, never to be plagued by them again. This real-life purifying experience is captured in the *Vedas*, which affirm, “To such a one who has his stains wiped away, the venerable Sanatkumara shows the further shore of darkness. Him they call Skanda.”

“Interspirituality”

Interfaith dialogue or dissembling monologue?

BY DR. KENNETH ROSE

WAYNE TEASDALE (1945-2005), A POPULAR CATHOLIC spiritual writer, invented the term *interspirituality* to designate a fertile and syncretic movement that is bringing together people who simultaneously follow one or more of the spiritual practices of the many religions in the world.

Central to Teasdale's interspirituality is a core group of Roman Catholics from the last four centuries who shared the common vision of the Christianization of Hinduism and India. This group includes the 17th-century Jesuit missionary and self-proclaimed sannyasin Roberto de Nobili, 19th-century convert to Catholicism Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, 20th-century priest Jules Monchanin and Teasdale's Catholic “guru,” Bede Griffiths. Teasdale portrays this lineage as visionaries looking for a way to bring about the “convergence” of Hinduism and Christianity. Monchanin wrote, “I have come to India for no other purpose than to awaken in a few souls the desire to raise up a Christian India.” This vision of a Christian India, so beloved of the pioneers of interspirituality, implies not a plural quest of spiritual equals for an exchange, but rather an inclusivistic attempt to transform Hinduism into an ethnic variety of Catholicism—an outcome that would be a tragic loss for India, Hinduism and humankind.

For Teasdale, in this so-called “Interspiritual Age” the Roman Catholic Church “has decided to offer itself as a bridge that allows other religions to discover the source of their common identity.” Although Teasdale sees this as a generous gesture from the Church, non-Catholics can get a sense of its imperialistic ambition and implausibility if we imagine a Jehovah's Witness, a Baptist or a Muslim making a similar claim for their religions. The idea that the Catholic church is the parent of all of the other religions may be a pleasant fantasy for some Catholics to indulge, but it will strike the outsider as paternalistic and—given the long history of this church's relations to other faiths, both Christian and non-Christian—as a dangerous power-grab that must steadily be resisted.

Despite the concession made by the II Vatican Council about the salvific value of other religions, the Council's declaration also makes clear that the Vatican views religious truth in all of its varieties as Christocentric—as beginning and ending in Jesus Christ. While many Catholics were inspired by the apparent liberality of this proclamation, an outsider is struck more by its impudence than by its generosity, since this position paternalistically implies that the other religions are at best incipient forms of Catholic piety.

This inclusivistic belief motivated the missionary work of Teasdale's mentor, Bede Griffiths, who spent forty years in India. Griffiths wrote, “If Christ is present to all men, then the Church is also present in all mankind. There is a hidden movement of the Church going on in the hearts of men drawing men to Christ without their knowing it, in Hinduism, in Buddhism, in Islam, even in agnosticism and unbelief.”

Such dogmatism closes its adherents off to the deeper and more challenging dialogue that puts this claim about Jesus at risk and entertains the possibility that some other religion may have a more comprehensive truth than Christianity—a possibility that may actually explain the attraction of some of these Christian figures to

the study of Hinduism and Buddhism. An interspirituality that does not enter into this sort of risk and does not wrestle with the real possibility of conversion to other religions turns out to be only a new and more deceptive way of doing missionary work. There is nothing to celebrate here for people of other religions, unless they also think that the destiny of their own religions is to become fulfilled daughters of the Roman Catholic Church.

When I began to research interspirituality, I was under the impression that it was a popular mystical movement that was trying to recast Christian theology as pluralistic. But it turns out that interspirituality is merely another form of Christian inclusivism that wants to recast as “truths in Christ” what it admires in other religions. This is an incoherent and condescending viewpoint, and well-informed practitioners of other religions are not likely to accept so alien a view of their own religions. This interpretation will impress only the naive or the fearful,



people who know little about their own religions or whose confidence in their own religions has been undermined by missionary propaganda about Christ as the only way.

As human organizations engaged, among other things, in a quest to understand the spiritual nature of life, religions should interact pluralistically with each other as formal equals engaged in a mutual search for adequate responses to the spiritual dimension of life. They should join in a common quest for wisdom that is less the dialogue of cagey players thinking about hidden agendas and more the enthusiastic bonding that occurs among people from different countries on pilgrimage together. Rather than trying to make converts or prove the supremacy of one religion over the others, it would be truer to the actual limitations of human knowledge to see followers of other religions as fellow pilgrims with whom we can share our tips about the journey.

Christians have an ethical and theological obligation to refrain from claiming or implying that people who worship at other altars worship false or lesser divinities. They do not have a right to insist that it is Jesus who is the living truth hiding in the center of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and other religions. This moral and theological criticism is directed not only at the obvious case of the many conservative Christians who think that Jesus is the only way and that those without explicit faith in Christ are destined for eternal damnation. It is also directed at moderate Christians who tolerate and even appreciate other religions while never doubting that Jesus is the final word of God to humanity.

Against the background of hundreds of thousands of years of prerecorded and recorded human history, to claim that any particular religion is the final religion and essential to the spiritual life of humanity is like saying that one particular society is the final one and essential to all of humanity. One can only wonder at what the successor religions to today's religions will look like a hundred millennia from now—if humans survive that long. Will any significant trace of today's religions persist in those future religions? We can be certain, however, that if religion survives, it will be recognizable as religion by reference to the eternal teaching that all true religions teach: the insufficiency of the material world and the saving and universal care and compassion of the divine.

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Tackling Depression

Ayurvedic remedies raise spirits as effectively as drug treatments, without troublesome side effects

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

IN MY ARTICLE IN THE JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER ISSUE I wrote about clinical depression in young people and the treatments that are standard in Western medicine, including antidepressant drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. All of these drugs are known to have unpleasant and potentially dangerous side effects, including nausea, headache, clenching of teeth, strange dreams, dizziness, weight loss/gain, increased feelings of depression and anxiety, tremors, restlessness, liver or kidney impairment, and a loss of sense of reality. Based on studies, regulatory agencies decided in the last few years that it was prudent to inform patients of the most dangerous side effect of them all: increased thoughts of suicide and suicidal behavior. On the other hand, recent reports purport a relationship between a subsequent decrease in pediatric SSRI prescriptions and an increase in adolescent suicide.

In my opinion, there is no sense risking that your child will become suicidal from taking antidepressants when there are natural remedies for depression that have proven to be both effective and totally safe. For example, along with counseling, supplements of 5-Hydroxytryptophan, St. John's wort extract, ashwagandha, *Bacopa monnieri* and *Mucuna pruriens* have all been effective in my clinical experience.

The chemical 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) is extracted from the seed of an African plant (*Griffonia simplicifolia*) and is the direct precursor to serotonin. In addition to increasing serotonin levels (which correspond to feelings of well being), 5-HTP causes an increase in levels of endorphin and other neurotransmitters. Numerous double-blind studies have shown that it has effectiveness equal to the SSRIs, and it offers several advantages: it is less expensive, better tolerated and associated with fewer and much milder side effects. The typical recommendation is 50 to 100 mg three times daily.

St. John's wort extract (*Hypericum perforatum*) is a well-known natural antidepressant. Over thirty double-blind studies involving over 2,000 patients with mild to moderate depression have shown St. John's wort extract to be effective. However, while it appears to be as, or possibly more, effective than conventional antidepressant drugs in mild to moderate depression, it does not appear to be as beneficial in the treatment of severe depression. St. John's wort extract's advantages over pharmaceutical drugs include far fewer side effects, lower cost and greater patient satisfaction. The dosage for St. John's wort extract (standardized for hypericin and hyperforin content) is 900 to 1,800 mg daily. In severe cases, St. John's wort extract can be used safely in combination with 5-HTP.

People taking prescription drugs need to check with their doctor or pharmacist before taking St. John's wort extract, as it appears to induce enzymes in the liver and gut that detoxify certain drugs. St. John's wort extract may also potentiate prescription antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs. While I am of the opinion that St. John's wort and 5-HTP can be combined with low doses of anti-depres-



sant medications, I strongly advise it only be done under the strict supervision of a physician.

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), standardized for withanoloids, has shown to be effective in the treatment of anxiety and depression in several studies alongside pharmaceutical antidepressants. I recommend 1,000-1,500 mg three times a day. Ashwagandha is a wonderful adaptogen, increasing the body's resistance to stress, trauma, anxiety and fatigue, and has many other positive health benefits.

Bacopa monnieri, another brain tonic herb, has also shown antidepressant and anti-anxiety effects. Both of these herbs can, however, increase the effects of benzodiazepines and phenobarbiturates. *Mucuna pruriens*, another herb, has been shown to increase dopamine in the body, therefore it is effective in cases of low dopamine levels. I recommend 250 mg three times per day.

The primary advantage of these natural extracts and herbs over the chemical antidepressants is that they have minimal or no side effects, yet offer excellent results.

Studies looking at exercise, yoga,

pranayama and meditation have shown positive outcome in almost all diseases, but especially anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, depression, stress-related medical illnesses and substance abuse.

