

HINDUISM TODAY®
THE HOME SHRINE ♦ PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS ♦ HIMALAYAN RETREAT CENTERS
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HINDUISM TODAY®

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



Patanjali's Yoga Sutras



(Cover) Ardhanarishvara, soaring gracefully above in the Sivaloka, witnesses Rishi Patanjali with two yogis engaged in *svadhyaya*—scriptural study with a guru; (above) a family's home shrine receives a daily offering

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026 • The Hindu Year Parābhava, 5128 • पराभव

Bodhinatha Veylanawami www.gurudeva.org

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Siva's Cedar Forest Sanctuary

Nestled in a dense cedar forest thirty miles from Almora, the Jageshwar temple complex is one of India's finest examples of early Hindu architecture. Built between the 7th and 18th centuries by the Katyuri and Chand dynasties, its approximately 125 stone shrines are dedicated primarily to Lord Siva, along with many other Deities.





GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

The Netherlands Returns 1,000-Year-Old Chola Plates

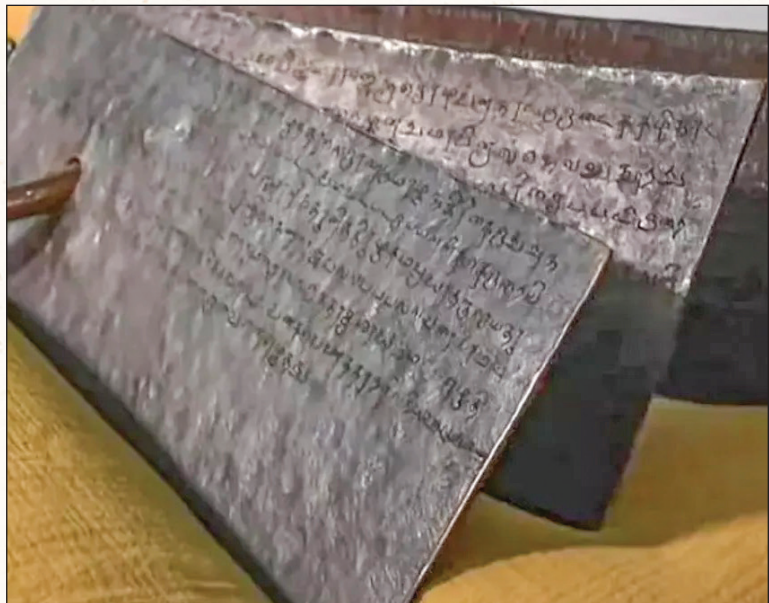
THE ANAIMANGALAM COPPER Plates, widely known today as the Leiden Copper Plates, are among the most extraordinary surviving records of the Chola age. They are not merely inscriptions from medieval India, according to *Bharat Ke Wow*. They are a civilizational archive, carrying the pulse of empire, maritime diplomacy, temple culture, administrative precision and the cosmopolitan imagination of the Indian Ocean world.

For centuries, the plates remained far away from India. Since 1862, they had been preserved in the collections of Leiden University Library. Yet their story never truly left India. It survived in epigraphy, in Tamil historical memory, in scholarship and even in literature, quietly echoing through the pages of *Ponniyin Selvan*.

With their restitution to India, the Anaimangalam Copper Plates have become more than archaeological artifacts. They are now a symbol of historical return.

The plates are royal charters—documents that Chola kings used to permanently record administrative decisions, according to *Tamil Heritage Chronicles*. The grant originated as an oral order from Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 ce) and was formalized in copper by his son Rajendra Chola I. The larger charter records that revenue from the village of Anaimangalam near Nagapattinam was assigned to support a Buddhist monastery called Chulamanivarman Vihara.

What makes this more than a routine grant is the identity of the monastery's founder. The vihara had been built not by



Cross-cultural grant: The plates record a Hindu Chola king's revenue grant to a Buddhist monastery in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, built by a Sumatra-based Srivijayan ruler

a Tamil king but by Maravi-jayottungavarman, a ruler of the Srivijaya Empire centered on Sumatra in present-day Indonesia and extending into the Malay Peninsula. A Hindu emperor directed revenue from a Tamil village to sustain a Buddhist institution established by a

Southeast Asian ruler.

The inscriptions record village revenues, land boundaries, tax exemptions and procedures for implementing the grants. Together, the charters provide important evidence of Chola administration and maritime relations with Southeast Asia.



TECHNOLOGY

The Rise of Virtual Darshan in Hindu Practice

IN AN AGE WHEN TECHNOLOGY mediates almost every human experience, religion, too, has entered the digital realm. Across India and the global Hindu diaspora, smartphones, livestreams and social media have become new pathways to the divine. Temple darshan—seeing and being seen by the Deity—has traditionally been experienced in person. Today, as reported by *Religion World*, millions experience it virtually, through screens. Digital transformation is reshaping how some Hindus practice and experience their faith.

Darshan, central to Hindu devotion, is a sacred exchange between devotee and Deity, not merely an act of seeing. For centuries, this involved visiting temples or pilgrimage sites in person. However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a shift that was already underway. With travel restrictions and temple closures, devotees turned to

technology. Temples such as Kashi Vishwanath, Tirupati and Shirdi offered livestreams of daily rituals.

Some of these online services draw millions of viewers, more than a temple could physically accommodate at one time. For many, this was the first time they could witness rituals from afar in real time. The practice didn't end with the pandemic—it created a new normal. Virtual darshans now coexist with physical visits, making sacred experiences in prominent temples accessible to those far from home, the elderly or members of the diaspora.

The growth of digital devotion has given rise to an entire religious-tech ecosystem. Mobile applications now offer everything from puja bookings to astrology consultations and even personalized chanting sessions. Platforms such as Divine India,



Bhakti World and MyMandir provide 24/7 access to mantras, devotional songs and live temple feeds.

Digital offerings—e-pujas and e-aratis—allow devotees to book rituals remotely. Priests perform them on behalf of the devotee while streaming the ceremony live or sharing recorded blessings. Payment gateways enable online temple donations and payments for ritual services. This shift has also broadened

Modern Hinduism: A devotee performs arati while joining a live virtual darshan, blending tradition with technology

access to rituals. For many who cannot afford travel to a pilgrimage site, digital rituals offer an alternative. At the same time, it has opened a new form of religious commerce—the “digital temple economy”—where faith meets fintech.



King's temple: The grand entrance to the Emperor Ashoka Temple in Ningbo, China

CHINA

The Ashoka Temple Legacy

EMPEROR ASHOKA TEMPLE, called Ayuwang Temple in Chinese, is in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, China. Featured in an article in *The Hindu*, it is one of the oldest and most important Buddhist temples in the country. It is traditionally believed to have been founded in 282 ce—more than 1,700 years ago.

The temple is named after Emperor Ashoka, one of India's greatest rulers. After the Kalinga War, Ashoka expressed deep remorse and increasingly devoted his reign to *dhamma*, promoting compassion, self-restraint and religious tolerance. According to Buddhist tradition, he built many stupas across his empire and placed the Buddha's sacred relics in them. The temple enshrines a relic believed to be of Shakyamuni Buddha and traditionally

associated with Ashoka.

Over the centuries, the temple became an important place for Buddhist monks, pilgrims and scholars. It rose to prominence during the Tang Dynasty, when Buddhism flourished in China. Today's complex largely preserves a Ming–Qing layout and contains historic halls, pagodas, inscriptions and sacred objects.

The temple is still an active place of worship. Monks hold daily prayers and conduct religious ceremonies. People from different parts of China and other countries visit the temple to pray, learn about its history and enjoy its peaceful surroundings.

Beyond its religious importance, the temple reflects the long history of Buddhist exchange between India and China.



Hinduism everywhere: (from left) Stone Deities in Japan—Saraswati, Ganesha (holding a daikon radish rather than His broken tusk), Lakshmi

JAPAN

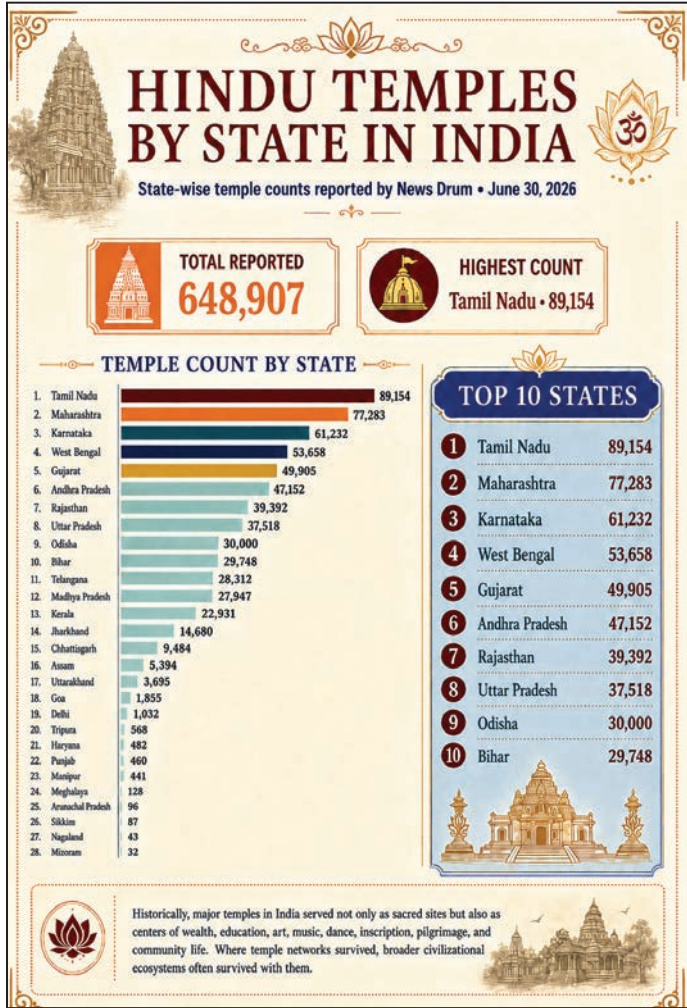
Hindu Gods across Asia

MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THAT SOME HINDU GODS ARE also worshiped in Japan. This cultural transmission unfolded over many centuries, largely through the spread of Buddhism, as noted by *The Global Hindu* YouTube channel.

Historically, Buddhism reached Japan primarily through Korea, after having developed in China. The Buddhist traditions transmitted across Asia included not only Buddhist scriptures but also Deities of Indian origin. Over time, these Deities were adapted within Japanese Buddhism and became known by new names.

One of the best examples is Sarasvati, the Hindu Goddess of knowledge, music and learning. In Japan, She is known as Benzaiten or Benten. She is one of the famous Seven Lucky Gods of Japan. Many people visit Her temples and shrines to pray for wisdom, success and good luck.

Another Hindu God who reached Japan is Lord Ganesha. In Japan, His Buddhist form is called Kangiten. He is believed to bring happiness, good fortune and success in business. His statues look different from familiar Indian images of Ganesha, but His elephant head still shows His Indian origin. In some images, He holds a radish. Lord Siva also has a connection to Japan. Mahakala, a form of Siva, was adopted into Buddhism and developed in Japan as Daikokuten, who is also one of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods.



Desire Versus Duty

Self-centered action may be the mantra of the day, but selfless duty is Hinduism's historic song

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A PERSON DRIVEN BY DUTY, OR DHARMA, takes up a course of action because it fits into his natural responsibilities in life—*kartavya karma*. For this individual, the course of action, such as the choice of occupation, is the priority, and the attendant personal benefits are of secondary importance.

Kartavya karma is action that ought to be performed. It is determined by scripture, social convention and the responsibilities of one's chosen profession. Let's take as an example a 50-year-old physician and list the major duties in each of five categories of his *kartavya karma*.

Professional Duties: Providing competent medical care in an ethical manner; serving beyond profit; giving time to low-income patients, responding to emergency calls or supporting public-health efforts as his situation permits; continuing medical education; mentoring younger physicians.

Householder Duties: Providing for the material needs of his wife and children; being emotionally present; providing education, guidance and moral formation for the children; maintaining a strong marital life.

Societal Duties: Supporting Hindu organizations and causes; contributing time, skill or funds to efforts that reduce suffering—free clinics, health education, disaster relief and other forms of community service.

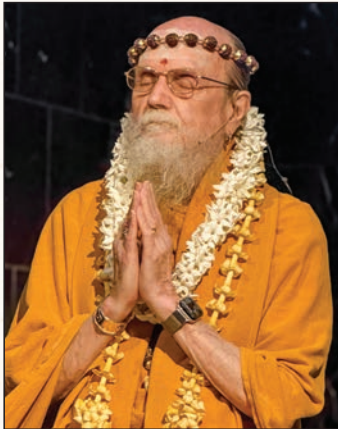
Personal Discipline and Spiritual Growth: Maintaining a daily spiritual practice—prayer, meditation and the study of wisdom texts; participating in worship—home puja, temple visits and satsang; practicing self-control and ethical living; acting without attachment to results; cultivating equanimity amid success and failure.

Later-Life Duties: Placing greater emphasis on mentoring and sharing wisdom; balancing professional work with spiritual reflection; preparing for the senior years with an increasing orientation toward contemplation and spiritual evolution.

The nature of the world and karma is such that some efforts succeed but others do not. When success is an individual's primary goal, its attainment brings elation, while failure brings discouragement or even deeper negative emotions, such as anger and despair. Thus, when one is motivated by desire, life becomes a constant series of emotional ups and downs, a state not conducive to spiritual progress.

When the focus is on duty, performing the task itself is the source of fulfillment. Doing all tasks to the best of one's ability creates an evenness of mind, regardless of success or failure. Such evenness of mind is a key requirement for spiritual maturation.

There is a subtle form of personal benefit that also needs to be surrendered: the tendency to fulfill one's duty while expecting appreciation for it.



For example, a mother raises her children with attention and love but is disappointed when they do not express appreciation for what she does. She may prepare a special dinner for her family and receive no acknowledgment or thanks. Ideally, she lets go of this expectation and finds fulfillment in the duty itself—lovingly raising her children and joyously preparing family meals.