I recommend fast walking at least 45 minutes and yoga and pranayama for 30 minutes every day. Alternate nostril breathing, *anulom-vilom*, and fire breath, *kapal bhatti*, are of great benefit in lowering depression and anxiety. There are many forms of meditation, among them quieting the mind, reciting a mantra, getting rid of all thoughts, guided imagery and holding attention focused. All forms have shown remarkable results. Keep in mind that it may take four to six weeks before you start feeling the difference when using a combination of herbal and nutritional therapies with exercise, yoga, pranayama and meditation. But this is the same expected time frame as in standard drug treatments.

Clearly, modern drug therapy may be dangerously unsafe for teens with depression. It is important when seeking help for your son or daughter to work with health practitioners who are open to the various options and are willing to work with alternative practitioners. No matter what approach is used, a seriously depressed person should always be under the supervision of a psychiatrist, working together with complementary practitioners.

Let me end with some testimony about the effectiveness of natural remedies for depression. A 24-year-old boy from Alberta, Canada, who has been on antidepressants for one year, came to my clinic near Seattle. He was put on a nutritional program along with St. John's wort, ashwagandha and *Bacopa*, plus exercise, yoga, meditation and pranayama. Three months later, after consulting his psychiatrist, I learned he was off antidepressants and feeling back to normal again. On a personal note, last year my sixteen-year-old son, Rishi, died tragically. My wife, Rekha, our twenty-year-old son, Gunny, and I all went into deep depression. Following a dietary, herbal and physical regimen, we have been able to cope. Gunny was the hardest hit of all. It was a rough year, but finally he turned around, all without any chemical medications.

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Ready for media scrutiny? The rich and famous are used to it, but how many temples and religious groups can take the attention?

PUBLIC RELATIONS

When Religion Is the Focus

Religious organizations need to understand how to deal with the media

On September 11-15, 2006, Montreal was host to *World's Religions After September 11: A Global Congress*, organized by Dr. Arvind Sharma under the auspices of McGill University. The following article is adapted from the plenary session address, "Religion and Media," given by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami.

THE EVENTS OF 9/11, THE SUBSEQUENT terrorist attacks and the military actions in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East have received extensive media coverage. The need to accurately report on the religious components of these events has challenged and highlighted the media's limitations of expertise and time, and its known institutional peculiarities.

In this article, *media* refers to journalistic reporting via newspapers, magazines, television and the Internet. It does not include fictional presentations, such as art, movies, music and the stage—even though these,

too, can strongly influence public opinion. The organizer of this Congress, Professor Arvind Sharma, hopes to show how "the media might use its persuasive power to promote harmony among religions and bridge the secular/religious divide." The goal is to promote mutual understanding, appreciation and harmony, not only among religions but also between the religious and nonreligious elements of society.

The media will not be willing or able to meet this challenge without help. Religious groups must learn to work with the media in specific ways—understanding and working around its limitations, recognizing the many opportunities to educate and favorably impact the media locally and globally, and using the most effective means to do so.

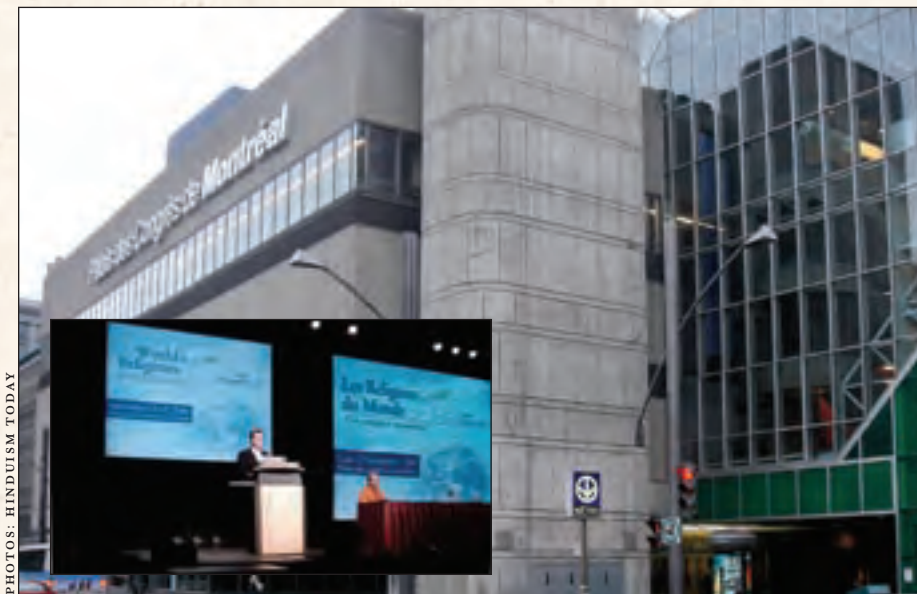
What the media considers "news"

It's an obvious but crucial point that media such as newspapers, magazines and television networks are businesses. With the

exception of public broadcasting and government-controlled outlets, they must turn a profit in order to survive. Their product, "news," comprises information and entertainment. Every day, journalists around the world ponder whether a particular event or issue is "news" according to established criteria, such as the following seven-point system:

1) *Effect*: how many people were, are or will be affected and to what extent? Examples: the 2004 tsunami and the wars in Iraq and Lebanon have affected tens of millions of people. Religious events fitting this criterion would include a split in the Anglican church or a major change in Catholic doctrine, as they would affect large numbers of people. In general, war, crime, violence of any sort, accidents, natural disasters are always considered "news," because they have a dramatic, jarring impact.

2) *Timeliness*: did the event occur recently? As information becomes older, it is less



PHOTOS: HINDUISM TODAY

Dissecting the media: (above left) *The World's Religions After 9/11* conference was held at the Palais de Congrès de Montréal. Hinduism Today's publisher (inset) gave the plenary session address upon which this article is based. (below) *The Associated Press Stylebook* guides reporters' thinking worldwide and is a key to knowing how to work with the media.

newsworthy. For example, a major accident snarling traffic downtown for hours is news the day it happens, but not the next morning. Likewise, an annual religious holiday is news when it happens, but not at other times of the year.

3) *Revelation*: does the story involve significant new information? Examples: a new cure for a disease, an archeological discovery, medical breakthrough or—a religious example—the discovery of the Gospel of Judas.

4) *Proximity*: was the event nearby? For example, the local weather is always considered newsworthy.

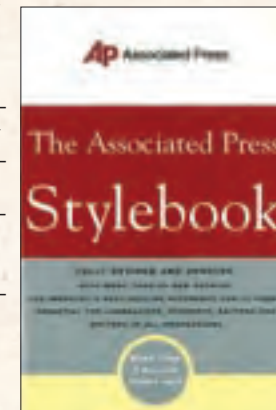
5) *Oddity*: was the event highly unusual? An adage in journalism says, "'Dog bites man' is not news, but 'Man bites dog' is." Recently in Ottawa a fleeing suspect actually did bite a police dog, generating reports as far away as South Africa and Malaysia. Unfortunately, articles about religious events are often written from the "oddity" perspective. Every year the wire services run photos of bloodied Shi'ite Muslims flaying themselves to mark the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. This practice is treated as a curiosity; the motivation is rarely explained. Likewise, when Christian ministers handle poisonous snakes—as a testament of their faith—the media run photos but ignore the fact that the minister is rarely bitten.

6) *Entertainment*: would it make for a fun or engaging story? Cute stories about chil-

dren and animals, sports stories and some religious activities qualify as news under this criterion, such as a traditional wedding, festival or coming-of-age event that is colorful and interesting to people of all faiths.

7) *Celebrity*: was anyone famous involved? Some publications operate within this single category, deeming it "news" to run a photo of a famous movie star walking down the street. The celebrity effect is cumulative, as seen in the frequent reports and photos of the Dalai Lama with actor Richard Gere.

When an event falls in multiple categories, "news" value increases. Example: a recent photo of the Toronto Film Festival, a culturally significant event, showed a charming group of children surrounding a celebrity—Lassie, the movie-star dog.



But is it important?

Unfortunately, this system of evaluating news doesn't necessarily identify many truly important issues and events, and may actually marginalize them. In practice, the media tends to focus most strongly on conflict, and overlook issues and events that are critical but not tragic, sensational or engrossing.

Professor Beverly Keever of the School of Communications at the University of Hawaii observes, "There is an inverse relationship to what is considered news and what is important." She gives the example of the breakdown of the foster child care system in Hawaii, which will ultimately have a disas-

trous societal impact but goes unreported. Global warming gets more press these days than it did 20 years ago—largely because Al Gore's documentary made it "celebrity news"—but still precious little considering its importance to the future of our planet.

Important religious issues, even those vital to all major faiths, rarely qualify as news. How often does one see a story on declining religiosity among youth or on the decline in the number of youth entering the clergy—both issues in all religions? What, in the long run, is the human consequence of an unreligious generation, compared to, say, the results of a province's next elections, which could be but a minor blip in political history?