A second aspect of a desire-driven life is that the fulfillment of one desire often leads to a desire for something more. If we covet a \$2 million home and finally acquire it, the satisfaction of that achievement will eventually fade and we will desire an even more lavish

estate. As the ethical scripture *Tirukural* states: "It is the nature of desire never to be fulfilled, but he who utterly gives it up is eternally fulfilled at that very moment."

If we have renounced the grosser benefits of wealth, fame and influence, as well as the more subtle expectation of receiving appreciation, what further refinement can be incorporated into our fulfillment of duty? We can add Ishvara. Specifically, we can make our actions an offering to Ishvara by saying a prayer before we begin an activity. Ishvara is then invoked to bless our activity, and the sense that we are the doer is gradually lessened.

Being motivated to action by a sense of duty rather than by personal desire is called *nishkama karma*, which literally means action free of desire. It takes into account everyone affected by an activity and seeks to benefit them all. In a school, this would include all the students; in a county government, it would include all the local residents; and in a corporation, it would include all employees and stakeholders. As a modern example at the corporate level, a CEO guided by *nishkama karma* makes hard decisions—such as investing in worker welfare or environmental responsibility—even if they may reduce short-term profit. His criterion is "What is the right thing for everyone?" not "What maximizes my bonus and reputation?"

At the personal level, there is a tendency to become anxious about the outcome of an action. Say you are scheduled to give an important speech. You become anxious about how it will be received. During preparation, this anxiety prevents you from doing your best work, and the speech you compose is mediocre. Clearly, greater detachment from the outcome is needed. Focus on creating the best speech you can without concern for how it will be received. This is another form



Duty & desire: A college student takes joy in helping her aging grandmother, even though such duties can be challenging, while her younger brother plays his game in a bad mood.

"I approach my job every morning with the thought that I am going to the 'Temple of Electrical and Computer Engineering,' where I will workshop. The first thing I do when I enter my office is offer salutations to a statue of Lord Ganesha, which I have installed in a small shrine there. Then I go to workshop with my staff, students and faculty colleagues, striving always to carry out my tasks with a willpower born of the conviction that for every problem, there is not just a solution, but a good solution. I have found that when one is able to practice workshop with gratitude, rewards come without being sought."

Dr. Rao was an exemplar of *karma yoga*. Ordinarily, when we think of yoga practice, we envision it taking place in a special environment. Bhakti yoga, the practice of devotional disciplines, is generally undertaken at a temple or in the home shrine. Raja yoga and jnana yoga, which emphasize meditative disciplines, are practiced in a meditation room at home or in a meditation hall at a yoga school. Karma yoga is an exception to this pattern. It is practiced wherever our normal activities take place, such as at school, at work or during family activities at home.

In the term *karma yoga*, karma means action, referring to our everyday actions, which in Hinduism are considered our duties. Karma yoga provides a way to spiritualize those actions, transforming them from mere secular activities into spiritual ones. Karma yoga is the simple concept of action based on dharma rather than on desire. It is an easily remembered formulation that we encourage parents and Hindu teachers to share with youth to help guide their choices in education, career and family life.

The concept of duty has gone out of style during the last 100 years. Why? Because it is tightly woven into the fabric of community, and community has loosened its ties to the individual. Community can be the family or the workplace.

of *nishkama karma*.

We published an opinion article in the October 2005 issue by the late Dr. N. Narayana Rao, who at the time was associate head of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Illinois. In his teaching efforts, he remarkably embodied all the ideals stated above and provided an example of what can be accomplished in one's professional life when working to fulfill dharma.

"I have been inspired to coin two new words for this article: *gratitude* and *workshop*. Gratitude means an attitude of gratitude. In the performance of my job, I feel gratitude for the opportunity I have been given to help facilitate the education of our wonderful youth, through my teaching, writing and administration. I have learned that performing such work with gratitude yields immediate enjoyment, while performing that same work expecting appreciation in return yields the opposite effect. Workshop means approaching work as worship. This is nothing new. It's an old Hindu concept which I am just now identifying with a catchy new wordname.

It can be an athletic team or a theater group. More broadly, it encompasses our fellow believers, our nation and, ultimately, the human family. When community is strong, it is natural to work selflessly to help others. We want them to succeed. They are part of us. Community strengthens our sense of duty. But when we are alone, duty can feel foreign. The homeless man living in a cardboard box may not awaken thinking about his duties, about helping others. When we are a community of one, it is natural to look after number one. We think it is necessary; we see no alternative. Our thoughts do not naturally encompass duty. In today's fractured world, this is a common reality. Extended-family bonds are more fragile than in earlier times; there is less tribal connectedness and less religious fidelity. For those seeking to live with a consciousness of duty faithfully performed, the first order of business is to strengthen all forms of community, to the point that, like the worker bee, we naturally seek the survival and prosperity of the hive as well as our own. For the wise among us, it is clear that the success of our community is also our own.





LETTERS

Listening to Silence

"The Writer Who Listened to Silence" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2026) is a splendid article—quite the best published so far. It conveys a deep appreciation of both Paul Brunton's philosophy and the Indian environment in which he developed it.

JOSCELYN GODWIN
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This was my first encounter with Paul Brunton. I feel called to seek self-realization through the sources of his thought. I am grateful for the introduction and eager to learn more.

ISAÍAS SILVA LIMA
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Serious Misrepresentation?

The article by Pradeep Srivastava of California, "The Writer Who Listened to Silence," suggests that Paul Brunton and Sri Ramana Maharshi are one and attempts to equate their teachings. This is a serious misrepresentation of Bhagavan's teachings and is deeply troubling. The issue lies in attempting to equate the core philosophies of Paul Brunton and Sri Ramana Maharshi as "one."

Sri Ramana Maharshi's lifelong, uncompromising teaching is pure Advaita Vedanta, realized through *atma-vichara* (Self-inquiry). This path demands the complete annihilation of the mind to reveal the absolute, formless Self.

In contrast, Paul Brunton's system evolved into what he termed "Mentalism," where he actively substituted Bhagavan's concept of the *Self* with the *Mind*.

By suggesting their teachings are identical, the article glosses over a profound, structural contradiction. Blending Brunton's mind-centric philosophy with Bhagavan's direct path to the absolute Self risks confusing sincere seekers who look to HINDUISM TODAY for spiritual purity and clarity.

SUNITA PARASURAMAN, PRESIDENT,
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Author's Response to Above

I have serious disagreements with the statements made above by Ms. Sunita Parasuraman, as follows:

I never said that their philosophies were identical or "one." Please refer to my statement, "Deeply advaitic at heart, Brunton reframed ancient wisdom in Western philosophical terms—building a bridge between inner experience and modern understanding."

Brunton used the term *Overself* to describe *Self*, or *Atman*, not *Mind*, and that too for the

benefit of the Western audience.

I have nowhere mentioned that their teachings are "identical." They both believed in Advaita Vedanta, the only difference being that Sri Maharshi was able to bypass his mind, to realize his Self or Atman, whereas Brunton realized that most people cannot so easily bypass the mind. Therefore, he developed the concept of Mentalism, as an intermediate step, to realize one's Overself or Atman.

The concept of Mentalism is not a novel concept in Advaita Vedanta. *Shravana* (listening/studying), *manana* (reflecting/contemplating), and *nididhyasana* (meditating/internalizing) are the three progressive stages of spiritual learning and realization in Advaita Vedanta. They transition one from simply hearing a truth to intellectually analyzing it, and finally, to fully embodying it in one's daily life. All these three processes are related to mind.

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA
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A Calling to Priesthood

After reading "Kerala: Facing and Fixing a Shortage of Priests," I felt moved to say that I would like to live in a temple and serve as a priest (Jan/Feb/Mar 2014).

AJAY
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Simple and Beautiful

Pranam, Guru. "Heaven and Hell Are States of Mind Within Us" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2025) explains complex ideas in simple words. Beautiful!

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The Vedic Silk Road

Thank you for the fascinating historical overview in "Hindus on the Silk Road, Part II" (Jul 1989) and its account of the exchange of commerce, religion, philosophy and culture across Asia. The article beautifully demonstrates that the Silk Road was far more than a trade route; it was a dynamic network through which ideas, rituals, languages, technologies and spiritual traditions traveled between India, Central Asia, China and beyond.

At the KaviKrishna Foundation and Thoreau Lab, we are developing an interdisciplinary research program tentatively called the Vedic Silk Road. We use this term for a broader cultural network connecting ancient Kamarupa, the Himalayan world, Central Asia and Southeast Asia through textiles, artisans, pilgrimage and community traditions.

One focus is the Hajo—Sualkuchi cultural landscape of Assam, with its Muga silk

weaving, metal craftsmanship, temple culture and oral histories. Community memories of interactions with Bhutanese, Tibetan and Khasi visitors suggest that the Brahmaputra Valley may have been an important eastern node within wider trans-Himalayan networks.

Our objective is to combine archaeology, textile history, oral traditions, artisan communities and Indigenous knowledge to understand how living cultural landscapes preserve memories of historical connectivity. We hope this perspective encourages collaboration among scholars and local communities.

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Teaching the Young

We need children to help spread the information presented in "Einstein's Religious Theses." I started teaching mine at a young age, and now that they are older, they know it was the greatest education they ever received. God bless (Jan/Feb/Mar 2004).

DEVANAND SINGH
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Improving Character

I agree fully with "Improving Our Character." It is a real challenge for me, as there are many areas where I need to work hard to improve. Reading this is a mind opener: it helps us see where we are stuck and what next step to take. Thank you for this opportunity (Jan/Feb/Mar 2012).

MOUGAM PAREATUMBEE
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I found this quotation especially interesting: "Spiritual life is not different from the rest of life; it is simply the best of life. Character is the foundation upon which all spiritual unfoldment rests" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2012).

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Mystery of Vault B

"Kerala Temple's Wealth Astounds India" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2012) described the extraordinary treasures preserved in the ancient vaults of Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple. One of the 108 Divya Desams, the temple has been the family Deity of the Travancore royal family for centuries. When Vault A was opened in 2011, it revealed a remarkable collection of gold, jewels and precious antiquities. Vault B, however, remains sealed.

According to popular belief, its entrance bears cobra imagery and has no visible locks or keyholes. Tradition holds that it is protected by a nagabandham, a sacred spiritual seal, which can be released only through



the Garuda Mantra chanted in a particular manner by a highly accomplished soul. Yet perhaps the real question is not how to open Vault B, but why. If it has remained untouched for centuries, perhaps it was never meant to be opened. Whether considered through faith, history or simple curiosity, Vault B reminds us that not every mystery is waiting to be solved. Some are meant to be respected.

SAATHVIKA RAMAKRISHNAN
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Vedic Priestesses

"Women Revive Lost Art of Vedic Priestess" provides excellent and appropriate information. Jai Sadguru! Sadguru Upasani Kanyakumari Sthan has great spiritual significance in today's materialistic world. One should visit the ashram for inner silence and to observe the daily satkarma rituals—especially the yajnas performed there by the kanyas. Thank you (Aug 1992).

SAVITA VIDWAT
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Ambamata's Location

"Girnar Mountain, a Spiritual Journey of Ten Thousand Steps" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2025) says that the Ambamata Temple mentioned in the article is on Gabbar Hill. Gabbar Hill is in

Banaskantha District, not in Girnar or Junagadh, though Girnar also has an Ambamata Temple.

RAKESH
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Raising Good Hindus

"Educational Insight: Raising Children As Good Hindus" is wonderful for teaching young parents how to raise their children as responsible future citizens (Apr/May/June 2021).

MAYA YADAV
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Parenting with Dignity

Your article "Parenting with Love" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2026) especially appealed to me. In this age of smartphones and nonstop texting among teenagers, its advice to control our anger and approach young people with dignity is invaluable. My grandson, Krishna Jorge, age 14, is entering that stage, and I have encouraged his parents to follow your writings. I have enjoyed and learned much as a subscriber since HINDUISM TODAY began. Though a Vaishnavite by birth, I embrace all Hindu philosophy.

C. V. SUNDAR RAJ, PhD
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Poet Tayumanavar

"The Poet Saint Tayumanavar" (Apr/May/June 2026) reminds us that Sanatana is the truth. Keep up your great work!

NIYOR KASHYAP
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Please accept my sincere appreciation for this wonderful article. We are normally exposed to the life histories of the Nalvar and hear only fragments about Tayumanavar. It showed me how inspiring a saint he is and made me wonder why he does not receive as much recognition as the Nalvar. You beautifully combined his life history and teachings—indeed, a neat samarasam. I hope this article reaches far and wide. Well done, and thanks to everyone involved in creating it!

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or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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

Preserving Heritage, Nurturing the Future



By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Recent articles in this magazine call out for support. In our July 2026 issue the feature article is "Sri Lanka's Tirukoneswaram Kovil." It provides an account of how this ancient clifftop edifice outlasted empires, survived colonial destruction, and continues to draw pilgrims today. Sri Lankan journalist Thulasi Muttulingam shares information on the probable origins of the temple based on mythology and vague historical records. She paints a picture of the kovil in its original glory, including its major

irrigation systems for growing rice, which still exist today. In 1624 the temple was destroyed by Portuguese invaders and only rebuilt 300 years later as a much smaller but functioning structure. Thulasi shares information on the major events that happened to the temple and surrounding community and harbor over those three centuries.

The July Educational Insight presents a subject that is often a topic of discussion among families—disciplining children. There has been a definite shift in recent decades in research and public attitudes about corporal punishment. The adage "spare the rod and spoil the child" has increasingly been replaced by approaches that emphasize teaching, emotional development, and consistent boundaries rather than physical punishment. Our article summarizes the well-honed program of Dr. Jane Nelsen called *Positive Discipline*. It presents the key points of her system and 14 proven strategies for raising children "without blame, shame or pain." Consider the first strategy: "Look for Improvement, Not Perfection." Jane explains, "Perfection is an unrealistic expectation, and children would rather not try at all than experience constant discouragement because they don't live up to an adult's

expectation of perfection—or their own. Recognition of improvement is encouraging and inspires children to continue their efforts."

Each issue of HINDUISM TODAY is crafted to uplift, educate and preserve the world's oldest living faith. Through thoughtful journalism and vivid imagery, we share the beauty and depth of Hindu culture with a global audience. Your support ensures that these articles reach seekers, students and spiritual leaders—strengthening Hindu identity and fostering understanding in today's interconnected world. You can support HINDUISM TODAY in its efforts to bring together Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism. Your generous donation helps keep the magazine financially strong and secure.

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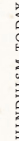
Tirukural, 843

What are you going to do with the money you accumulate? Can you increase your

Every beauty seen here on Earth
resembles, more than anything else,
the merciful fount from which we all
exist. **Michelangelo** (1475-1564)

If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. **Sarada Devi** (1853-1920)

You are already the Self, you are just not aware of it. Do not put it off based



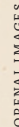
Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1

Maya is the classroom, karma the teacher
and anava the student's ignorance. **Satguru
Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-
2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

An Early Theory of Atoms

Kanada's word for the atom is *anu*; the fuller term *paramanu* (from *parama*, ultimate, and *anu*, minute) is the term his commentators would later make well known. His proof is pure logic: if matter could be divided

None of this was physics for its own sake: the *Vaisheshika Sutra* opens by declaring that its aim is dharma and that liberation follows from correctly knowing these categories. Vaisheshika and the logic-focused



Of course, the parallels to modern science shouldn't be overstated. Kanada reached his atoms through reason and insight, not experiment. He embedded them in a holistic overview of the evolution of the human soul, not modern chemistry or physics. But the core intuition—that the solid, continuous world is really a lattice of invisible, indivisible units combining by fixed rules—is one of the most remarkable feats of reasoning in the ancient world, an idea European chemists wouldn't confirm for another 2,000 years.

Crossword Puzzle

A crossword puzzle grid with 23 numbered squares. The word "Namaste" is already filled in across square 9.

23. Devotion to the divine through love and surrender. **DOWN: 1.** One of the energy centers aligned along the spine. **2.** A sacred sound or phrase repeated in meditation. **4.** The eternal self, distinct from body and mind. **5.** A state of pure bliss or joy. **7.** The ultimate, formless reality underlying all existence. **11.** One's righteous duty or the natural law that upholds order. **12.** The continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth. **14.** The vital life-force that animates all living things. **16.** The practice of nonviolence toward all beings. **17.** The divine feminine force and source of cosmic energy. **20.** Selfless service performed without expectation of reward.

Explore the heart of Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras

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योगचित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २॥

SŪTRA 1.2 29

1.2 yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ

yogah (yoga), nirodhaḥ (restraint), citta (of the mind), vṛtti (activities)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

Yoga is the restraint of mental activities.

Commentary

Our minds are constantly engaged in one type of activity or another, whether awake or sleeping. We are remembering events from the past, thinking about current tasks or theorizing about future events. Or we are experiencing moods and emotions. The practices of yoga enable us to silence these mental activities, which can be thought of as movements or fluctuations.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

As you sit to meditate, awareness may wander into past memories or future happenings. It may be distracted by the senses, by a sound or by a feeling of discomfort in the body. This is natural in the early stages. Gently bring awareness back to your point of concentration. . . . Don't criticize awareness for wandering, for that is just another distraction. Distractions will disappear if you become intensely interested and involved in your meditation. In such a state, you won't even feel the physical body. . . . To become the ruler of the mind is the goal. (*Living with Śiva*, Lesson 95: "Taming Distraction")

"At last, there is a translation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* that accurately represents the devotional aspect of Suddha Saiva Siddhanta as expressed in the original text—acknowledging Ishvara, God, as a Being to be worshiped as a means to final and complete Realization and Advaitic oneness."

—CHAMUNDI SABANATHAN, HAWAII

Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras

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KAIVALYA UPANISHAD

Seek to Know

How Self-knowledge leads the seeker to the state of absolute freedom

The following text is the Kaivalya Upanishad from the Krishna Yajurveda, in which Brahma teaches the sage Asvalayana the knowledge of the Self by which the sincere devotee attains liberation.

Then Asvalayana approached the Venerable Lord Brahma and said: Teach me, Venerable Lord, the knowledge of Brahman, sought constantly by the wise, hidden, that by which the knower is freed from impurities and attains the Supreme Self, greater than the great. **1**

Brahma said to him: Seek to know That by faith, devotion, meditation and concentration. Not by work, not by offspring or wealth; only by renunciation does one reach life eternal. **2**

It is higher than the heavens and shines in the cave of the heart. Those who strive for it enter into it. **3**

The ascetics who have well ascertained the meaning of *Vedanta*, who have purified their natures through renunciation, dwelling in the worlds of Brahma, at the end of time become one with the immortal and are all liberated. **4**

In a solitary place, seat oneself in an easy posture with a pure heart. Straighten the head, neck and body, control all the senses, and bow with devotion to the teacher. **5**

Meditate on the lotus of the heart, devoid of passion, in the center of which is the pure, the sorrowless, the inconceivable, the unmanifest, of infinite form, the blissful, the tranquil, the immortal, the source of Brahma. **6**

He who is without beginning, middle or end, who is one, all-pervading, who is wisdom and bliss, who is formless, wonderful, who has **Uma** as His companion, the highest lord, the ruler, who is the three-eyed, who has a dark throat, who is tranquil; by meditating on Him the sage reaches the source of beings, the witness of all, who is beyond all darkness. **7**

He is Brahma; He is Siva, He is Indra, He is the imperishable, supreme, the Self-Lord. He is Vishnu, He is life, He is time, He is fire, He is the moon: **8**

He is all, what has been and what shall be. He is eternal. By knowing Him one conquers death. There is no other way to liberation. **9**

By seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self, one goes to Brahman, not by any other cause. **10**

Making one's body the lower firestick and the syllable Aum the upper firestick, by kindling the flame of knowledge, the knower burns the bond of ignorance. **11**

The same Self veiled by maya attains a body and performs all work. In the waking state he finds satisfaction in the enjoyments of women, food and drink. **12**

In the state of dream, the Self experiences happiness or sorrow in the worlds created by his own maya. In the state of dreamless sleep, where all things disappear, overcome by darkness, he experiences happiness. **13**

Again, through his connection with the deeds of his past life, he wakes and sleeps. He revels in the three states of consciousness and from him all this varied world is born. In Him who is the support, who is the bliss, who is indivisible wisdom are merged the three states of consciousness. **14**

From Him are born life, mind and all the senses; sky, air, light, water and earth, which is the support of all existence. **15**

He is the supreme Brahman, the Self of all, the chief foundation of this world, subtler than the subtle, eternal. That thou art; Thou art That. **16**

Knowing that the world appearing in the waking, dream and dreamless states is Brahman, who I am, one is freed from all fetters. **17**

In the three states of consciousness whatever appears as the object of enjoyment or the enjoyer or the enjoyment, I am different from them, the witness, pure consciousness, the eternal Siva. **18**

From Me all proceed, in Me all exist and to Me all return. That Brahman without a second am I. **19**

I am subtler than the subtle, greater than the great. I am this manifold universe. I am the ancient, the Person. I am the Lord of golden hue. I am Siva. **20**

I am without hands and feet, of inconceivable powers. I see without eyes. I hear without ears. I know all. I am of one form. None knows Me. I am always pure consciousness. **21**

I am the One to be known through the many *Vedas*. I am the maker of the *Vedanta* and the knower of the *Vedas*. Merit or demerit I have none. There is no destruction for Me, no birth, body, senses or intellect. **22**

I have not earth, water, fire, air or ether. Knowing the nature of the Supreme Self, dwelling in the cave of the heart, stainless, without a second, the witness, free from the duality of being and non-being, the renunciate obtains the pure nature of the Supreme Self. **23**

Whoever reads the *Satarudriya* (*Sri Rudram*) becomes pure as fire, he becomes pure as air, he is no longer swayed by greed, intoxication or violence. He is released of the notion of action and inaction. Therefore one should strive to become freed from these things. He who has become free from the delusions of worldly life should meditate on this *Upanishad* constantly. **24**

By knowing these truths—which destroys the ocean of births and deaths—he obtains the state of *kaivalya*. He obtains the state of absolute freedom. **25**

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first Vice President (1952–1962) and second President (1962–1967). This text is adapted from his translation of *The Principal Upanishads*.

IMAGE: OPENAI IMAGES

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Sacred Shrine, Heartbeat of the Home

For many practicing Hindus living outside India, stepping across the threshold of their suburban home or city apartment means stepping between two worlds. Outside, modern Western life—with its long commutes, corporate deadlines and the bustle of day-to-day errands—dominates. Inside, however, a small, vibrant and deeply sacred space serves as the household's spiritual anchor: the home shrine, or mandir.

In this feature article, the author brings both scholarly depth and a devotional understanding of the home shrine's power—offering devout Hindus guidance they can put to immediate use in their own worship.

BY AARTI PATEL, PENNSYLVANIA

WHILE PUBLIC HINDU TEMPLES HAVE garnered attention with growth in size, number and architectural grandeur across the global diaspora over the last 50 years, Hindu daily devotion has been offered within devotees' homes for millennia. Domestic sanctuaries, or home shrines, represent spiritual anchoring and cultural continuity. Home shrines are living, breathing epicenters of spiritual energy.

To understand the centrality of the home shrine to a practicing Hindu's religious life, one must consider both its physical components and the theological foundations that give it meaning, because in Hindu practice, the two are inseparable. The *Agamas* (a corpus of sacred texts encompassing theology, temple architecture, iconography and ritual practice) categorize ritual worship into two distinct forms: *parartha puja* and *atmartha puja*. The two are distinguished by who performs the worship and for whose benefit, not where it takes place. *Parartha puja*—literally “worship for the sake of others”—is performed by a qualified, Agamically trained priest or *pujari* on behalf of another person or the broader community. It takes three forms: *nitya* (daily), *naimittika* (occasional, for special causes) and *kamya* (commissioned by a patron for a specified desired outcome). The daily temple arati, for instance, is simultaneously atmartha and parartha: the qualified *pujari* performs it for his own spiritual self (atmartha) as well as for the benefit of all beings and the congregation (parartha).

A devout family worships at their home shrine tucked in a quiet corner of a room in their small high-rise apartment



SHUTTERSTOCK



A special abhisheka commissioned by a devotee for a specific request, by contrast, is *kamya parartha puja* alone—the pujari acts purely as an intermediary for the patron's *sankalpa* (stated intention). Parartha puja is not restricted to temples: when a pujari visits a home to conduct a *mahapuja*, *vastu puja* or *grihapraves* ceremony, he is performing parartha puja within the domestic space.

Atmartha puja—"worship for the sake of oneself"—is puja performed by an individual for their own spiritual protection, growth and liberation. It is most naturally expressed in the home shrine and is available to any initiated practitioner, priest or householder.

Practitioners describe how, over years of sustained daily worship, the home undergoes a transformation. The *murti* (sacred image), a form of God enshrined within the home, to whom family members offer devotion through various practices—*arati* (the waving of lighted wicks before the murtis), *thal* (the offering of food) and the singing of devotional hymns—creates an atmosphere of sanctity. The peace-giving presence of God and the joint performance of these acts shape how family members relate with one another and extend patience and forgiveness in moments of strain.

When a family moves into a home, whether for the long or short term, they consecrate a dedicated space for devotion and invite God to reside there permanently. Before the rite of *murti pratistha*, the carved stone or cast image is a reverently crafted object, shaped in anticipation of the divine form it is to become.

Through the murti pratistha ceremony, God manifests in that form—and from that moment, the murti is genuinely a form of God, just as the avatara is a form of God. Just as one does not say that Krishna's form was a shell containing a separate divine presence, one does not separate the murti from the God who has manifested within it. It is this living divine form that the devotee approaches, serves and relates to as a present and beloved member of the household.

All home shrines share similar features, such as wood carving or metal engraving, but each shrine is individualized depending on tastes and tradition, including the size and specificities of murtis, fresh or synthetic flower garlands, additional lighting or hand-made or purchased coverings.

Bringing the Murtis to Life

While the consecration ceremonies in public mandirs can last several days and involve many specialized priests or swamis, a home shrine requires its own deeply intimate process of consecration. A beautifully carved piece or printed image purchased from a boutique, ordered online or shipped across the ocean from India becomes a murti, a form of God, when the devotee performs a localized ritual of consecration.

The process begins with *panchamrita snana*—ritual bathing of the murti in a mixture of milk, honey, yogurt, ghee and water, tending to the Deity with the same devotion one would offer a distinguished guest. Each substance is chosen for its sacred character.

Following this process comes the act of

avahana (invocation). Using specific *bija* (seed) mantras and prayers, the family requests the Deity to descend and take up residence within the physical form. God's manifestation in the murti is an act of divine grace that the household receives with reverence and joy. The offering of arati at the conclusion of the ceremony, is the devotee's initial act of worship before God now present. From this moment, the murti is a living, beloved form of God in the home, receiving daily care, attention and devotion.

Vastu Shastra for Modern Spaces

Maintaining a traditional home shrine within the constraints of modern domestic architecture—whether in a suburban house, a city apartment or a high-rise flat—is aided by understanding the principles of Vastu Shastra (the science of architecture) and employing a degree of creative adaptation.

Vastu Shastra understands the cosmos as a web of energetic currents, and how we orient our living spaces determines our alignment with these currents. In widely observed Vastu conventions, the northeast quadrant of the home—the Isana corner—is considered particularly auspicious for a home shrine, as it draws on the stabilizing energies of the North and the illuminating energies of the East. That said, Vastu prescriptions are not uniform across all schools, and specific guidance may vary depending on the Deity being enshrined, the orientation of the home and the devotional tradition of the family. Families are best served by consulting classical Vastu principles and the specific conventions



of their own *sampradaya* (spiritual lineage) when determining placement.

This is where adaptation and creativity become necessary. Homes of modern architecture are rarely built with the Vastu Shastra in mind. A devout Hindu family moving into a suburban home in Maryland, an apartment in London, a flat in Singapore or a townhouse in Toronto must engage in spiritual problem-solving.

One of the most ambitious adaptations is the conversion of a family room, a walk-in closet or a flex-room into a dedicated temple room—apart from the high-traffic areas of the house, offering a level of quiet privacy.