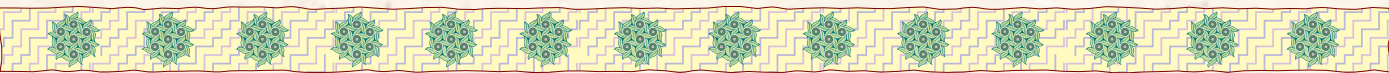
The journalist's world

Experienced reporters are excellent writers and information gatherers. They are capable of a quick study of complex issues and expert at detecting deception and trickery. However, they almost always work under the pressure of deadlines that allow only limited time for research. They are not given weeks or months to investigate their topic. A report on an event today must typically be filed tonight and published in the morning, or even in today's evening news. They can only include in their report the information they can gather in the short time they have.

The reporter's work often reveals to him the dark side of life: crime, drugs, fraud and conflict. After years of seeing the worst mankind has to offer, he may become jaded and cynical, having encountered too many people willing to say anything to get in the news, been deceived by too many politicians or businessmen with hidden agendas, and seen more than his share of man's inhumanity to man.

Because of the analytical, dispassionate nature of their trade, journalists are generally not sympathetic toward religion. "We don't talk about religion in the newsroom. We consider religion just another special interest group," a prominent journalist confided. Another said bluntly, "We will report on your activity, but we don't care about your core beliefs." Other reporters are respectful toward religion but acknowledge that such cynicism is common in their field. That fact is unlikely to change, and should be taken into account in any attempt to obtain coverage for religious news.

Just because reporters are in a hurry doesn't mean they are not prepared to observe minute details in their reports. The Associated Press, the largest news gathering organization in the world, publishes a *Stylebook*, which is a mini-encyclopedia for reporters. Its entries range from correctly spelling problem words, to lists of official acronyms, to short descriptions of major religious denominations.



HINDUISM TODAY

Reporters Need a More Positive Outlook

Dr. Karan Singh, son of the last Maharaja of Kashmir, is a prominent politician and a scholar of religion. He has been a member of India's parliament and served as India's ambassador to the United States. He has represented Hinduism at international conferences and is a major figure in the interfaith movement. He addressed the issue of how the media selects news:

"It is the big responsibility of the media to report factually and accurately on what has happened. At the same time, the media should throw its weight in favor of communal harmony. Presently the media hardly takes note of the interfaith movement. For example, there was a huge gathering for the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1999. There was not a word in the press about it. Twenty years ago, the environmental movement was similarly ignored or on the periphery of media coverage. Now it has moved to the center. The same needs to happen with the interfaith movement."

He also remarked with regard to the terrorist attacks in the UK: "A million Muslims have lived peacefully in England for 30 to 40 years, now the whole community is under suspicion. This is a tragedy, but brought on by the way these *jihadis* have acted, which has demonized Islam. The press should report on the softer aspects of Islam. The teachings of Sufism, for example, should be brought to the fore, whereas now Wahhabi Islam has more exposure." "In general, he concluded, "religions need to project more universal principles. Hinduism has a strong tradition of pluralism."



ZUMA PRESS/RON BULL

Fame always helps: What makes this photo at the Toronto Film Festival work? The culturally important festival, the kids and that famous actor, Lassie the dog.

For example, the *Stylebook* explains that it is the "Canada goose, not Canadian goose." Similarly, any reporter can tell you that Jeep should be capitalized, as should Jacuzzi and Rollerblades, because they are all trademarks. Reporters are instructed to use "letter carrier" instead of "mailman" because women hold the job, and that there is no apostrophe in "Pikes Peak."

The *Stylebook* contains numerous passages on religion. Entries on Christian sects are multiple and comprehensive. In contrast, Islam is covered in one page. Hinduism and Buddhism are each dismissed in a single column. Sikhism and Jainism are not covered at all. The information on Hinduism is simplistic and inaccurate, stating, for example, that it has "no formal clergy" (ignoring its legions of priestly and monastic lineages), and that one million Hindus live in the US (when the correct number is 2.2 million). Every English-speaking reporter in the world has the *Stylebook* on his desk. And every religious organization should buy a copy to learn what reporters follow as an authoritative source and identify any misconceptions that may need to be countered. The lesson to learn from the style book is that reporters are quite capable of dealing with minute details of a subject. We are not asking too much that they learn and understand a basic and correct outline of the history, theology and current manifestation of any religion or religious movement which enters their sphere of reporting.

Two forms of interacting with the press

There are two basic forms of interaction between religious groups and the media, proactive interaction and reactive interaction. In proactive interaction, religious groups or persons approach the press with the intent of creating a news item, such as an article on their activities. In reactive interaction, the press seek out religious groups or individuals after a news event has happened—a terrorist attack by or against its members, for example. In a second form of reactive interaction, religious groups' approach the media to protest false or otherwise objectionable coverage of issues related to their faith.

Proactive interaction

In proactive interaction, religious groups take the time and make the effort to use the media to educate the community about their faith. There are various means to bring religion into the media in benign circumstances, that is, when not faced with a crisis or mishap. Environmentalists have a saying that to save the planet we must "think globally and act locally." Applying this adage, religious leaders can evaluate the global situation as it relates to religion and determine what things can be done at the local level to bring about improvement.

The first step in proactive interaction is getting to personally know the local media. The goal is not necessarily to make the front page or prime-time TV report. Rather, it is to establish a consistent, low-key presence through news items, photo opportunities,

educational features, opinion pieces and letters to the editor. In North America, most newspapers and magazines have an editor responsible for religious reporting. TV stations may have a reporter assigned part time to matters of faith. Proactive religious leaders make it a point to meet in person and get to know their local religion editors and make it known they are readily available to be interviewed or consulted when the need arises. They also make themselves accessible to reporters who are not religion editors but whose stories occasionally touch on religious matters. A reporter who regards you as a "good source"—reliable, accessible, able to provide well-worded direct quotes and concise, accurate background information—is apt to call you when a story breaks and his deadline looms.

Religion editors want to reflect their community's religious diversity in their publication, and religious leaders can be of great assistance to them. The religion editor at the *Honolulu Advertiser* newspaper told HINDUISM TODAY that most of the material she receives is from Christian evangelicals. She, like other religion editors, must seek out other religious groups and develop stories on her own. The media conglomerate Gannett Corporation, of which the *Advertiser* is a part, actually grades its publications on the number of different ethnic and religious voices that they carry.

One fruitful area of news, she explained, are the "intersecting circles" between religious communities—areas of concern, activity or ceremony that they have in common. For example, one community's concern for passing on their religious heritage to the next generation makes a good story to a religion editor, because it will be of interest to all communities. Celebrations and rites common to all faiths, such as marriage or coming of age, likewise make interesting stories and serve to educate readers about mankind's varied traditions. Background information on one's faith can be provided to the editor to weave into such stories. An article on a colorful Sikh wedding, for instance, might include insights into the Sikh view of marriage and family.

To facilitate both local and wider coverage, proactive religious groups develop attractive websites that explain the basics of the faith in simple terms. Such sites include a section specifically to fill the needs of journalists, with well-written press releases on recent events, high-resolution photos and contact information. Naturally, offering contact information requires having someone ready to respond promptly to inquiries. Well-funded groups may hire a public relations firm to manage their website, issue press releases and interact with the media.

The Roman Catholic church sets a good example in this area (photo, right). When

a reporter googles "Vatican," the first link is www.vatican.va, an immense site which includes a specific page for press contacts; whereas if he googles "Islam," he finds a portal site, <http://www.islam.com/>, with little original content and no press contact.

Religious communities have many opportunities to invoke favorable news coverage. One that works well for HINDUISM TODAY is an open house held every two years, inviting friends on the island, local clergy, politicians and the media. There is a tour, entertainment, food and small talk, all of which allows those of other religions, or no religion, to better understand what our organization is doing.

Weddings, especially if colorful, are apt to receive good coverage on the religion page or the society page. Festivals are another excellent opportunity. Churches, mosques and temples can work personally with local media people to schedule annual coverage of their main festivals and holy days.

Most communities have interfaith organizations. While participation rarely generates media coverage, it does serve as a forum in which to interact, establish rapport and share information with leaders of other faith backgrounds. Such gatherings build a foundation of respect and tolerance which spreads to each member's constituents, influencing attitudes and actions, subtly but inevitably influencing how religion is covered in the media.

A simple, if not inexpensive, outreach method is to buy paid advertising space in newspapers, magazines and on television. One group made a splash with billboard space calling for the ordination of women as priests in the Catholic Church. Less controversially, ads can invite the community to a special function, explain an upcoming religious holiday or offer a heartfelt, sympathetic response to a tragic event.

Favorable media coverage and community appreciation can be earned through social service activities, such as feeding the poor, holding medical camps and providing disaster relief. For example, the Sikh religion has a 500-year-old tradition of free feeding, the *langar*, which they have begun putting into action during disasters in the US. Those in India are familiar with the tradition and have learned to expect the much welcomed *langars* when disaster strikes an area, such as the tsunami-devastated shores of South



VATICAN



HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION

Web presence: A good organizational website has a clear link for media inquiries (orange circle) on the home page, such as in these examples from the Vatican and the Hindu American Foundation

India in 2004. But this is something unusual to Westerners—a noble, charitable tradition that made the news during massive relief efforts in New Orleans in the wake of the Katrina hurricane.