In smaller spaces, like apartments or townhomes, families often create a sacred space in an office, living room or kitchen by installing a free-standing cabinet—wooden or marble, ornate or simple. Doors are closed during non-worship hours to protect the sanctity of the interior space.

Vastu specifies other considerations to keep in mind. A shrine should never share a wall with a bathroom, be placed directly under a staircase (where heavy foot traffic constantly passes overhead) or be located inside a master bedroom. If a bedroom is the only option—as is often the case for college students or young professionals in smaller or shared living spaces—the shrine should be shielded by a curtain or closed cabinet doors, demarcating the boundaries of the sacred area.

While synthetic materials are more readily available in modern furniture, natural materials like teak wood, rosewood or marble are most fitting for sacred use and offer



KUMAR SIVAKUMARAN

Saiva sect shrines

(Clockwise from opposite top) Muthumanimoli Sivakumaran performs arati at home; some shrines include paduka, holy sandals, to represent the family's satguru; a smaller shrine holding Ganesha, Kartikeya, Nataraja and Sivalinga fits into tighter spaces; a shrine modeled after the Siva Nataraja shrine of Kadavul Temple in Hawaii



UNKNOWN



JAI & GANGA MURUGAN



SHANTHI SURESH



continuity with the craft traditions in which shrines have long been made.

Engaging Cosmic Elements

A Hindu home shrine is designed to be a microcosm of the universe. At the heart of its ritual structure are the *pancha bhutas*, the five elements—space, air, fire, water and earth—that constitute all of creation. Their presence in the puja carries a profound theological logic: since all of creation proceeds from God and is sustained by God, the offering of all five elements is the devotee's gesture of returning the entire cosmos to its source—an act of surrender, gratitude and recognition of God's sovereign presence in all that exists. The puja also draws on the sense corresponding to each—sound, touch, sight, taste and smell—so that the devotee is drawn into the presence of the Divine not merely intellectually, but with their whole person.

The arrangement of the shrine itself follows a sacred order. At the center sits the family's Ishta Devata, the form of the Divine to whom they feel the closest personal affinity—such as Krishna, Durga Ma, Shiva, Bhagwan Swaminarayan or Rama. Around the Ishta Devata are often placed other Deities: the Kula Devata (the ancestral family Deity), Ganesha, the Lord of Beginnings and Remover of Obstacles; and, in many traditions, the guru.

When a devotee steps before their home shrine to perform puja, they use sacred implements to invoke the five elements in a systematic choreography of bhakti.

Akasha (Space): The element space is invoked by the ringing of the brass *ghanta* (bell) or the blowing of a conch shell. The crisp, metallic strike of the ghanta shatters wandering thoughts, focusing the mind on the present moment.

Vayu (Air): The element air is engaged through the burning of *dhupa* (incense), whose smoke carries resin fragrance into every corner and lends a lingering perfume for the devotional ritual.

Agni (Fire): The element fire is manifested by lighting and waving a lamp (diya) of oil or camphor during the arati. In Vedic tradition, fire is the great purifier and the messenger who carries offerings between the human and the Divine. The upward-reaching flame symbolizes the soul's yearning for liberation, while its luminance represents the destruction of *avidya* (ignorance) by the light of divine wisdom.

Apas/Jal (Water): Pure water is presented in a *panchapatra* (copper or brass cup), using a small spoon called an *achamani*. Water, symbolizing cleansing and receptivity, is offered to the Deities for drinking and washing, mirroring the hospitality extended to honored guests.

Prithvi (Earth): The solid material world is represented by the physical offerings placed at the feet of the Deities: fresh, fragrant flowers, *chandan* (pure sandalwood paste), *kumkum* (vermilion powder) and *naivedyam*, such as fruits, nuts and freshly cooked food.

Multi-Generational Anchors

In a bustling suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, USA, three generations make up the Shah household. Their home could not accommodate an independent room for their shrine, but they chose to turn their family room into a shared space. The family—grandmother, parents and two children—gather daily, perform arati and afterward sing bhajans (devotional hymns) or listen to the grandmother read verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Although the family visits the local mandir weekly, their home shrine remains the steady center of their daily *sadhana*.

College Student Adaptations

For first-year college student Shakti, living in a campus dorm meant adapting her shrine to her single room and following a "no open flame" safety rule. She allocated a space on her bookshelf for her murtis which she could cover with fabric at night. In place of incense, she purchased an oil diffuser, and in place of the diya she used battery-operated tealight candles. In her off-campus



apartment in her second year, Shakti set up a more complete worship arrangement.

The constraints of her circumstances had been real, but she did not abandon her daily *sadhana*. She recalled the verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* (9.26) in which Lord Krishna speaks of accepting even a leaf, a flower or water when offered with love—understanding it not as a license to replace prescribed forms at will, but as an assurance that sincere devotion, sustained even under genuine constraint, is received by God. Her experience pointed to a principle the tradition holds dear: that form and intention together constitute proper worship, and that when circumstances temporarily limit the form, the orientation of the heart keeps the devotee connected—while the aspiration to restore proper practice remains. Shakti's story reflects what countless Hindu families in the diaspora know from experience: that the desire to maintain one's connection with God, however imperfect the conditions, is itself an expression of bhakti.

Bringing the Temple Home

Increasingly, Hindu families in the diaspora draw on the presence of traditional mandirs to enrich their devotional life at home. For

example, a visit to the Sri Venkateshwara Temple in Pittsburgh, PA, the Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ, or the Shri Sanatan Hindu Mandir in Wembley may serve as a pilgrimage rather than simply a brief excursion.

When families bring home *prasadam* (food that has been offered to the Deity) from the temple and share it among themselves, the devotional power of the temple finds its continuation in the household.

The home shrine stands at the center of that daily rhythm—not as a beautiful object to be admired from a distance or a symbol of heritage displayed for others, but as a living presence that draws the household back each day into relationship with God. How deeply the shrine takes root in a family's life is shaped by how faithfully and lovingly it is approached.

Inner and Outer Worship

Morning worship follows a recognizable pattern with certain foundational elements, while additional rituals are performed on certain occasions:

Snanam (Ablutions): The devotee bathes and dresses in fresh, clean clothes before entering the shrine space.

Shuddhi (Cleansing): Offerings from the previous day are removed—flowers, burnt incense ash, etc. The murtis are wiped clean or ritually bathed with water, milk or rosewater, selected for their purifying and nourishing properties.

Naivedyam (Food Offering): Fresh water, fruits, nuts or other foods are offered to the murtis.

Chanting and Japa: Sitting facing north (associated with the abode of the Divine) or east (associated with the source of light and creation), devotees recite Vedic hymns and other holy stanzas, or perform silent japa, using a *strand* of holy rudraksha, tulsi or sandalwood beads.

Arati: A lit diya is waved before the murtis, accompanied by the singing of hymns praising God's glory.

Pradakshina: The devotee circumambulates the murtis, understanding the Divine as indwelling within the self, and as the center around which their life is ordered.

Pranam: The devotee prostrates before the murtis—the body itself becoming an offering, the whole self laid before God.

In performing these steps—pouring the water, lighting the lamp, placing flowers at the feet of God—the devotee is not simply going through motions. Each physical act is an expression of love, through which the ordinary objects of the world—water, flame, flower, food—become transparent to the Divine presence that pervades them. The hands that offer are the same hands that will go out into the world; the vision cultivated before the shrine quietly reshapes how everything else is seen.

These actions also serve as the foundation for *manasi puja* (mental worship). With sustained daily practice, a devotee can close their eyes in any environment—a busy office, college campus, train or hotel room—to visualize their home shrine with clarity and perform the entire ritual and offer bhakti within the sanctuary of their own mind. The physical home shrine, therefore, serves as the tangible ground from which an interior devotional life takes shape. It

Shakta sect shrines



(right to left) This large shrine focuses on a painting and brass murti of Goddess Lalitha Tripura Sundari. The Hinduism subreddit user who shared this photo called it their "Shakta starter home mandir." Pretty nice starter!



Vaishnava & Smarta shrines



(clockwise from far right)
A Smarta home shrine includes Shankaracharyas along with Saiva, Vaishnava and Shakta Deities; a spectacular home shrine for sale; a couple worships the divine family of Lord Rama as their central Deities; family members of the BAPS organization sit in front of their ornate home shrine while attending an online satsang with BAPS sadhus



shows the outer ritual to be itself devotional, and at the same time a means by which an inner practice is formed and sustained.

An Anchor of Continuity

To understand the role of the home shrine within the modern global diaspora, it is helpful to view it through the lens of historical adaptation. In addition to its role in cultivating a devotional disposition, the household shrine has historically served as a primary anchor for religious continuity during periods when public temple networks were unavailable, inaccessible or disrupted.

A powerful example of this resilience can be found in the indentured labor migrations of mid-19th to early-20th century. When hundreds of thousands of Hindus were transported under indenture contracts from India to faraway regions like Fiji, South Africa, Guyana, Trinidad and Mauritius, they arrived in regions without established traditional temple infrastructure. In these unfamiliar environments, public worship was not an immediate option.

During these transitional decades, worship in the home shrine was among the practices that maintained the thread of cultural and spiritual identity. In the quiet of their living spaces, individuals, and eventually their families, dedicated corners or spaces for prayer. They lit simple lamps and recited verses from memory.

This capacity to sustain devotional life across displacement and disruption is among the oldest and most tested qualities of Hindu practice. Whether in the face of the profound uprooting that brought earlier generations to

unfamiliar shores or the quieter but persistent pressures of modern secular life, the home shrine has remained steady as the intimate, daily place where faith is not proclaimed but simply lived, carried forward from one generation to the next.

Conclusion

A house, however grand or lovingly built, is fundamentally a structure of walls and rooms. But when it contains a consecrated *ghar mandir*—daily approached, daily worshiped, daily loved—something more than architecture is present. The home becomes a *devalaya*: an abode of God—not by virtue of its beauty or scale, but because of the divine presence that has taken up residence within it and the devotion that greets that presence each morning.

In a world that pulls insistently toward external achievement and relentless activity, the home shrine speaks a different language entirely—one of stillness, gratitude and quiet certainty that the purpose of human life runs deeper than accumulation or recognition. It does not compete with the community mandir, nor with festivals or the study of scripture—it is the intimate daily ground from which the whole of devotional life grows.

As Hindu communities continue to take root and flourish across the world, the home shrine remains one of the most enduring expressions of that

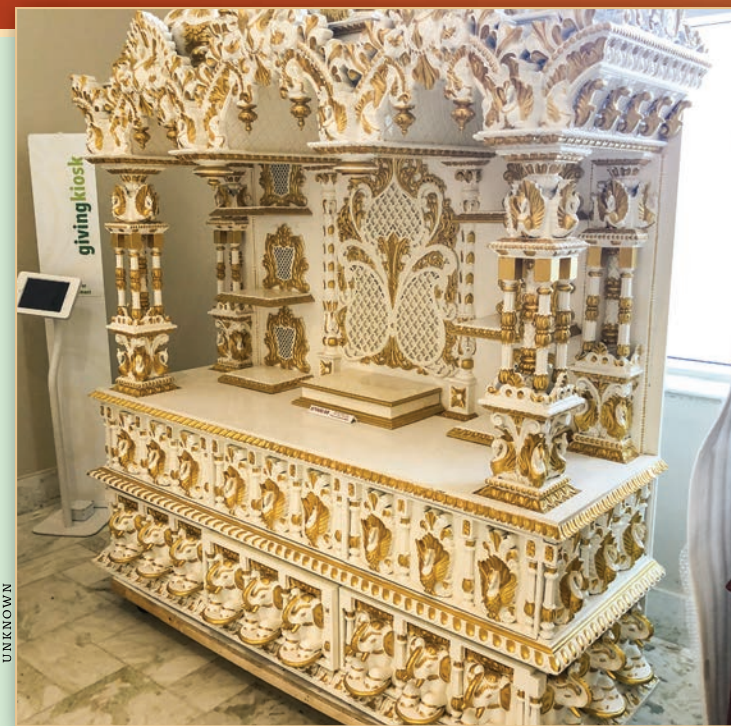


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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vitality—the place where the tradition is not merely preserved but lived, loved and passed forward.

For children growing up in the diaspora, it is among their deepest inheritances—not consciously claimed so much as quietly absorbed through years of mornings spent in its presence. Long after the lessons of school have faded and the passing trends of popular culture have been forgotten, they will remember the warm, golden glow of the morning diya, the sweet fragrance of incense drifting down the hallway, and the steady, reassuring sound of their parents' voices raised in the prayers and hymns of the tradition.





Hindus Reflect on Their Home Shrines

Did your parents or grandparents have a shrine? What are your earliest memories of that shrine and its place in their lives?



Rajeshwari Parasivam: Growing up, my mum was a Buddhist (I converted to Hinduism in adulthood), so we had a shrine in a quiet corner of the living room. She spent a lot of time in front of a big fat Buddha. As children, it seemed that food was always coming to the house, and it would be presented to the Buddha. We would also pray to our ancestors. Those practices were part of our life at the shrine,

and everybody was participating. But there was no meditation, nothing like that. It was just praying, offering, asking to be blessed, and being with our ancestors.

Sullochina Lulla: My father was a very devout Hindu. He was a Siva follower. He fasted on Mondays for most of his life. In India, we were in a very small house with two or three rooms, so we couldn't designate a whole room for puja. But one side of the bedroom was kept as a puja place. We had a little wooden cabinet with pictures of Lord Siva and other Deities, but the Siva Lingam was especially important to my father. Every Monday after his bath, he would bathe the Siva Lingam and offer some flowers, whatever he could afford, and do puja, although we were not brahmins or from a traditionally Saivite family. In India, in those days, there was a lot of casteism. We were working-class people, but somehow, my father had become a Siva follower.

Describe your home shrine space. Does the entire family worship together?



Thushyanthan Amirthalingam: When we owned a house, the shrine had a dedicated room. Now that we've moved and space is really tight, it is part of a larger living area. However, the shrine itself sits behind intricately carved doors in the living area. Before we had kids, my wife and I would worship together, but now with the kids, it's kind of hard, because of their schedules and such. But we do introduce them

to worship occasionally.