Not reaching out to serve the broader community can invoke mistrust and animosity. A member of one major US Hindu temple that has no public-service programs told HINDUISM TODAY they are regarded as a "cult" by the local community. Conversely, temples that support the food bank and local charities and interact with the broader community are generally well regarded.

One natural way for Hindu groups to become known as a positive and valuable force in the community is to institute programs that foster tolerance. A good model is "Teaching Tolerance," a program of the Southern Poverty Law Center in the US. One of its activities is to arrange for children to meet children of other religions. Instituting such programs is an effective way of becoming known in the community.

Television programs are obviously the most wide-reaching venue. Moderate Mus-



Favorable publicity: (above) A colorful Sikh wedding, here with kids and a horse, makes an appealing news item; (below) when disaster strikes at a distance, a generous donation brings good will and publicity

lims came into world view on a recent panel discussion program aired by the Public Broadcasting System program to debate issues about Islam.

Clearly, it takes effort and sophistication for religious groups to interact with the media to their benefit. It requires responding to vital events and developing ways to garner interest. Successful pro-active groups have well-trained speakers on call to speak on short notice to the media and at community events, such as forums organized by civic leaders and elementary school presentations. It goes without saying that such spokespersons must speak from the heart and be educated in their faith.

Some religions have national or international groups which, among other activities, monitor and respond to media coverage as watchdog or advocacy groups. B'nai B'rith, the National Council of Churches and the Hindu American Foundation respond ag-

gressively to events that involve their faith and also to the manner in which it is treated in the media.

An organization can also create its own media agency to carry news and teachings relevant to its religion or denomination. One example is HINDUISM TODAY and its daily e-mail news summary service, Hindu Press International. But, being your own press is different than creating a watchdog or advocacy group. To be effective, it must be conducted in a thoroughly professional manner, on a par with mainstream publications, such as *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine. The reporting must be consistently accurate and unbiased, so that other media groups come to trust and rely on it.

Reactive interaction

The day a religion or religious group is badly portrayed in the press is not the best day to develop a working relationship with the

media. An existing, well-developed relationship is a preferred starting point. Yet, events that attract wide attention require an immediate response, on both the global and local levels.

Organizational structure is an key factor. The unified structure of the Catholic church enables it to respond in a one voice, whereas the variegated nature of most religions can make it difficult for majority opinions to be heard.

Occasionally a news story will be biased, unfair or demeaning to a religious community. On October 4, 2003 (in sharp contrast to their exemplary record of inclusiveness and respect in reporting on minority religions), the *Toronto Star* upset the Hindu community with their coverage of the annual Durga festival in India, a multi-day celebration involving hundreds of millions of Hindus. The one and only photo included in this article to represent one of Hinduism's largest festivals was of an unclad statue of the Goddess being prepared for the procession. Hindus found this insulting, as the provocative image created a misleading impression of the sacred festival and presented Hinduism in a bizarre manner.

The events that followed were typical of protests against the media. Hindus voiced their objections to the *Star*. Initial complaints, including 1,000 e-mail "letters to the editor," were ignored. Demonstrations in front

of their office, coupled with contact from concerned Hindu community leaders, finally got their attention. Meeting with the editors, Hindu leaders explained that although the photo itself simply showed part of the normal process of festival preparation, its use as the only image depicting the festival was obviously calculated to create a bizarre impression and evoke a laughing or snickering response from non-Hindus.

The paper responded with a half-hearted apology on October 11 that concluded with the statement, "When asked, several Hindus said the photo didn't offend them." The *Star* did not identify the "several Hindus" as community leaders, temple priests, scholars of Hindu iconography or even devout Hindus, but still used their anonymous opinions to justify the photo. Hindus rejected the apology and continued to protest. The *Star's* editors ultimately concluded that Hindus were genuinely offended by the photo and

Teaching Tolerance

A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center

Action programs: Instituting a program such as the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance can be good public relations for any religious organization

issued a proper apology. In the course of doing so, they also acknowledged to community leaders that the *Star* already had a policy in place to present religious images in a "dignified" manner. They admitted they had failed to abide by their own rules.

Methods of protesting coverage

If you call a newspaper or magazine to complain about an article, the most common response will be, "Write a letter to the editor." This is a simple way for the publication to dispatch the concern. While letters to the editor are useful in responding to other letters to the editor, some editorial pieces and to factual errors in reports, they have little effect on a publication's policies or attitudes. Letters can easily be ignored.

It is common for religious groups to respond to injustice or insult by rallying their members to deluge the offending press and various politicians with letters of complaint and blogs on the Internet. Unless done in a sensitive, nonabusive manner by a responsible group, this tactic can easily backfire by creating further hostility. Most campaigns we've seen launched online by Hindus degenerate into name calling and threats that do more harm than good.

A thoughtful, polite approach is much more productive than a brash assault with condemning, accusatory diatribes. For example, the Muslim community in Phoenix, Arizona, arranged a face-to-face meeting with the editors of the local newspaper. They said, "We don't see our community in your newspaper." This polite but strong objection resulted in a permanent shift: one reporter was assigned part-time to cover news and events in the Muslim community, which numbers over 70,000.

The 2006 case of cartoons insulting Prophet Mohammed is instructive as a public campaign that got out of hand. Perhaps most notable was the hypocrisy of the Western press in defending the cartoons as an expression of free speech. Muslims rightly pointed out that in several European countries, it is against the law to publish anti-Semitic car-

toons. Likewise, it is against the policy of every major Western publication to publish anti-Semitic or racist cartoons. The Western media got the message that it should extend this policy to protect Muslim sensibilities as well. Whether this was best accomplished by deadly riots and death fatwas against the cartoonists is another question. Making enemies of the press is never a good strategy.

Community leaders in Denmark could have tried to solve the issue locally, before others became involved who saw an opportunity to create civil unrest. A group from any religion could have taken the lead. We were told that the Muslim community had, in fact, approached Denmark's king, but were rebuffed. Had the papers and cartoonists been convinced to apologize promptly, it is unlikely the situation would have escalated into an international scandal in which lives were lost.

Conclusion

Dr. Sharma asked how the "media might use its persuasive power to promote harmony among religions and bridge the secular/religious divide." The responsibility to make this happen belongs with religious groups. Each group needs to work to improve its relationship with the media. They should learn how the media thinks and operates. The media has its institutional peculiarities, some of which work against religion. Each group should be proactive, opening more channels to those who report the news, understand their opportunities and restrictions and make it easy for the media to accurately and sympathetically report on their religious events. They need to be prepared and organized to respond quickly in a positive way when crisis situations occur.

One way to bridge the secular/religious divide is to share our lives with one another, which can be accomplished, in part, by stories in the media. People can gradually learn that we all have many experiences, concerns and challenges in common. We all seek to live life for a higher purpose, even if we don't conceive of that purpose in terms



Understanding India's Media

Madhu Kishwar of Delhi, India, is the editor of Manushi magazine. She is one of India's leading activists for women's rights and social justice for disadvantaged communities. Her comments concern the peculiar situation of the media in India:

"India is one country in the world where the majority community, the Hindus, complains that they are not being given a sympathetic coverage by the press as against the minority communities, Islam and Christianity, which get a better treatment by the press. Our mainstream national press is greatly influenced by the leftists who, in turn, are influenced by the colonial critique of Hinduism. As well, they are influenced by Karl Marx, who portrayed Hinduism as a stagnant civilization which is a cesspool of dehumanizing practices. So it is the Marxist description and that of the British missionaries through which most of the scholars and media see Hinduism. Our educated elite is poorly informed about our own religion and culture. Experts on Hinduism are in short supply. The best that exist have inadequate knowledge and are biased as well. The whole information structure is of a shoddy quality."

of God. Through programs such as Teaching Tolerance, our children can meet children of other races, religions and ethnicities and learn of their commonalities. In these and other ways we can dispel fears and stereotypes and develop an honest respect for one another and for the religious—or non-religious—path that each of us is following through life.

VIDEO OF ORIGINAL KEYNOTE PRESENTATION IS AVAILABLE AT: WWW.HINDUISMTODAY.COM/IN-DEPTH_ISSUES/

Rukmini Devi Remembered

Two large-format photo books present the life of one of India's greatest dancers and fine-art educators

SOUTH INDIAN DANCE ENTHUSIASTS should greatly appreciate these two latest offerings from Kalakshetra Publications in South India: *Rukmini Devi, Bharata Natyam* and *Rukmini Devi, Dance Drama*. Rukmini (1904-1986) was the founder of the Kalakshetra Foundation of Chennai, India, including its College of Fine Arts, today the world's leading school for Bharatanatyam dance (www.kalakshetra.net/). The books are hefty, nine by 14 inches and running 270 pages plus each (Kalekshetra Publications, Rs. 2000). *Bharata Natyam* is an introductory text, followed by contemporary and retrospective articles by and about Rukmini. There is an abundance of photos, mostly in black and white. *Dance Drama* is a photographic account of her stage work from 1938 to 1986. The overall impact is like stepping back in time to the early 1930s, when she revolutionized South Indian dance, then moving forward through her illustrious 50-year career to her death in 1986.

The book's creator, C. Nachiappan, undertook the work late in his own life, following

his entry into *sannyas*, Hindu monasticism. He is now known as Koviloor Swami and is influential in the Hindu world. He writes in his introduction, "I came into contact with Rukmini Devi when I was studying in the Besant Memorial School at the young age of 12, not realizing that it was she who would become the catalyst in bringing out my talents in art and photography." He worked as her personal assistant, set designer, lighting expert and photographer, recording all of her dance dramas through 1976. The book's photos are mostly from his collection and the early work of Conrad Woldring.

Rukmini explains in one article, "I never knew Madame Blavatsky (founder of Theosophy), but grew up under the influence of Dr. Annie Besant. I met her when I was fourteen. She then, as afterwards, appeared to me a person of tremendous power and light." Just two years later, Rukmini married Dr. Besant's close associate, the then forty-year-old Dr. George Arundale, causing an outcry among her orthodox brahmin community.

Rukmini's initial talents lay in music. During her travels with Dr. Arundale, she be-

came interested in ballet, and then at age 25, in Indian dance. The dance form now known as Bharatanatyam was originally called *sadir*, and performed by the temple dancers, the Devadasis. "Still under the spell of ballet," explains the book, "in 1929 she went to see the performance of *sadir* by two sisters in Madras. That program was pristinely classical and not one of those vulgar versions adapted by many of the Devadasis whose preserve *sadir* was in those days. Many of the Devadasis had become courtesans and were not too highly regarded by the conservative society. However, that particular program converted Rukmini totally and she 'was never the same person again,' according to a friend. She herself reminisced once that she was 'ushered into a new world of rhythmic beauty and meaning.' It became a personal challenge for her to disseminate knowledge of 'this beautiful and profound art that had been restricted to a few specialists.'"

Rukmini Devi undertook serious training in the dance at the relatively late age of 30 but became a master of the form. She established not only the dance school at Kalakshetra, but several related institutions as well. She was instrumental in adapting Western stage sets and lighting techniques for the Indian performances and generally succeeded in bringing dance back into respectable repute.

Rukmini Devi said in a speech on All India Radio, "In old India, art was part of the scheme of everyday life, and that was where the Indian genius showed itself. But nowadays art is something to be displayed. In the old Indian homes, even the kitchen vessels were beautifully shaped, everything in life was beautiful and picturesque. That creative spirit of beauty has to be reborn in India today. The great past is never out of date, as greatness and beauty are eternally true."

RUKMINI DEVI, BHARATA NATYAM AND DANCE DRAMA, DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY C. NACHIAPPAN (KOVILLOOR SWAMY), KALAKSHETRA PUBLICATIONS, 84 KALAKSHETRA ROAD, THIRUVANMIYUR, CHENNAI, INDIA 600 041.



KALAKSHETRA PRESS



EDUCATION

Massive rally in Washington showcases Pariwar's amazing youth program

AN 8,000-STRONG PARADE BEGUN FROM the front of the US Capitol building opened the Swadhyay Pariwar's Vayastha Sanchalan, National Youth Rally, on June 16, 2007. The chain of devotees stretched more than a mile down Constitution Avenue, ending near the Washington Monument where the Pariwar's leader, Didiji, reviewed the marchers. They proceeded in groups of 50 to 100, according to their city of origin. Each group carried banners displaying the principles of the founder, Pan-

duranga Shastri Athavale, known as Dadaji. Slogans carried by the *swadhyaes* included "God is with me and within me," "We must have reverence for mankind, for all creatures and for nature;" and "The youth are meant for not merely reading history, but for making it."

Onlookers were struck by the colorful culture and unusual message. They kept asking the HINDUISM TODAY team who attended the event, "Who are these people? What's going on?" Most were at once delighted and

puzzled at this religiously inspired march, which was so different from the usual marching-band style parade.

The Swadhyay Pariwar, "study of the self family," was founded by Pandurang Shastri Athavale (1920-2003) in Mumbai (www.swadhyay.org). It is today a global organization dedicated to the spiritual upliftment

Jubilee: (clockwise from above): Didiji lights the torch to start the parade; young ladies at the staging area; the march through DC



Inspiration: Simran Yogakumar (left, age 4) looks over at her brother Sanjay (age 6) as they pose outside HINDUISM TODAY's office with Kalakshetra Publications' latest releases



ALL PHOTOS: HINDUISM TODAY



Joyous Family Gathering: Didiji, current leader of Swadhyay Pariwar, presides at the Verizon Center over a colorful dance by 1,400 youth.

of individuals and society through study, knowledge and discovery of self. The Pariwar aims at universal social revolution and is based on Hindu practices and scriptures, primarily the *Bhagavad Gita*. It counts millions of adherents worldwide, making it one of Hinduism's largest religious organizations. The Washington, DC, event exemplified Dadji's dynamic campaign to empower youth. The event drew an estimated 12,500

Swadhyayees, including 3,000 youth. They enjoyed a discourse by Didiji on selfless service, videos of Dadaji preaching and at an immense celebration he took part in near the end of his life. The evening ended with a series of floor shows, most notably the grand finale in which 1,400 youth performed intricately coordinated dances (photo above). Behind the pride, enthusiasm and devotion among the Pariwar youth is a sophis-

ticated and effective education program administered from India and conducted worldwide by volunteers at weekly meetings on the local level. The discipline, magnitude, wholesome fervor and dedication of time and energy of this conclave and others like it bode well for the future of Hinduism, as youth embrace the teachings and practices of Sanatana Dharma by virtue of their own conviction and determination. 🇮🇳

A Powerful Teaching Program

Swadhyay Pariwar conducts weekly or twice monthly one-hour *kendras*, or satsang/study sessions in rented halls or schools. Depending on the number present, they break up into as many as seven groups (outlined below, with typical subject matter). Four of these, known as Bal Sanskar Kendra (BSK), are for children.

Adults, age 31 or older:

Group recitation of shlokas and viewing a video of the Hindi lectures of founder Pandurang Shastri Athavale, "Dadaji."

Yuva ("Youth"), age 16 to 30:

Group recitation of slokas and viewing a video of Dadaji's lectures, but with English subtitles.

Mothers with babies, age 0-4:

Mothers with babies have their own room where they watch Dadaji's video but are able to freely care for the babies as needed without distracting the group.

A Global Syllabus:

Twice-a-month packets of video and syllabus materials are sent from Nirmal Niketan, the Swadhyay Pariwar headquarters in India, to zones all over the world. Children in every country are learning the same thing during the same week.

BSK, Level 1, age 5-7, grades KG, 1st, 2nd

Stories, (Ramayana, fables, etc.) sloka recitation, devotional songs.

BSK, Level 2, 8-10, grades 3 to 5

Advanced stories, slokas, songs, characters (Vivekananda, etc.) crafts.

BSK, Level 3, 11-13, grades 6 to 8

Meanings of symbols, reasons behind festivals, simple philosophy.

BSK, Level 4, 14-15, grades 9 to 10

Qualities, e.g., "self-respect," the rational philosophy behind symbols and festivals; debates "What is more needed in life? Money or love?"

A College in India:

The Vidya Peeth in Thane, India, offers one- and two-year residence programs for youth for intensive study, sadhana and study of philosophy, the lives of great leaders as well as real-world experience doing seva in villages.

Weekly, Monthly & Annual Events in the US

Weekly—Yuva Kendra: a curriculum-based, interactive Friday night gathering (no adults) with popular youth activities: debates, games, skits, etc.

Monthly—Mahila Kendra: Ladies meetings, age 21 and up, discuss how to bring the culture and teachings into home life, society and the nation.

Annual—Dirga Milan: Sanchalak (Teacher) Training. About 200 Yuva Kendra sanchalaks gather once a year to to share experiences, discuss curriculum and the best ways for implementation.

Annual—Youth Camp: A two-week summer camp for ages 14-20 conducted by Yuva Kendra teachers under 30.

Annual—Bal Sanskar Kendra Camp: A four-day camp for children ages 8-13.

Annual—Festival Competitions: Gita Jayanthi elocution and essay contests.

Annual—National Sports Day: friendly game play between teams from 11 zones.

Annual—Street Play: A public drama during Krishna Janmashtami.



ALL PHOTOS: HINDUISM TODAY

A new generation: (left to right), Vishal Mody, high-school physics teacher, Illinois; (top) Raaghav Pandya, New Jersey; Keshav Pandya, New Jersey; Mrs. Ami Majumdar, high-school English teacher, Ohio. All were born in the USA. Hear the complete audio of these interviews in our Digital Edition: www.hinduismtoday.com/digital/

Vishal Mody, 26

"A very small percentage of Indian youth have any sense of their religious and spiritual heritage. Young people are struggling to create their identity in an unfamiliar culture which is not knowledgeable about their religion, while being raised another way at home. At the same time, you are who you are—sometimes that creates a lot of confusion. I had a lot of Indian friends who were ashamed. I began to feel the very same way. I tried to disassociate and was very confident and very proud of it. My mom had to drag me kicking and screaming to Bal Sanskar Kendra at age 13.