Kumar Sivakumaran: The shrine in our house is a fully dedicated room. We have a raised platform for our Deities: a Siva Lingam, Lord Siva, Lord Ganesha, Lord Murugan, Saraswati and Lakshmi. My children are grown up and they're not with us. My wife and I sometimes pray together and sometimes on our own.

Anonymous: Our home shrine is a fully dedicated room. Deities on the main altar include Lord Ganesha, Lord Murugan and Lord Siva arranged in a traditional manner. Additionally, our Satguru's picture and padukas are located on the main altar. The altar is illuminated with oil lamps and is often adorned with freshly picked flowers. Our family typically prefers to worship individually in the room; however, the entire family worships together on special occasions, such as Ganesh Chaturthi.

What activities do you perform at the shrine?

Kumar Sivakumaran: We use it for daily worship, especially in the

morning, as soon as we get up and also in the evening. In the mornings, it's usually between 7 and 8am, and in the evening between 6 and 7:30pm. We do a regular, simple puja in the shrine. Basically, I sit, meditate, chant hymns, light a dipam, show the lamp to the Deity, and after that I pray vibhuti.

Rajeshwari Parasivam: Every morning I do my sadhana, and it feels very peaceful, so I go there and spend time and relax. I even do my hatha yoga there. I read sacred texts. I do puja every day, though I sometimes skip on weekends, following a format I found online.

Sullochina Lulla: I use it for daily worship. I do my meditation in that room, and my prayers—also the evening arati. Even if I don't have time for my full worship, like when I'm traveling, I make sure that I first go to the shrine and get blessings, even if my flight is at 5am.

Any restrictions for the shrine, such as no shoes?

Kumar Sivakumaran: We don't even use shoes inside the house, so there's no way anyone can walk into the shrine room with shoes on.

Thushyanthan Amirthalingam: Because the shrine is part of our living space, we use a small floor mat to mark its boundary. Even though the kids run around in the area, my wife and I remain conscious of it, as though the shrine were protected by an invisible barrier. We stop and think, "Oh, we have our shoes on. We can't walk into that space."

Have you adjusted your worship over the years?

Ravi Nadesan: Very little. I've refined, if you will, the actual puja that I do: the arati, the affirmations and the prayers that I say on a daily basis to the point that it's almost automatic.

Thushyanthan Amirthalingam: Within the last five years, we moved to two different places. So, previously, we had the shrine in my office, then a puja room. Next we moved to a different space where keeping the proper north- or east-facing orientation was a bit difficult. Also we have added new murtis. Previously, we just had a Ganesha murti and a much smaller Murugan murti and Siva Lingam. Two or three years ago, we added a large Siva Nataraja, 16 inches tall. We also got Ganesha and Murugan murtis, which were about half the height of the Nataraja, and a new Siva Lingam. My wife decorated our shrine with the dipam and kuthuvilakku to complete the space.

Sullochina Lulla: We've been in this house for 40 years and have not really made any particular changes. Of course, I have added decorations to the shrine, which change according to the occasion.

What has been the impact on your spiritual life?



Kumar Sivakumaran: It is a place where I can sit down for some time and meditate, which helps calm my anxieties and lower my stress level. It was an especially important refuge during the COVID lockdowns, when we couldn't go to the temple, as it gave an alternative place to worship and pray.

Ravi Nadesan: The shrine room is the cornerstone of my home and the very base

of my daily sadhana. I've maintained this practice since 1978. We all have a lot of struggles in our lives, and the shrine room and daily routine of sadhana provide stability.

Rajeshwari Parasivam: I live with my two brothers who don't feel protected if they don't hear the sound of the puja in the morning—like something is missing. So, when I say that I am going into the



shrine room, they say, "Yes, yes." So, they are very happy. As soon as the puja is finished—performed by me or streamed from powerful temples—there is something very divine happening, not just in the shrine room but throughout the house. We really feel the love pouring from all the pujas that we hear. It completely changes the atmosphere of the house. There's a certain sanctity that we share. All this changes our family life. If a voice is raised, it means that I haven't done my puja well enough, so I know that I have to go back and ask for the protection of Lord Ganesha, and He sends it right away.

How do neighbors and friends react?



Ravi Nadesan: Most of my friends are Hindu or connected with the Hindu community. They understand the importance of a home shrine and recognize it as a personal practice. They're all very positive. Even family members who don't practice Hinduism

know that I am a Hindu. They understand the struggles I've been through and recognize how important the shrine room has been as a stabilizing factor.

Kumar Sivakumaran: None of our neighbors are Hindu. Occasionally, some workers have visited the house, but none of them go into the shrine room. We don't allow anyone else to go into the room. While doing puja, we ring the bell, but none of our neighbors have ever called us about it or asked why we were ringing a bell or anything like that. They haven't called 911 or the police.

Rajeshwari Parasivam: They react very well. When I first set up my shrine room in 2014, my neighbors helped me move the furniture. They laughed, you know—they're French. But it was accepted. Everything went well. Everybody on an island is exposed to the same weather and circumstances, so everybody prays and everybody respects each other's religion. It's fine.

Sullochina Lulla: My neighbors and I don't visit one another. You know, the higher the standard of life, the more isolated we become. In my earlier homes, when I was struggling financially and trying to save enough money to buy my own house, we lived in an apartment and neighbors would visit and also respect my shrine. They would even bow down. Even when I was a resident at a hospital and shared a room with another resident, I had designated one area of the room as a prayer spot and my roommate respected that.

.....
Shaila Rao relates her home worship: (photos right) "I am originally from South India. We left India about 50 years ago. We built our home in California and have always had a shrine at home. We always pray with our family. Now, my routine is to pick flowers from my garden and offer to God. We perform Sri Satyanarayana puja every Ekadasi, which comes every 15 days. Apart from that, every day we offer all the 16 upacharyas."



SHAILA RAO



SHAILA RAO



Living Vedanta Through Our Daily Home Puja

BY MR. AND MRS. UDAY ACHARYA

FOR MY WIFE AND ME, RESIDENTS OF NAVI MUMBAI, ORIGINALLY from South India, our home shrine (photo above) is not merely a place of prayer—it is the living heart of our household, our personal temple. I am a full-time Vedanta teacher and disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and this sacred space bridges the profound philosophical truths of the *Upanishads* with the intimate daily discipline of devotion.

We believe our home belongs entirely to the Lord, who presides over all our mundane and spiritual activities. He is the center of our existence, around which everything in our lives revolves. Our altar tells the story of a lifelong pilgrimage, housing beautiful Deities that have come to us from sacred temples across the length and breadth of India. While Lord Krishna is invoked as our main Deity, the Divine Mother, Devi, holds a place of special prominence. We revere her as Annapoorani, who blesses our home with sustenance; as Lakshmi, who grants both material and inner wealth; and as Saraswati, the source of supreme spiritual knowledge. Flanking them are Lord Ganesha and Lord Hanuman, who dispel obstacles and fear.

Our *dinacharya*, or daily routine, is anchored by lighting the sacred lamp at dawn and dusk. We spend about 45 minutes each day reciting various *stotras*—a dedication that intensifies during festivals

and on special occasions. Our morning begins with the Surya Namaskara mantras and Aditya Hridayam, welcoming the light of consciousness. We then chant traditional puja mantras to Ganesha, Devi, Vishnu, Hanuman and Siva, followed by japa of the Gayatri and Mahamrityunjaya mantras.

As twilight falls, the lamp is lit once more, accompanied by the soulful chanting of the Hanuman Chalisa, the Margabandhu Stotram for protection and the sublime Rajarajeshwari Stotram. Our daily worship also includes offerings of sacred *Gangajal*, incense, light, fresh flowers and fruits, followed by Mantrapushpam and the concluding Karpura Arati.

Most importantly, our prayers are never just for ourselves. Every day, we sit before the Deities and consciously remember everyone we know who needs help—whether they are facing issues involving health, career or relationships, or the profound grief of bereavement. We close our worship with the universal Vedic prayer for harmony beginning *Sarve bhavantu sukhinah*—may all beings be happy and free from suffering.

This continuous communion transforms our home from a physical structure into a spiritual sanctuary, keeping our teaching, learning and living aligned with the Divine.

INTERVIEW

Ramana Maharshi's Women Devotees

With Sneha Choudhury

BY ERICA BASSANI

IN THE SPRING OF 2025, I WAS IN TIRUVANNAMALAI, INDIA, TO INTERVIEW women teachers and leaders for the Women Awakening Project. There I spoke with Sneha Choudhury, a devoted follower of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and editor of *Women Devotees of Bhagavan* (photo right). In this conversation, we focused on Bhagavan's interaction with women devotees and the feminine principle, offering a glimpse into the spiritual sensitivity of this master.

Sneha, can you tell us how this book came about?

The idea actually came from the President of Sri Ramanasramam, and we owe him deep gratitude. Although accounts of these women existed across various sources, he felt it was time to compile them in a single volume. He envisioned that the presence and voices of the women devotees should be honored. It was a collective effort to which the President himself contributed several articles. Honestly, I would have never imagined myself working on something like this. But when it came to me, I saw it as Bhagavan's grace and did my best.

Who is Ramana for you?

Ramana is everything to me. When I was younger, I had many questions and doubts about prayer, rituals and their meaning. One day, I came across the book *Be As You Are*, and I felt that Bhagavan answered all my questions through it. What struck me was his logical and simple way of explaining things. I had no prior knowledge of meditation or Self-Realization at the time, but I felt drawn to him.

Later, in 1996, I found a Ramana center in Hyderabad. I was going through a personal crisis and needed support. What I found was a community that radiated Bhagavan's teachings of love, compassion and care. It was like discovering a new world. Ultimately, all who are drawn to him come to Arunachala, because it is the heart—the grace, the light. There's nothing in this world other than grace.

How did Ramana relate to women, especially considering the social norms of the early 20th century?

Let me start with his mother. She was devastated when Ramana left home and she searched everywhere for him. When she finally found him in a neglected state at Arunachala, she begged him to return, but he remained silent. When prompted, he wrote a note saying: "What has to happen will happen; try as you may. The best course is to remain silent." She returned home but later came back to stay. Over time, he looked after her, prayed for her health and helped her transcend physical attachments. Eventually, she passed away in his presence. He guided her through the process, placing one hand on her chest and another on her head, silencing her thoughts so they wouldn't give rise to further births. He later declared that she had merged with the Self.

What about his interactions with women devotees?

Most of the women who came to him were widows, deeply rooted



in traditional practices. For example, during their menstrual cycles, they were not allowed to enter the kitchen or be touched. One day, a woman had her period, and her relatives were away. She stood outside the ashram gate, and a kitchen worker cooked separately for her. When Bhagavan noticed, he asked why food was being taken outside. When he learned the reason, he insisted that she be brought inside and served the same food as everyone else. He said, "You cannot hurt another devotee with such customs." This was revolutionary at the time. Many Brahmin families stopped coming to the ashram after that, but Ramana didn't care. He said, "Let them not come. This ashram is for everyone."

Ramana truly made no distinction between men and women?

Never. When it came to Realization, he made no difference. Though women weren't allowed to stay in the ashram at night due to lack of accommodations, he always treated them with the same compassion and dignity. He welcomed everyone equally. Many women came for solace, for spiritual guidance or were simply drawn to his silent presence. Some had nothing—no shelter, no support. They stayed in verandas, old temples or with generous devotees. This book is a tribute to those women, who overcame resistance from society and their own families to follow their hearts. Interestingly, I feel that the kitchen workers may have benefited the most. They couldn't attend satsangs, but Ramana would wake up at 2 or 3 am to help prepare vegetables. Later, he would visit them in the kitchen, tell stories, share teachings. His simplicity came out most with them.

That reminds me of a poem he wrote. Would you say both the Shiva and Shakti aspects were fully realized in him?

Absolutely. That poem, where he writes from the perspective of a woman yearning for union with Shiva, is filled with devotion and longing. It expresses the soul's desire to merge with the Divine. When people asked him to explain it, he simply said it came spontaneously and couldn't be explained. In devotional traditions, it is said that God is the only true male, and all souls are the female aspect, yearning to unite with the Divine. There is a story about a female devotee who was denied an audience with a saint because she was a woman. She replied, "Am I the only woman here?" The saint understood immediately.

Ramana often spoke of Purna—completeness. We are already full. But we don't realize it because of our ego-consciousness. We think we are waves, separate and competing, not realizing we are the ocean.

The Author: Erica Bassani has been a copywriter, author and spiritual seeker since her early twenties. She's combined her highest passion with her deepest love by founding the Women Awakening Project (www.womenawakeningproject.com), a space to gather interviews with female masters of all spiritual traditions.



Finding the Perfect Himalayan Retreat



Stressed out by relentless personal and professional demands? One of these remote mountain hideaways may be just the place to rekindle your spirituality.



BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, DEHRADUN, INDIA

IT IS EASY TO ASCERTAIN WHY THE PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT OF the Himalayas was chosen by saints, sages and wise men for deep meditation and communion with God. As Pandit Shri-ram Sharma Acharya puts it, "The Himalayas are not merely mountains—they are the Earth's beating heart, where divine wisdom descends and human aspiration ascends. In their silence lives the voice of eternity."

Amidst innumerable spiritual retreats spread across India in holy cities, along riverbanks and seashores, Rishikesh has always been a sought-after center of learning. Ashrams there include The Divine Life Society, Dayananda Ashram, Parmarth Niketan, Kailash Ashram and Omkarananda Ashram. But in recent years, the holy city has become overwhelmed by visitors, traffic and chaos.

I felt it was time to explore more remote retreats in the Himalayan foothills, far from the hubbub of any city. In consultation with the editors of HINDUISM TODAY, we decided to explore the Kumaon region, in eastern Uttarakhand. In recent centuries, Kumaon gave sanctuary to great saints like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ram Tirtha, Mahatma Gandhi and Mahavatar Babaji, a central figure in Paramahansa Yogananda's Kriya Yoga lineage.