"Going to Swadhyay's Vidya Peeth (a kind of college of religion) in India at age 19 transformed my understanding of the culture. I went for one year during 2000 and 2001. To sum it up, it's simple living and high thinking. In a typical day you wake up at five in the morning, prayers at 6 am, surya namaskar, Indian philosophy, study of both Western and Indian literature, study circles, evening prayer and classes again.

"Because a lot of the ideas in Hinduism are very abstract, they become misunderstood. The Western world portrays it in a certain way and we begin to accept that way of understanding. But Dadaji took these high ideas from our scriptures and simplified them. It just made so much more sense. I think the idea of indwelling God is such a simple idea, incredibly powerful and transformative. It's not a set of rules or a set of guidelines. It's an internal change in outlook."

Raaghav Pandya, 13

"I have been going to Bal Sanskar Kendra since I was born. From Gandhi I learned about nonviolence through which he helped India gain freedom from the British. He told people to always say the truth. If someone tries to hurt you, don't ever fight back. Just stay calm. From Dadaji I've learned fearlessness, because God is always within me. I can do it. I can try my best at anything, and God will always help me.

"The most important thing for children is to remember that God is with you, because, if you remember that God is with you, you won't ever do anything wrong. People in school say swear words. But, if you remember that God is with you, then you'll know that is not right. It's my inner conscious that's going to tell me not to say those words."

Keshav Pandya, 11

"I'm in fifth grade. In the *Gita* elocution contest I learned that other is not other, he is my divine brother, that we are all brothers under the Fatherhood of God. God resides in all of us, so we should all treat others equally. And that's it. I really enjoy our Bal Sanskar Kendra classes. We learn all about our Indian history, our epics, different Gods, our religion and about great leaders that helped make us what we are right now. I like how Dadaji said he trusted three things: youth, God and *shruti* (scripture) and that God's work should go all around the world and we should all do it together. One of my favorite authors is Leo Tolstoy."

Mrs. Ami Majumdar, 27

"I started Bal Sanskar Kendra back when I was about six years old. My identity as an Indian and a Hindu was formed in those years of elementary school—every Sunday going to the Swadhyay Centers with my parents, my whole family, my grandparents, meeting friends there, getting to know the scriptures. It started out just as something that was

fun. In junior high school, the understanding started to kick in. I was thirteen when I went to India. I got a chance to visit some of the experiments that Dadaji has done in fishing and farming villages. It hit me that it wasn't just me in my little city in California. It was millions of youth, young children and people all over the world who were living by a certain set of principles.

"We did national and local cultural programs together. I'm a classical Indian dancer, so it was an amazing opportunity to be able to offer the dance form, that made me who I was, towards God's feet. What always struck me was this collective spirit of bhakti, how everyone got together and contributed. And the whole thing of the ego dissolving; you really feel that when it's not you. Although you are offering something, it's not yours anymore and so there's something pretty profound in that experience.

"What has kept the youth as Swadhyayees? One of the biggest things is that both Dadaji, and Didiji really have demonstrated and lived every principle that they've ever spoken of. And I think there's something in youth that really responds to 'walk the walk,' not just talking the talk. Also the intellectual approach towards Hinduism—that it really is more than a set of rituals, that there's an understanding behind it. For future generations, unless they're intellectually convinced, they are not going to do anything.

"The *Bhagavad Gita* elocution contests are worth mentioning—about 3.5 million youth all over the world speak each year and the number is growing. It always struck me: Christian youngsters holding and reading Bibles. You don't see that as much with Indian children and their scriptures. So one thing that Dadaji and Didiji did was put the *Gita* in our hands and say: 'You find the quotes. You find what you want to do and then make it your own.' I think that's been a very powerful experience for myself as well as everyone else who has done that."



Ganesha's latest home: Devotees receive sacraments at the newly consecrated shrine

K E R A L A

“He Heard My Prayers”

Elephant-faced Lord invites family back into Hinduism through a miraculous act of Grace

BY VRINDAVANAM S. GOPALAKRISHNAN, KERALA, INDIA

GEORGE KURIEN LIVES IN A TILED house typical of the Syrian Orthodox Christian community, but there is no mistaking the ambiance. Passers-by are surprised by the fragrance of burning incense and the intermittent ringing of a brass bell like those used by Hindu priests. Arriving at 8:30 in the morning, I encountered a group of men, women and children coming from the house. Each held sandal paste, red sindoor powder and flowers wrapped in a banana leaf—all signs they had just attended puja at a Hindu temple. George's house has become an abode of Lord Ganesha.

For George, wife Alice, son Sanjay and daughter Meetu Mariam, there is only one God and that is “Ganapati Bhagavan,” Lord Ganesha. Alice told me that previously she prayed to Parumala Bava, a revered 19th century bishop of Kerala's Syrian Orthodox Church. “But now,” she said, “only Ganapati Bhagavan is on my tongue.”

This transformation took place in October, 2003. George was facing a serious financial crisis. Looking for ways to increase his income, he became aware that soil had become a hot commodity: landowners were buying it to fill in their low-lying paddy fields and marshlands for the much more profitable residential and commercial construction. George realized that he could sell the soil from the small hill behind his

house—and once the hill was gone, he could sell the leveled land for residential construction. The decision was made.

While loading the earth into the lorry, the driver found a small *panchaloka* (five-metal) icon of Lord Ganesha. He handed it over



A family of conviction: Alice, Sanjay and George Kurien at their Kerala home now housing Ganesha

to George, who decided keep it in his drawing room as an antique. “But,” he recounted, “ever since I did that I started hearing in my dreams at night, ‘Don't keep it the way you are doing now. Either hand it over to a temple or build a temple and consecrate the Deity there and worship. You will become prosperous.’ During the days when the Deity was kept unattended, my work was con-

stantly interrupted and my financial crisis deepened. At the same time, my children's education was disrupted.

“I called two of my Hindu friends and we visited an eminent *tantri*—an expert on the *Agamic* rites governing Deity worship. He advised me to create a sanctified place for the Deity in my home. I entrusted Ganesha to a nearby temple while we built the sanctum.” The *tantri* identified the room on the northern end of the house as ideal. The sanctum was built promptly and the consecration ceremonies were held on November 17, 2004.

The temple has prospered ever since. At first, puja was conducted only once a month, but now the income is sufficient to employ a priest who lives on the temple premises and performs the ritual worship twice a day. Once a month *annadanam*, a mass free feeding, is sponsored by the devotees.

George wept freely as he explained this momentous turning point in his family's life. “I surrendered before Him. He heard my prayers and helped my entire family. There have not been any financial constraints since. Everything goes on smoothly and joyously. Our daughter was accepted into a nursing course despite a lack of funds on our part. My son, who was a profligate during his dental mechanic course, totally changed and passed his dentistry exams with flying marks. He has been offered a position as a dental technician by the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences. He has become so dedicated to Ganapati that he has undergone training for priesthood and is now assisting the head priest. A Christian friend was saved by our Ganapati Bhagavan. Such are the lively testimonies to the miracles of our Lord Ganesha!”

George faced serious opposition and threats from the Church. “Having once been so actively involved in the Church, our former parish became furious with us, and we have been ostracized by the Church and even by our families,” George recounts. Alice then boldly interjected, “But, since our Ganapati Bhagavan is with us, we had no fear at all!”

And so the formerly Christian house of George Kurien in Mulanthuruthy has become a place of worship for devotees of “Lakshmi Ganapati” (called thus for having helped people solve their

financial problems); and George, who once attended a Syrian Orthodox seminary, has become the custodian of a Ganesha temple.

George's family—descendants of a Nair family which converted to Christianity a century ago—now seek acceptance by the local, caste-oriented Hindu community. They are pleading to be formally accepted back into the Sanatana Dharma. 

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Evolution of Faith

As the soul matures, it slowly develops an unshakable spiritual knowledge

BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI

FAITH IS THE INTELLECT OF THE SOUL AT ITS VARIOUS stages of unfoldment. The soul comes forth from Lord Siva as an embryo and progresses through three stages (*avastha*) of existence: *kevala avastha*, *sakala avastha* and *shuddha avastha*. During *kevala avastha*, the soul is likened to a seed hidden in the ground or a spark of the Divine hidden in a cloud of unknowing called *anava*, the primal fetter of individuality, the first aspect of Lord Siva's concealing grace, *tirod-hana shakti*. *Sakala avastha*, the next stage in the soul's journey, is the period of bodily existence, the cyclic evolution through transmigration from body to body, under the additional powers of maya and karma, the second and third aspects of the Lord's concealing grace.

The journey through *sakala avastha* also happens in three stages. The first is called *irul pada*, “stage of darkness,” where the soul's impetus is toward *pasha-jnanam*, knowledge and experience of the world. The next period is *marul pada*, “stage of confusion,” where the soul begins to take account of its situation and finds itself caught between the world and God, not knowing which way to turn. This is called *pashu-jnanam*, the soul seeking to know its true nature. The last period is *arul pada*, “stage of grace,” when the soul yearns for the grace of God. Now it has begun its true religious evolution with the constant aid of the Lord.

The intellect in its capacity to contain truth is a very limited tool, while faith is a very broad, accommodating and embracing faculty. The mystery of life and beyond life, of Siva, is really better understood through faith than through intellectual reasoning. The intellect is a memory/reason conglomerate from the lower nadi/chakra complex. Its refined ability to juggle information around is uncanny in some instances. Nevertheless, the intellect is built upon what we hear and remember, what we experience and remember, what we explain to others who are refined or gross in reasoning faculties. What we remember of it all and the portions that have been forgotten may either be greatly beneficial to those listening or may be confusing, but will certainly not be Truth with a capital “T.”

There are two kinds of faith. The first kind is faith in those masters, adepts, yogis and rishis who have had similar experiences and have spoken about them in similar ways, unedited by the ignorant. We, therefore, can have faith that some Truth was revealed from within themselves, from some deep, inner or higher source. The second aspect of faith is in one's own spiritual, unsought-for, unbidden flashes of intuition, revelations or visions, which one remembers even stronger as the months go by, more vividly than something read from a book, seen on television or heard from a friend or a philosopher. These personal revelations create a new, superconscious intellect when verified by what yogis and rishis and the sadhus have seen and heard and whose explanations centuries have preserved. These are the old souls of the *shuddha avastha*, being educated from within out, building a new intellect from superconscious insights. Their faith is unshakable, undaunted, for it is themselves. It is just who they are at this stage of the evolu-



tion, the maturation, of their soul in the *shuddha avastha*.

One of the aspects of faith is the acceptance of tradition rather than the questioning or doubting of traditions. Another is trust in the process of spiritual unfoldment, so that when one is going through an experience, one always believes that the process is happening, instead of thinking that today's negative experience is outside the process. However, it is not possible for souls in the *irul pada*, stage of darkness, to trust in the process of anything except their need for food, a few bodily comforts and their gaining the abilities to adjust transparently into a community without committing too many crimes for which they would be severely punished. They gain their lessons through the action-and-painful-reaction ways.

It is difficult and nearly impossible for those in the *marul pada*, stage of confusion, to have faith in the process of spiritual unfoldment and trust in tradition, because they are developing their personal ego, manufacturing karmas, good, bad and mixed, to sustain their physical existence for hundreds of lives. They will

listen to sermons with a deaf ear and, after they are over, enjoy the food and the idle chatter the most. They will read books on philosophy and rationalize their teachings as relevant only to the past. The great knowledge of the past tradition, even the wisdom their grandparents might hold, is an encroachment on their proud sovereignty.

It is only when the soul reaches the maturity to enter the *arul pada*, the stage of grace, that the ability will come from within to lean on the past and on tradition, perform the present sadhanas, live within dharma and carve a future for themselves and others by bringing the best of the past, which is tradition, forward into the future. This transition is a happy one. Truth now has a capital “T” and is always told. The restraints, the *yamas*, truly have been perfected and are a vital part of the DNA system of individual living beings. Now, as he enters the *arul pada*, the *niyamas*, spiritual practices, stand out strongly in his mind.

The Sanskrit word *astikya* means “that which is,” or “that which exists.” Thus, for Hindus faith means believing in what is. *Astikya* refers to one who believes in what is, one who is pious and faithful. There is an old saying favored by practical, experiential intellectuals, “Seeing is believing.” A more profound adage is “Believing is seeing.” The scientists and the educators of today live in the *marul pada*. They see with their two eyes and pass judgments based on what they currently believe. The rishis of the past and the rishis of the now and those yet to come in the future also are seers. There is a thin thread through the history of China, Japan, India, England and all of Europe, Africa, the Americas, Polynesia and all the countries of the world connecting seers and what they have seen. This seeing is not with the two eyes. It is with the third eye, the eye of the soul. One cannot erase through argument or coercion that which has been seen. The seer relates his seeing to the soul of the one who hears. This is *sampradaya*. This is guru-shishya transference. This is Truth. This is *shuddha*.

SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI (1927-2001) is the founder of HINDUISM TODAY and 162nd satguru of the Kailasa Parampara. Web: www.himalayanacademy.com/satgurus/gurudevai

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Jagdish Agarwal, founder of Dinodia, managed the family business of textiles and was a hobby photographer. He won many awards in photography competitions in India and abroad. Demand for his photos for use in local publications led to his founding the Dinodia Photo Library in 1987 with 100 photographers enrolled and a start-up collection of 100,000 images—the first professionally-run photo library in India. Now in its 20th year, Dinodia has over 20,000 clients worldwide. Son Tushar has joined to help run the business. They have a staff of 19, including a team of three who pre-check and then scan slides and photos, and two specialists who have the momentous task of entering keywords.

Top down: son Tushar and father Jagdish Agarwal; web site; incoming slides from photographers are meticulously reviewed, cleaned, scanned and added to the library; aside from the online archives, Dinodia has an additional 500,000 slides cataloged in binders; one slide from the collection



www.hinduismtoday.com



Hindu Heritage Endowment

‘IF YOU BREAK GROUND, THEY WILL GIVE’

Jai Seecharran is willing to take reasonable risks.

After a brief career as a high school science teacher, he took his chances as a motel owner, landlord, Baskin Robbins and Karmelkorn® franchisee, and with a few other businesses.

He feels that the same entrepreneurial spirit that starts new businesses funds new temples. “You have to break ground if you hope to raise money,” he says. “Unless people see something happening, they will not be inspired to give.”

He moved to the United States from coastal Guyana when he was eighteen to further his education. Both in Iowa, where he spent most of his adult life, and in Arizona, where he retired a few years ago to be with family, he saw Hindu immigrants find each other so they could express their faith together.

“The group usually starts in a home and then moves to an apartment basement,” he said of the temporary Hindu temples that have sprung up throughout the country over the years. “In Ames, Iowa, we started with five or six families in a home and then moved to an apartment basement



Artist's rendering of the Bharatiya Ekta Mandir in Arizona

as our group grew. Our temple on Sunday morning might have been a party room on Saturday night.”

The Iowa devotees talked about building a permanent temple for years, he said. But substantial contributions began to flow only after the groundbreaking.

When visiting his daughter in Scottsdale in the late 1990s, he heard local Hindus talking about building their own temple. “They asked me how we raised the money for the Iowa temple, how much we needed initially, what our strategy

was,” he recalled. “I told them to have members of the temple board make loans, to borrow from the bank, and to start work. Others would contribute once the project was under way.”

He said that Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona—a Hindu and Jain Temple in Phoenix—started construction in September 2006. Phase 1 will be finished in August 2007, at a cost of \$5 million. Indianization of the 12,000-square-foot temple will follow later, he added.

Moving forward at that pace entails risk, but Jai feels the risk is worth taking. A permanent temple, he says, both expresses and creates community. “The presence of the temple attracts other Hindus,” he said. He recollected hearing from a Hindu doctor from Canada asking what Iowa was like and where the local temple was. “For people relocating to a new community, this is critical. A permanent temple may be the determining reason they choose a community. But to get it built, someone has to stick his neck out.”

Jai applied that same principle in December of 2006 to the long-range future of the Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona by creating a permanent fund (#68) at the Hindu Heritage Endowment with a gift of appreciated stock. His gift bypassed the capital gain on the stock and generated an income tax deduction based on the stock’s full market value. Having broken the ice with an established gift, he hopes others will give to the fund, either during their life or through a bequest. The fund is meant as a long-term source of reliable income for the temple. As with creating a temple, someone had to take the first step. Please visit the temple at www.ektamandir.org and make a donation to the fund at www.hheonline.org/donate.shtml.