Dol Ashram

The concept of a spiritual retreat has recently come to include health and wellness programs that offer scant spiritual content. For this report, we highlight ashrams that retain a strong spiritual focus, especially those founded by saints and sages. I drove from my home in Dehradun to Bhimtal, then stopped in Almora at Dol Ashram (photo at left, map page 33). At an elevation of 5,500 feet, the ashram is situated in what is called the "Lesser Himalayas," between the lower foothills and the actual mountains.

In this idyllic location—in a silent pine forest but not too far from a city—I met the head, Mahamandaleshwar Swami Visheshwarananda. Swami told of the ashram's founding: Tapasvi Baba Kalyan Das passed by this place while returning from his second pilgrimage to the holy lake Manasarovar in Tibet. Inspired by a vision of Goddess Bhagavati, he established the ashram here in 1990, setting this guiding principle: "The Divine is not far from you. It lives in the silence of your own heart. Purify the mind through meditation and selfless service. When the mind becomes still, the guru within awakens."

Today the ashram is run by the Shri Kalyanika Himalayan Dev Sthanam Trust. Visit www.shrikalyanika.com to learn what is offered. For physical balance there is fresh air, daily hatha yoga and pranayama. For mental calmness there is chanting of mantras and other mindful practices, plus the reduced sensory overload and minimal digital distraction. The meals here are pure vegetarian, as they are at every retreat in this report. Courses include guided meditation, scriptural recitations, selfless service, community living and interaction with teachers and spiritual guides, all aiming to foster spiritual growth. Multiple quiet spaces are available for self-study and reflection.

Over 25 temples grace the sprawling property. Built in various architectural styles, these honor Navdurga, Ganesha, Vishnu, Shiva,

Dol Ashram, founded in 1990, is a spectacular ashram retreat headed by Swami Visheshwarananda



Maa Bhagwati, Hanuman and others. There are beautiful quarters for visiting swamis, a huge satsang hall, a meditation hall and a well-stocked library. In a pagoda-style building called Shri Dhyani Peetham, a circular hall with a high ceiling contains a 1.6-ton Sri Yantra, believed to be the largest in the world. Seekers meditate in the spiritually charged surroundings.

Dol Ashram offers four kinds of retreats. The first one includes beginning practices such as pranayama, the second intensifies one's practice of hatha yoga, the third focuses on health issues and the fourth is for serious spiritual seekers. The cost ranges from \$160 to \$420, depending on the length of stay—three, seven or ten days. There are 45 double- or triple-occupancy rooms and three dormitories with 10 to 15 beds each. The daily schedule starts at 4:30am and ends at 8:30pm.

The weather here is pleasant much of the year, but these are the Himalayas: serious storms and shifts in temperature are possible any time of the year. Visitors especially should avoid monsoon season, from mid-June to mid-September.

I spoke with visitors. Sarita Pandey and her husband had just arrived from Chhat-tisgarh. They first met Baba Kalyan Das in 1985 in Amarkantak, where Babaji has his main ashram in the lap of Narmada Valley. "I

had no idea who I was before I met Babaji," she recalls. She says that through the guru she found herself in Devbhoomi, the land of Gods in the Himalayas.

Young Hem Raj came to Dol Ashram as a job aspirant, but dedicated his life to service after reading Sadhana Yatra, the biography of Baba Kalyan Das. He remembers, "I had found what I was hunting for. The fear and anxiety that always haunted me were gone after I took *diksha* (initiation) and started working and living here."

Dol Ashram is a great choice for serious seekers as well as newcomers who wish to get a sense of a spiritual way of life along with some comfort and freedom.

Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

A pleasant road trip took me to the old town of Lohaghat, close to the border of Nepal, and just over six miles more to Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati (www.advaitaashrama.org). Meditating here should be the ultimate goal of a serious seeker. At 6,400 feet, tall cedars and oaks surround the ashram on all sides. The boundless stillness of the place elevates human consciousness.

A narrow winding road through the forest takes you to the ashram gate. Inside, one first notices the rustic charm of the gardens, old buildings, halls and rooms, all retaining their pristine glory. Wooden terraces, mud-

smeared walls, age-old electric fittings, everything seems unchanged from when the ashram was built more than a century ago.

Swami Shuddhidananda, president of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, tells me the ashram was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1899. Having seen the beauty of the Swiss Alps during his travels, he expressed a wish to have an ashram in the lap of the Himalayas in India. Determined to fulfill the wish of the guru, his disciples Captain James Henry Sevier and Charlotte Sevier chose this place. At that time the living conditions were very harsh, with no decent roads, no electricity, no hospital or any other facility. There was an acute scarcity of food. When James Sevier passed away within a year after the ashram came up, Swami Vivekananda came here to console Mrs. Sevier in January 1901 and stayed for 15 days. Thus the ashram was sanctified by the great spiritual teacher.

The meditation hall where Vivekananda meditated is still the same. He dedicated this ashram entirely to practicing and preaching Advaita Vedanta. Thus, he did not want any temples or rituals based upon dualistic ideas. There are no forms or rituals—only the methodology of the *Upanishads*, going straight to the true nature of the human being, the Atman. This ashram became the publication hub of the Ramakrishna Mission, producing the majority of its books,

commodations. These tend to follow one of two patterns: some have in-house teachers and instructors, while others are booked by outside teachers who bring in their clients to use the facility. The surroundings of a property, accessibility, weather, in-house facilities offered, standard of accommodation and quality of food are some of the key factors determining the rates of retreat courses and accommodation.

It is very important to investigate carefully when choosing a retreat. One must read the retreats' respective websites and use social media platforms to find what clients say. Read reviews thoroughly and contact the retreat for information.

One thing remains unchanged: for a serious person with an urge to find inner peace, learn from scriptural texts and meditate, an ashram-based retreat will work best.

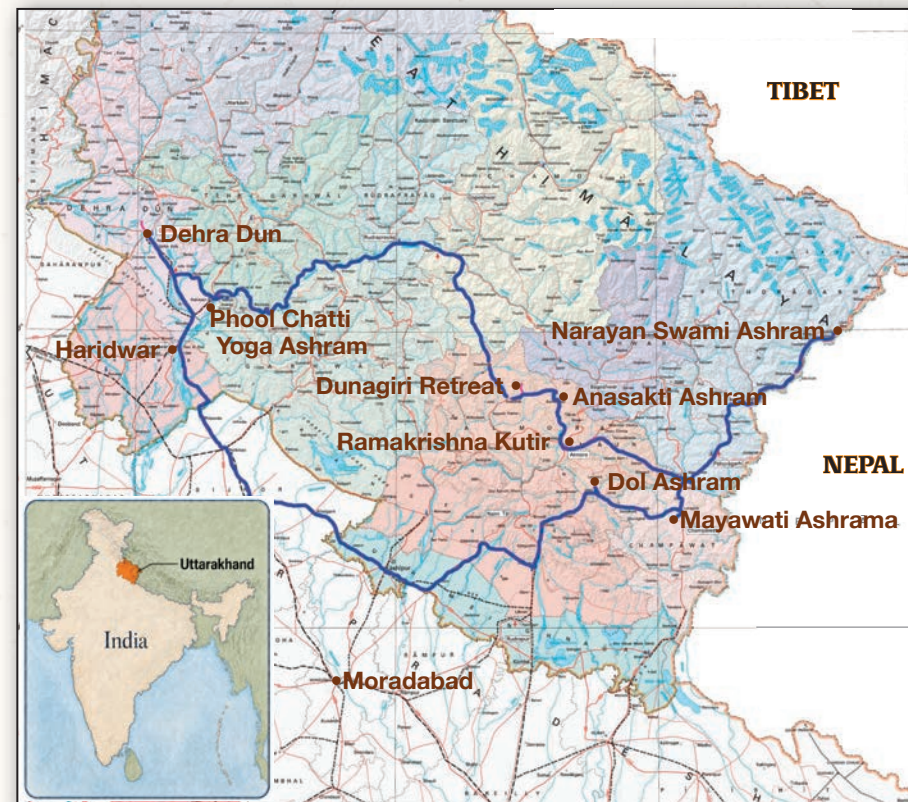
are searching for solutions to overcome immediate physical or mental problems.

Such clients can choose from nominally priced basic facilities to high-end, five-star ac-



The evolving concept: A Himalayan retreat once meant an ashram or modest lodging near a temple; now it includes stand-alone health and wellness programs with little spiritual emphasis

and very hectic urban schedules. They are trying to reduce their stress levels by rejuvenating themselves in a peaceful place in preparation for going back to work. Some



including the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

When asked, Swami Shuddhidananda explained that there are no differences of ideology between Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati and other RK Mission centers: "When you are looking at the ultimate reality from a great distance, it is dualism. When you are a little closer, it is qualified non-dualism. Finally, when you come extremely close, it is non-dualism. It is only the distance from which you are looking at the reality. We are looking at God from a distance so it appears as if God is different and we are different. As we evolve and grow in spiritual life, we come closer and the difference reduces. Finally, you will see that you and the entity you are worshipping are actually one."

The ashram has a library, a bookstore and

a charming museum which is devoted to the life and times of Swami Vivekananda. Visitors can meditate in the place where Swamiji himself meditated.

A total of 250 seekers attend the retreats here every year in batches of 20. Participants are chosen after their online applications are carefully scrutinized to evaluate each applicant's seriousness and spiritual bent. The curriculum is based on Vedantic texts, with some variation depending on the interest of participants.

Accommodation facilities are of two types. General visitors, mostly admirers of Swami Vivekananda and Advaita philosophy, are allowed to stay for a maximum of three days free of cost. They are welcome to make donations on their departure. Seven- and ten-day retreats cost \$104, irrespective of nationality.

Seeking peace in the Himalayas:

Our journalist proceeded more or less southeast from Dehra Dun stopping first at Dol Ashram, then Mayawati Ashrama and on to Narayan Swami Ashram before returning along a northern route through hill country to Ramakrishna Kutir, Anasakti Ashram, Dunagiri and finally Phool Chatti Yoga Ashram on the Ganga above Rishikesh.

This includes boarding and lodging in individual rooms.

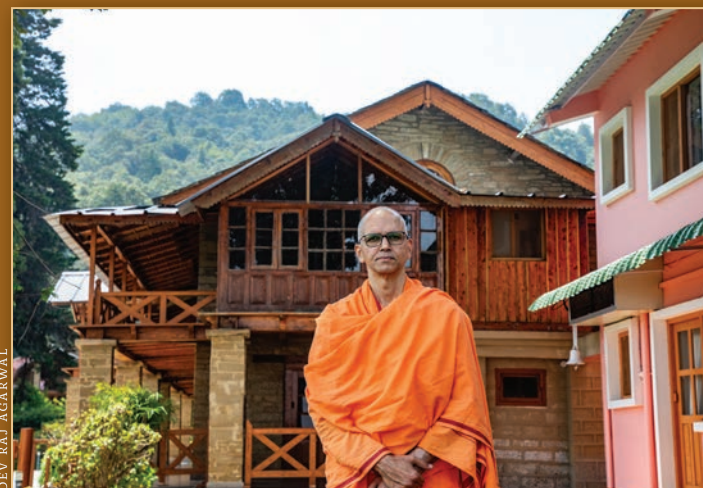
Narayan Swami Ashram

Along the road to Narayan Swami Ashram is Pithoragarh, a large city in an open valley with a splendid view of Nanda Devi mountain. A little farther is Jauljibi, a border town where the Gori and Kali Rivers meet. One can talk with people in Nepal across the Kali River. From here, the road to Narayan Ashram runs along the India-Nepal border, with the ashram just 30 miles from Tibet. Heavy downpour made it impossible to reach Narayan Ashram in the night. I got a call from Mr. Rana at the ashram, and he strictly told me to stay overnight in Dharchula, some 15 miles past Jauljibi.

The next morning his reasons became clear. The 32-mile drive to the ashram took a full four hours. In places, the road all but disappeared. Huge boulders blocked it elsewhere. Potholes as deep as a foot were a nightmare to drive across. Finally, I was able to see the iconic building of the ashram against the faint background of snowy mountains.

Known for its serene, picturesque surroundings at an elevation of 9,000 feet, this is one of India's most remote ashrams. It was a stopping place on a traditional pilgrimage route to Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailash in Tibet. It was also an important halt for Bhotia traders on the ancient trade route be-

Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati



(left) Swami Shuddhidananda, president of Advaita Ashrama; (above) the ashram's museum dedicated to Swami Vivekananda



tween India and Tibet. Across the Kali River, villages of Nepal overlook the ashram. With the recent lifting of travel restrictions near the border, the area has become more accessible to pilgrims, hikers and nature lovers, attracting greater attention to the ashram.

Narayan Swami, a civil engineer belonging to the royal family of Mysore, came to Dharachula in 1935 on his way from Karnataka to the Kailash Yatra. He was shocked to see how backward this part of the country was, with no roads, schools or hospitals.

After overcoming many hardships, Swami founded Narayan Ashram in 1940. He was tireless in his philanthropic work. He established a township named Narayan Nagar near Askot. He founded new schools, hospitals and other infrastructure facilities across Kumaon. He gave special emphasis to education. Brilliant students were given scholarships. The ashram still supports the academic pursuits of many students.

The resident acharya now is Swami Tadru-pananda Saraswati, supported by his disciple Mata Tanmayananda Saraswati. They conduct seven-day retreats during the summer, with classes on Vedanta, Upanishads, meditation and yoga. Guests can meditate in any of four temples or a specific meditation area. Serious participants may choose to meditate in the open field above the ashram. People are welcome to come independently for meditation and sadhana with prior reservation.

Narayan Ashram is among the simplest and least luxurious retreat centers. There is living space for 50 to 60 people, including 12 private rooms and a few dormitories. The rooms and dining area are very basic. Despite

this, nearly 400 serious aspirants visit the ashram in a year, and there is a long waiting list. Participants for each retreat are selected by the board from mailed applications that detail the individual's background and motives. Daily rates vary by accommodation, ranging from \$8 to \$13 for a room with meals and \$6 for a dormitory bed.

The ashram is supported by donations from thousands of devotees, including the big industrial houses in Gujarat and elsewhere. To increase self-reliance, the ashram grows vegetables, fruits and medicinal herbs.

Under the ashram's policy, the board wishes to avoid publicity other than word of mouth. It has no website. For reservations, one must apply by email to the president of Narayan Ashram Trust, Ramesh Pethani: pethanirp@gmail.com.

Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora

Swami Vivekananda called Almora the holiest place, because Goddess Parvati was born here. "These mountains are associated with the best memories of our race. Here, therefore, must be one of those centers, not merely of activity, but more of calmness, of meditation and of peace. And I hope someday to realize it." He expressed this wish to establish an ashram in Almora during his visit to the town in 1897.

Situated on the southwestern edge of Almora, the Ramakrishna Kutir is a conglomeration of medium and small buildings, old and new, on a very steep slope. One is instantly impressed by the boundless stillness of the environs.

As with Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati,

great care has been taken to restore and maintain all the old buildings in their quaint glory. A specialized restoration architect was hired for this job. Along with many places for meditation and self-study, there is a bookstore, a library, lecture and meditation halls.

Of particular importance is Vivekananda Bhawan, which houses students from nearby towns while they pursue their studies. Scholarships are available for those who qualify to attend universities for higher studies, with all expenses paid by the ashram. At present, there are 40 students studying with the ashram's support.

One can join the retreats by applying on the website, almora.rkmm.org. There are classes on Vedic scriptures for aspirants who want to learn from an acharya in the traditional way. The daily routine at the retreat includes Vedic chanting, meditation and prayers. Visitors are expected to maintain silence on campus.

Visitors staying one or two nights may do so free of cost. Otherwise, paid stays range from three to ten days, with longer stays available to retreat participants. Accommodations include 20 private rooms, large four-bed rooms and dormitories. The cost of a retreat ranges from \$100 to \$200. Please be aware that a lot of climbing up and down is involved here, though there is an elevator from the main road to get up to the top.

Anasakti Ashram, Kausani

Located in an area of Uttarakhand long associated with spiritual retreats, Anasakti Ashram is known for its association with Mahatma Gandhi. The main objective of the



Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora

The Remote Narayan Swami Ashram



(Clockwise from above) Narayan Ashram; (insets) the bridge to the ashram and rotis for lunch; Dunagiri Retreat dining hall; Anasakti Ashram head Ramesh Pandey in Kausani; Ramakrishna Kutir, Almora, head Swami Dhruveshananda; one of the Kutir's buildings





DEV RAJ AGARWAL

ference hall and the Gandhi Museum, with no separate area for yoga or meditation. About 700 people stay in the ashram in a year, paying \$9 for a double bedroom or \$2.60 for a bed in the dormitory. The ashram depends solely on visitor income and donations. There is a small but well-stocked store of khadi (hand-woven) garments. It is a great choice for an economical stay in a tourist place or to spend time in a peaceful environment.

Dunagiri Retreat

This is not an ashram—there are no resident swamis—but a high-end private facility (dunagiri.com) surrounded by lush forests that overlook the undulating landscape of the valley and the high Himalayas. It is just a mile from the Dunagiri Temple and near the cave of Mahavatar Babaji where he initiated Lahiri Mahasaya into Kriya Yoga. The retreat is open to nature enthusiasts, devotees of Mahavatar Babaji and spiritual seekers. It has a Mahavatar Babaji temple

ashram is to promote the ideology of Gandhi and inspire people to adopt the path of non-violence. With modernization and changing lifestyles, the ashram is gradually losing popularity. With its ultra-basic amenities, it is an excellent option for an economical

stay and meditation for someone on a shoestring budget. Its key features are tranquility and the sprawling lawn looking out on the Himalayas, offering a splendid view of the snowy peaks.

There are 18 basic rooms, a dormitory, con-

and meditation hall, a beautiful dining hall, a yoga hall and pyramid hall for meditation and worship of the divine feminine in the ancient traditions of Dunagiri.

Piyush Kumar, the owner, describes it as “a safe place for devotees who can experience



and benefit from the amazing spiritual vibrations of this place.”

The retreat programs, about 30 a year, are run by teachers who lead visiting groups and may rent the entire facility. The cost of the retreat and accommodations depends on the teacher. The property has 23 luxurious double bedrooms with private bathrooms. A room with meals costs \$157 plus tax per night for casual visitors. Individuals can meditate in any of the facilities and trek to Mahavatar Babaji’s cave or the Dunagiri Temple. The place is great for walks through the forest.

Phool Chatti Yoga Ashram

Phool Chatti Yoga Ashram (phoolchattiyoga.com), just nine miles from Rishikesh, is situated on an ancient yatra route, high on the right bank of the river, providing both the silence of the mountains and Ma Ganga’s divine darshan.

I met Lalita Nand and Meenakshi in the ashram’s imposing lobby. Meenakshi oversees administration, while Lalita conducts yoga retreats. Lalita came here 30 years ago, following 35 years of largely self-directed study. She has studied yoga at the Bihar School of Yoga, which follows the most conservative traditions.

The ashram was founded around 1885, when a saint named Baba Devi Dayal established a hut and sacred fire here on his return from Badrinath. He spent part of his time feeding pilgrims in the remote forest. Baba

was joined by Swami Vishudhanand, a doctor by profession who rendered medical help to the local people, including homemade ayurvedic medicines. He also developed an orchard of fruit trees. Over time, with the help of villagers, the ashram took shape.

The present head, Swami Dev Swarupanand, has transformed the place into a sophisticated retreat center. The daily cost is \$52 to \$84; a week-long retreat per person is \$570.

Today’s facility boasts a spacious lobby, yoga and meditation halls, the library, a new building with rooms for guests, a massive dining hall and terraced spaces overlooking the Ganga Valley. The ashram has a beautiful garden and many kinds of fruit trees.

Conclusion

The last few decades have brought tremendous changes in lifestyle and work culture. Life is now more hectic and stressful, with challenges to cope with and deadlines to be met at work. Physical and spiritual refinement, good health and stress-free time are the needs of the hour for people across the globe, needs that can be met by spiritual retreat centers. India is a favorite destination for such pilgrimages, with many sites for spending quality learning time, getting rid of fatigue and stress and replenishing mental and physical energies.

Literally thousands of places now offer such services. The first task is choosing the right one for you. If your goal is to have an

authentic spiritual experience, then an ashram-based retreat is the best choice. These have formal yoga and meditative programs with rules to be followed. When exploring options, carefully check the location, accessibility, Internet and banking facilities. Many retreats have long waiting lists, so you may need to register months ahead of time.

Selecting a more flexible private retreat is easier, as there are many more of these in beautiful locations and moderate climates. They cater to a wide audience, offering a range of services—from spiritual studies to yoga, health, stress relief and ayurvedic treatment facilities. Such retreats are easier to book, but more expensive, as they offer better facilities and cuisine.

As a final note, I should emphasize that the weather can be totally unpredictable in the Himalayas. Sudden spells of heavy rains may result in traffic jams and even serious landslides that block roads and interrupt travel plans—both of which I experienced preparing this report. One should allow extra time to deal with such adverse situations. 🍵

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dev Raj Agarwal of Dehradun, India, is a photographer who loves to capture Bharat’s immense diversity of people, cultures and nature, especially in the Himalayas.

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Mahavatar Baba’s Profound Temple



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

High-End Phoolchatti Yoga Ashram

(Clockwise from top left) Photographer/author Dev Raj Agarwal at Narayan Ashram; Phoolchatti Yoga Ashram’s Yoga Room; their Ayurveda treatment room; housing for visitors along Ganga; Mahavatar Baba’s temple and meditation hall



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



COURTESY PHOOLCHATTI YOGA ASHRAM



PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Excerpts from the Translation and Saiva Siddhanta Commentary by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami spent several years studying the foremost translation of the seminal yoga text, *The Yoga Sutras*, and formulating his own translation. His interest was focused on the text's parallels with the teachings of his guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who had studied the ancient text as a young seeker. After teaching these truths for over a decade, in 2022 Bodhinatha instructed his editing team of acharyas to bring his sutra project to a professional level. The illustrated book was published by Himalayan Academy in 2026 and this Insight is an excerpt of that book. It is arguably the first interpretation approached from the perspective of Shuddha Saiva Siddhanta, a fact which gives it a unique place among the myriad editions created over the centuries.

Introduction by Pujya Sri Jayendrapuri Swamiji

The perennial quest of mankind, as has been profoundly echoed through the sacred traditions of Sanatana Dharma, is not merely to live, but to know—to realize, to awaken to that eternal, unchanging Reality which shines as the very substratum of existence, the silent witness of all modifications, and the immutable essence behind the ever-changing panorama of life. In this exalted pursuit, the timeless work *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* stands as a radiant beacon, guiding earnest seekers toward the direct realization of their own true nature. At the very outset, one is struck not merely by the intellectual precision of the sutras, but by their deeply experiential orientation. Unlike many philosophical treatises that dwell extensively in abstraction, the aphorisms of Patanjali offer a direct and methodical pathway—an inner science—through which the aspirant may transcend the limitations of the mind and abide in the supreme stillness of pure consciousness. The celebrated declaration, *yogaścitta vṛtti nirodhaḥ*, encapsulates the entire essence of this path. Yoga is not merely physical discipline, nor philosophical speculation; it is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. If the restless modifications of the mind are the cause of bondage, their mastery alone opens the gateway to liberation. The rendering of these sutras by the Himalayan Academy, through the translation of Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, extracted from the treasury of works of Gurudeva Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, resonates deeply with the timeless wisdom of the *Upanishads*, wherein the mind is both the cause of bondage and liberation. (Continued)

Rishi Patanjali: The famed author meditates on a giant serpent. Above, Sadasiva rides on Nandi, while two cobras protect the sutras. Subtly, Siva's two all-seeing cosmic eyes peer out from just above the horizon.



SURESH MUTHUKULAM



The text of the Yoga Sutras is presented as part of the grand continuum of Vedic and Agamic thought. The division into four *padas* (chapters)—Samadhi, Sadhana, Vibhuti and Kaivalya—is symbolic of the aspirant's inner evolution: from the initial glimpse of stillness, through disciplined practice, past the temptations of extraordinary attainments and finally into the consummation of absolute freedom.

The exposition of ashtanga yoga—the eightfold path—restores yoga to its original sanctity and completeness. Yama and niyama are not external moral impositions but essential purifications of the inner instrument. Asana becomes a means to steadiness rather than an end in itself; pranayama unfolds as mastery over the vital force; pratyahara reveals the art of inward withdrawal—not suppression, but transcendence. Dharana matures into dhyana, and dhyana culminates in samadhi, where the triad of knower, knowing and known dissolves into non-dual awareness.

Yet, what elevates this edition of *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* into a rare and luminous category is the profound spiritual authority and experiential authenticity brought forth by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Gurudeva Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, and the deft, disciplined and compassionate exposition of Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Satguru Sri Bodhinatha Veylanswami.

The depth of knowledge embodied by Gurudeva is not merely intellectual. It is born of direct realization, refined through intense tapas and sanctified through decades of guiding seekers along the inner path. His insights are not speculative commentaries but living truths arising from the stillness of meditation and the clarity of Self-experience. In his hands, each sutra becomes vibrant, pulsating

with spiritual force, revealing layers of meaning hidden to superficial reading. His grasp of the subtle workings of the mind is particularly extraordinary. His words carry the authority of realization, possessing the rare capacity to instruct, inspire and transform simultaneously.

Gurudeva harmonizes the rigorous discipline of yoga with the devotional richness of temple-centered Hinduism, dissolving artificial divisions between bhakti, karma, jnana and raja yoga. For him, these are not separate paths but complementary streams converging toward the same realization.

If Gurudeva represents the vast ocean of spiritual wisdom, then Satguru Sri Bodhinatha Veylanswami stands as the master navigator who guides seekers across its depth with precision and grace. His handling of the text is truly deft. He neither dilutes the profundity of the teachings nor burdens the reader with unnecessary complexity.

Where Gurudeva's voice resounds with the authority of realization, Satguru Sri Bodhinatha Veylanswami's exposition reflects the clarity of a teacher who has deeply internalized that wisdom. His interpretations bridge ancient aphorism and contemporary understanding, making the teachings immediately relevant without compromising their sanctity.

His treatment of the Vibhuti Pada is particularly commendable. In an age where fascination with siddhis can easily distract the aspirant, he maintains unwavering focus on the ultimate goal. While acknowledging these powers, he gently but firmly redirects attention toward the higher uddeshya, or spiritual goal—realization of the Self. Similarly, in the Kaivalya Pada, his exposition reveals philosophical clarity and experiential depth, guiding the reader toward the recognition



Kriya Yoga: Ardhanarishvara, soaring gracefully in the Sivaloka, witnesses the three major yoga practices— austerity, self-knowledge and worship. On the left, three yogis are meditating and performing pranayamas in high Himalayan caves, their bodies covered with ice in a severe yoga tapas. In the middle, two yogis are engaged in svadhyaya, which includes scriptural study with a guru. On the right, in the third practice, known as Ishvarapranidhana, a man and his wife perform puja to a Shivalinga, offering devotional love and bilva leaves to God Siva.

that liberation is not an attainment in time, but the unveiling of one's eternal nature.

A feature of significance in this work is its presentation of the *Yoga Sutras* through the illuminating lens of Saiva Siddhanta—a perspective rarely found in the vast landscape of yogic literature. Under the realized vision of Gurudeva Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and the refined articulation of Satguru Sri Bodhinatha Veylanswami, they are revealed through the profound metaphysical and devotional framework of Saiva Siddhanta.

This approach brings into alignment the disciplined psychology of yoga with the rich theology of Saiva Siddhanta—where the relationship of Pati (the Lord), Pashu (the soul) and Pasha (the bonds) provides a comprehensive understanding of spiritual evolution. Here, the restraint of the mind is not an isolated practice but part of a larger journey toward union with Lord Siva as a living, experiential Reality.

In this synthesis lies the true uniqueness of the work. It serves as a unifying force between two of the most ancient streams of thought in Bharat—the analytical, introspective discipline of yoga and the devotional, metaphysical richness of Saiva Siddhanta.

This unification carries significance for the modern aspirant. It affirms that spiritual life need not be fragmented—that deep meditation and devotion are mutually enriching. The ultimate goal described by Patanjali as Kaivalya is shown to be in consonance with the Saiva Siddhanta realization of union with Siva, dissolving conceptual boundaries and inviting a more holistic spiritual vision.