Temple Builder Jai Seecharran

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Mary Sophia Webster		50.00	Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund		Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund	
Anonymous	US\$10.00	Total		4,963.92	Anonymous	50.00	Judy Berty	20.00
K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy	482.00	Hindu Businessmen's Association Trust			Total	50.00	Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda	153.00
Darmaguhan Satgunasingam	75.00	Easvan Param		409.95	Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund		Jayshree S. Rao	101.00
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20	Janaka Param		91.00	Rajadeva Alahan	153.00	Narendran Siddan	25.00
Other Donations	15,476.30	Total		500.95	Total	153.00	Martine Thom	100.00
Total	16,143.50						Total	399.00
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood			A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund		Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund	
Anonymous	1,204.00	Bala Sivaceyon		34.78	Chitrnanjan Saravanapavan	50.00	Jayshree S. Rao	101.00
Roger & Rosemary Brown	120.00	Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan		100.20	Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00	Total	101.00
Victoria Lynne Johnson	30.00	Total		134.98	Total	100.00	Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	
R. R. Kamath	100.00	Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund			Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		Victoria Lynne Johnson	10.00
Mohan Rao Korukonda	100.00	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam		41.25	Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00	Mohan Rao Korukonda	100.00
Bharat Rafpara	131.00	Gowri Nadason		207.64	Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00	Total	110.00
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20	K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy		101.00	Manoharan Navaratnarajah	150.00	Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	
Raja Vishnu	80.00	Vayudeva Varadan		54.00	Alex Ruberto	45.00	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	41.25
Other Donations	26,634.80	Other Donations		6,300.00	Vayudeva Varadan	63.00	Lila Shakti Devi	50.00
Total	28,500.00	Total		6,703.89	Raja Vishnu	80.00	Ripla & Gaurav Malhotra	125.50
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund			Total	1,000.00	Natraj Narayanswami	108.33
Gunavadee Caremben	7.18	Anonymous		50.00	Total	1,695.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	16.67
Somasundaram Caremben	7.18	Total		50.00	Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired		Jutikadevi Sivaraja	432.00
Sukanta Caremben	7.18	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment			Alex Ruberto	45.00	Silas H. Zirkle	500.00
Tarakini Gunasegaran	10.70	Anonymous		50.00	Total	45.00	Total	1,273.75
Victoria Lynne Johnson	10.00	Manoharan Navaratnarajah		75.00	Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment		Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund	
Amooda Koothan	4.77	Total		125.00	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	41.25
Saravan Koothan	4.77	Hinduism Today Production Fund			Total	150.00	Ripla & Gaurav Malhotra	125.50
Jagrata Minardi	142.50	Palani Annamalai		10.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		Natraj Narayanswami	58.33
Subramaniam Pennathur	16.67	Kamal V. & Shonu K. Gandhi		1,001.00	Bala Sivaceyon	34.76	Dharmalingam Siddhan	150.00
Kirtideva Peruman	9.57	Subramaniam Pennathur		16.66	Total	34.76	Total	375.08
Niroshnee Peruman	14.34	Kamalakar Rambhatla		100.00	Taos Hanuman Fund		India Hindu Tribals Endowment	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	Jayshree S. Rao		101.00	Kathleen A. Knight	200.00	Raghavan Srinivasan	400.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	8.69	Narayana & Sarojini Rao		2,016.00	Total	200.00	Total	400.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	8.69	Total		3,244.66	Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	
Patudeva Sivaceyon	8.69	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund			Auslin Mangal Lawrence	150.00	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
Hemavalli Sivalingam	2.62	Praneel Chandra Gosai		250.00	Total	150.00	Total	54.00
Kantaruban Sivalingam	2.62	Pankaj N. Lalji		500.00	Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		Pooled Income Fund (PIF)	
Rohini Sivalingam	2.62	Natraj Narayanswami		25.00	Natraj Narayanswami	58.34	Savitri Palani	100.00
Potriyan Sivanathan	5.76	Alex Ruberto		75.00	Total	58.34	Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2007	
Javanya Skanda	5.77	Nikolai Safavi		125.00	Karnataka Temple Development Fund		Total Endowment Funds	8,835,303.44
Shun K. Sunder	249.11	Laurie & Mark Scurich		200.00	Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda	303.00	Total Pooled Income Funds	224,051.95
Samynaden Veerapen	19.02	Raghavan Srinivasan		400.00	Raghavan Srinivasan	400.00	Grand Total	
Siven Veerasamy	28.64	Rodney & Ilene Standen		30.00	Total	703.00	US\$9,059,355.39	
Total	877.09	Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan		100.20	Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Total Contributions	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Raja Vishnu		80.00	Anonymous		72,345.32	
Yatrika Ajaya	80.34	Total		1,785.20	Total		72,345.32	
Brian Breiling	80.00	Hindu Education Endowment			Hindu Literature Fund		Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2007	
Ravichandran Ceyon	41.00	Bhagawandas P. Lathi		500.00	K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy	75.00	Total Endowment Funds	8,835,303.44
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	724.00	Naran D. Patel & Mani N. Patel Family		100.00	Nigel Subramaniam Siva	600.00	Total Pooled Income Funds	224,051.95
Ravindra Doorgiat	64.51	Total		600.00	Total	675.00	Grand Total	
Ramesh Gantiyala	320.00	Hindu Press International Endowment Fund			Anonymous		US\$9,059,355.39	
Anil D. Halappa	240.00	Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda		63.00	Total	50.00	Total Contributions	
Isanah Kameni	17.50	Jayshree S. Rao		101.00	Hindu Literature Fund		72,345.32	
T. Iswarah Kumar	35.50	Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan		100.20	K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy	75.00	Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2007	
Lakshman Maheswaran	800.00	Total		264.20	Nigel Subramaniam Siva	600.00	Total Endowment Funds	8,835,303.44
Adi Sankara Perumal	25.81	Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment			Total	675.00	Total Pooled Income Funds	224,051.95
Anjeeni Devi Perumal	9.68	Anonymous		50.00	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund		Grand Total	
Aruna Pundit	800.00	Total		50.00	Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00	US\$9,059,355.39	
Mogan Ramasamy	298.00	Hindu Literature Fund			Gassa Patten	1,500.00	Total Contributions	
Jayshree S. Rao	101.00	K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy		75.00	Total	1,575.00	72,345.32	
Charles & Jan Roberts	30.00	Nigel Subramaniam Siva		600.00	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund		Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2007	
Vijay N. Samant	800.00	Total		675.00	Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00	Total Endowment Funds	8,835,303.44
Girish Skanda	114.76	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund			Gassa Patten	1,500.00	Total Pooled Income Funds	224,051.95
Subasene Skanda	91.82	Manoharan Navaratnarajah		75.00	Total	1,575.00	Grand Total	
Rakesh Vaidyanathan	240.00	Gassa Patten		1,500.00	Anonymous		US\$9,059,355.39	
		Total		1,575.00	Total		72,345.32	

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Chakrapani Ullal, Vedic Astrology

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



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

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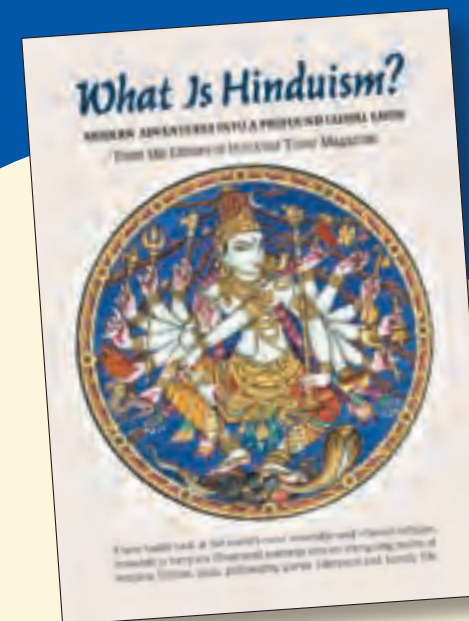


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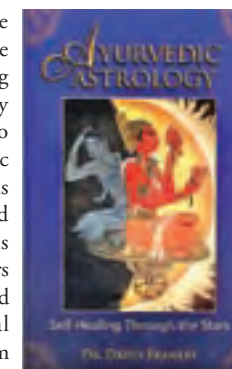
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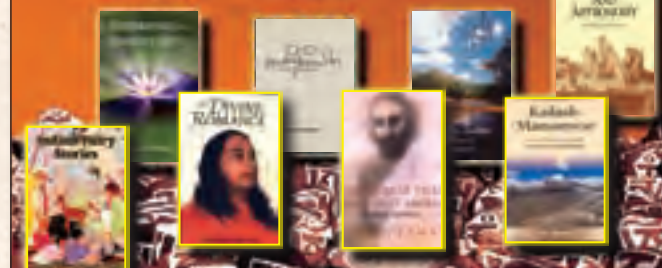
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- 3.) Three kinds of imbalances in the digestive and metabolic fires
- 4.) Vata, Pitta, and Kapha doshas and their relationship to Agni
- 5.) What is Samagni or balanced Agni – perfect digestion and metabolism
- 6.) Relationship between Agni or the (enzymatic system), and Ojas (hormonal system & neurotransmitters), and Manas (mind).

Learn how to distinguish between:

- A.) Healthy & Unhealthy Cravings
- B.) "Good body fat" (Abandhmeda) and "Bad body fat" (Bandhmeda)
- C.) VASA or lipids & meda - the fat tissue

What impact do toxins have on the fat tissue?

- A.) Ama or toxic build-up in the fat tissue - symptoms & management
- B.) Amavisha or virulent toxic build-up in the fat tissue - symptoms & management
- C.) Garavisha or xenobiotics in the fat tissue - symptoms & management

What is cellulite according to Ayurved?

- A.) Relationship with muscle, fat, and bone tissues and overall management
- B.) Practical management to flush out toxins from the fat tissue and the body

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My Lord of Light,
I hear the Twang
Of Thy Bow

Propelling
The Eternal Truth:

I AM.
I AM BRAMAN.
The Absolute.

I AM
The Death of death.
Immortal.

Form and Formless,
I AM.

Formless,
I AM BRAMAN.
Form,

I AM SIVA.
The Supreme Consciousness.

My Lord of Light,
I see the Light of Thy Vel.

My child
Who dreams of HIM
And embraces the Dream,
Of HIM, know this:

I AM.
I AM The Braman in
SU-BRAMAN-I-AM
The Source of Light
The Light of All Lights.

My Lord of Light,
I hear the thunderous
Twang of Thy Bow
Hurling Thy Arrows of Truth:

The Law of Reincarnation,
Life after life of evolution is
my gift to you.

The Law of Karma—Action,
My gift of freedom
To choose between
Darkness and
Light.

The Law of Balance,
One action must cancel the other,
Seeking perfection.

Immutable are My Laws.
And infinite is My Grace—
The Law of Love
That holds the Cosmos and...
Every fibre of your body.



The Eternal Truth
By Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam
21st November - 1st December, 2006
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