Throughout the text, one perceives an integration of dualistic and non-dualistic insights. While distinctions are acknowledged for the sake of clarity, the culmination transcends all duality. This delicate balance reflects the wisdom of the great masters who have celebrated the diversity of expression while affirming the unity of essence.

The language of the work deserves special appreciation. It is at once elevated and accessible, imbued with reverence yet free from unnecessary complexity. More importantly, it carries a subtle spiritual force. This is not merely a text to be read, but a scripture to be lived.

In the modern world—marked by unprecedented external advancement and inner unrest—the relevance of such a work cannot be overstated. The mastery of the outer world has not yielded mastery of the inner. The *Yoga Sutras* address this imbalance, offering a timeless pathway to inner harmony and ultimate freedom.

The role of the guru, though subtle, pervades the entire work. The journey inward, while deeply personal, is illumined by the guidance of those who have realized the Truth. In this regard, the combined presence of Gurudeva Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and Satguru Sri Bodhinatha Veylanswami transforms this edition into a living transmission where diverse streams merge into the ocean of Truth.

S. J. Puri
(SRI JAYENDRA PURI SWAMI)



The themes in the following sidebars outline some of Patanjali's basic practices and philosophical insights.

Systematic Practice—Kriya Yoga

Kriya yoga, literally the “yoga of action,” is Patanjali's practical three-fold discipline for weakening the mental afflictions that obscure clarity and perpetuate suffering. It consists of tapas, self-discipline and austerity; svadhyaya, self-study and study of scripture; and Ishvarapranidhana, devotion and surrender to God.

Patanjali states that the purpose of kriya yoga is “to bring about samadhi and attenuate the kleshas.” The kleshas are the five root afflictions: ignorance, I-am-ness, attraction, aversion and clinging to life (fear of death). To succeed in yoga, their force must be diminished, for they keep awareness entangled in worldly experience.

Tapas may suggest severe austerities, but it also includes disciplines anyone can undertake: sacrifice, silence, simplified diet, chastity, abstaining from electronic devices or undertaking pilgrimage. Svadhyaya includes reciting Om and other mantras, studying sacred writings on liberation and reflecting inwardly on one's thoughts, actions and motivations. It joins the outer discipline of scripture and mantra with the inner work of self-purification.

Ishvarapranidhana is the practice of love, trust and surrender to the Divine. Through these three observances, kriya yoga tempers the kleshas, deepens devotion and prepares the seeker for samadhi.



ESSENTIAL YOGA SUTRAS

A Condensed Overview of the Yogic Path

The Nature of the Mind and the Path to Restraint

दृष्टानुश्रविकविषयवितृष्णस्य
वशीकारसंज्ञा वैराग्यम् ॥ १५॥

1.15 dr̥ṣṭānuśravikaviṣaya-vitr̥ṣṇasya
vaśīkārasamjñā vairāgyam

vairāgyam (dispassion), **vaśīkāra-samjñā** (mastery, *vaśīkāra*; designation, *samjñā*), **vitr̥ṣṇasya** (of one who is free from craving), **dr̥ṣṭa-anuśravika-
viṣaya** (for objects, *viṣaya*; perceived, *dr̥ṣṭa*, heard-about, *anuśravika*)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

**Dispassion is the masterful consciousness
of one who is free of desire for objects,
whether perceived or heard about.**

Commentary

Progress in *yoga* is not possible if our mind is constantly externalized by and attracted to objects or people, whether actually seen or simply heard about, as in scripture or literature or even the news. The term *vairāgya* is a powerful one, not well represented by the single term dispassion. *Vairāgya* is a profound state of renunciation and indifference to worldly objects, a full and fearsome giving up of all things external. It is rare to see someone who has achieved true *vairāgya*. Some commentators consider “what is heard” to include what is described in scripture, such as the heavenly worlds. Having heard of such worlds, the mind may desire the divine experiences they hold.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

It is the day-to-day reactions to circumstance that indicate the attainment and not mere recorded knowledge about the path. When the aspirant is able to meet ordinary happenings and respond to them in the effortless wisdom born of detachment, that indicates that his striving is genuine. When he is able to encounter conditions that send ordinary people into states of



Siddhis: Here the artist depicts eight siddhis, powers, that a yogi naturally attains (and is encouraged to renounce). Clockwise from the lower left: 1) invisibility; 2) knowledge of past and future; 3) mastery of the body or super strength; 4) seeing and hearing at a great distance, called “remote viewing;” 5) ability to control nature (rain, animals and people); 6) entering another person’s body; 7) understanding all languages, even animal sounds; 8) attaining cosmic knowledge. At the center, the yogi has Siva (pingala) and Shakti (ida) balanced along his kundalini (the serpents at his third eye). The Sun and Moon are his eyes; fire and air from the nostrils show energies balanced through pranayama.

disappointment or discouragement and when his emotional nature indicates mastery over these lesser states of consciousness, he is well on his way toward filling the gaps of a natural growth of the instinctive vehicles—body, emotions and intellect. (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 65: “Disappointment, Discouragement”)

The Definition and Purpose of Yoga

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २॥

1.2 yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ

yogaḥ (*yoga*), **nirodhaḥ** (restraint), **citta**
(of the mind), **vṛtti** (activities)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

Yoga is the restraint of mental activities.

Commentary

Our minds are constantly engaged in one type of activity or another, whether awake or sleeping. We are remembering events from the past, thinking about current tasks or theorizing about future events. Or we are experiencing moods and emotions. The practices of *yoga* enable us to silence these mental activities, which can be thought of as movements or fluctuations.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

As you sit to meditate, awareness may wander into past memories or future happenings. It may be distracted by the senses, by a sound or by a feeling of discomfort in the body. This is natural in the early stages. Gently bring awareness back to your point of concentration. . . . Don’t criticize awareness for wandering, for that is yet another distraction. Distractions will disappear if you become intensely interested and involved in your meditation. In such a state, you won’t even feel the physical body. . . . To become the ruler of the mind is the goal. (*Living with Śiva*, Lesson 99: “Taming Distraction”)

God & Grace in the Sūtras

The key to understanding the devotional aspect of the *Yoga Sūtras* is Patanjali’s description of Ishvara, God. Ishvara is “a special puruṣa,” unaffected by the kleshas, karma and its fruition, and by stored saṃskaras. In Him the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed. He is the guru of those who lived earlier, unbounded by time, and His symbol is the pranava, Aum.

Many editions of the *Yoga Sūtras* render Ishvara in a generalized way, such as a higher power, an aspect of spirituality within each individual, or the Seer within. Here, Ishvara is understood in the traditional Yoga Darshana sense as the Personal God, who, like man, is a soul, puruṣa, but a unique soul who has always existed and is the source of the teachings of yoga.

Patanjali addresses what makes the attainment of samadhi near: “Samadhi is near for the intensely ardent.” Then he adds, “Or, this is gained through devotion to Ishvara.” He repeats the idea: “The attainment of samadhi comes from surrender to Ishvara.”

These verses suggest that samadhi may come not only through intense personal striving, but also through surrender to Ishvara. In that surrender, the seeker becomes receptive to divine grace, which can grant the attainment that effort alone cannot compel.



तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम् ॥ ३॥

1.3 tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vasthānam

tadā (then), draṣṭuḥ (of awareness/the seer), avasthānam (abiding/residing), svarūpe (in its own nature)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

Then awareness abides in its essential nature.

Commentary

When the mind's movements are restrained, awareness naturally turns in on itself, remaining aware only of itself until thoughts again arise.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

To attain and sustain *kaif* [awareness aware of itself] is a simple practice. You pull awareness out of the thought processes. You pull awareness out of the emotion processes. You pull awareness out of the bodily processes, and you're just completely on that pinnacle of being aware of being aware. That's so necessary to practice every day, even if you do it for a split second. (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 300: "Undesirable Influences")

वृत्तिसारूप्यमितरत्र ॥ ४॥

1.4 vṛttisārūpyamitaratra

itaratra (otherwise), vṛtti-sārūpyam (conformity, sārūpyam; with mental activities, vṛtti)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

Otherwise, awareness identifies with the mental activities.

Commentary

It is the nature of the awareness that it not only observes the mind's movements but also identifies with them. A simple example is the idea of experiencing happiness. We say, "I am happy," fully identifying with the emotional state called happiness. A deeper understanding would be "Awareness has taken the form of happiness."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Consciousness and awareness are the same when awareness is totally identified with and attached to that which it is aware of. To separate the two is the artful practice of *yoga*. Naturally, the Shum-Tyeif language is needed to accomplish this. When awareness is detached from that which it is aware of, it flows freely



योगसूत्राणि



योगसूत्राणि

Three passages: Here we have the three primary stages of *yoga*, one leading into the next. On the left, the yogi is practicing *dharana*, concentration. He holds a *Sivalinga* in his hand, his eyes open as he seeks to have an unbroken series of thoughts about the subject of his focus. In the middle, the yogi's eyes are closed as he draws within in *dhyana* or contemplation. On the right, he has attained *samadhi*, oneness with *Siva* and with all things, shown by the *Linga* in his heart. The long-term progression of these practices is reflected in the landscaping which moves from a tree's first flush to fully blossoming, from a nest of eggs to a flock of birds, from a young deer to an antlered adult.

in consciousness. A tree has consciousness. Awareness can flow into the tree and become aware of the consciousness of the tree. (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 34: "Awareness and Consciousness")

The Role of Īśvara

ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥ २३॥

1.23 Īśvarapraṇidhānādvā

vā (or), Īśvara-praṇidhānāt (through devotion, *praṇidhāna*; to God, Īśvara)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

Or, this is gained through devotion to Īśvara.

Commentary

"This is gained" is a reference to achieving *asamprajñāta samādhi*. Vyāsa explains: "Through a special kind of devotion called Īśvara-praṇidhāna on the part of the devotee, Īśvara inclines towards him and favors him with grace for fulfillment of his wish. From such grace also a *yogin* obtains *samādhi*, and its result, the attainment of the state of liberation, becomes imminent." (See Vyāsa on 1.23 *Hariharananda trans.*)

We arrive at a key juncture in Patañjali's *sūtras*, where he stresses the import of devotion to God. As discussed before, this is where Vedānta and Siddhānta diverge. Most commentators, leaning towards Advaita Vedānta, which regards devotion as a lesser practice, more or less set this *sūtra* aside, for to them there is no divine ruler, Īśvara, in the sense that Patañjali implies. Śaiva Siddhāntins, on the other hand, hold devotion as central to the spiritual path—this pure love of God, the creator of all, the source of illumination. For Siddhāntins, this devotion is not only a surrender of the heart, it is also the active worship of Śiva through *pūjā* and adoration and the active pursuit of Śiva consciousness through *sādhana* and *tapas*.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Someone once asked, "They say true bhakti is giving your whole will, your whole being, to God. If you do that, aren't you making yourself completely passive?" Many think that the ultimate devotion, called *prapatti* in Sanskrit, means giving up their willpower, their independence and their judgment for an attitude of "Now you direct me, for I no longer can direct myself, because I no longer have free will. I gave it all away."



Monistic Theism

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami's reading of the *Yoga Sutras* sees Patanjali's path as an expression of monistic theism, a spirituality that embraces both meditation and devotion. Patanjali teaches the restraint of mental activity so awareness can abide in its own essential nature. He also gives a vital place to Ishvara, God, through devotion, surrender and grace. Patanjali's *Sutras* give disciplined inner concentration its full place, while keeping devotion to Ishvara at the heart of spiritual transformation.

This dual emphasis is central to Bodhinatha's tradition, Suddha Saiva Siddhanta, in the lineage of Rishi Tirumular. It stresses the ultimate oneness of man and God while equally exalting heart-melting temple worship and mind-transcending yogic revelation. God is both within us and outside of us, the Creator and the creation, immanent and transcendent.

In theistic practice, we worship God and the Gods in a spirit of devotion and humble submission. In monistic practice, we meditate deeply to experience the essence of the soul, which is identical with God Siva's essence and present throughout the universe. The most complete path requires both monism and theism.

This is why Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* speak so naturally to Bodhinatha's Saiva Siddhanta lineage. They honor disciplined meditation, but they also affirm devotion to God as a transforming force on the path to liberation.



This is a good argument against *prapatti*, to be sure, but a gross misinterpretation of the word, which is the very bedrock of spirituality. This is not the meaning of *prapatti* at all. The *yoga* of pure devotion is found at the beginning, the middle and the end of the path. Merging with Śiva is more and more a deeply felt experiential reality when the soul gives of itself to Śiva inwardly and outwardly in unabashed devotion. *Prapatti* truly is the key that unlocks the love needed as merger increases as the years pass by and, as Satguru Yogaswami said, “Love pours forth to melt the very stones.” (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 155: “Your Will and The Gods’ Will”)

The Kleśas and the Root of Suffering

अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः क्लेशाः ॥ ३ ॥

2.3 avidyāsmītā-rāga-dveṣābhiniवेशāḥ kleśāḥ

avidyā (ignorance), asmitā (I-am-ness/egoism), rāga (desire/attraction), dveṣa (aversion/dislike), abhiniveśaḥ (clinging to life/fear of death), kleśāḥ (afflictions/obstacles)

The kleśas are: ignorance, I-am-ness, attraction, aversion and clinging to life.

Commentary

These five obstacles can all be weakened and diminished by the practice of *kriyā yoga*. It is a little-known truth of *yoga* practice that seekers must consistently attend to these impediments if they are to achieve their spiritual goals.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Spiritual unfoldment is not a process of awakening the higher *chakras*, but of closing the *chakras* below the *mulādhāra*. Once this happens, the aspirant’s consciousness slowly expands into the higher *chakras*, which are always there. The only thing that keeps the lower *chakras* closed is regular *sādhana*, *japa*, worship and working within oneself. (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 294: “Closing the Door to Lower Realms”)



Three gunas: Siva watches evolution from His aerie in the Sivaloka, high above the Himalayas’ cloud-bedecked icy peaks. His earrings are two powerful serpents. His locks of hair surround the world, just as Siva encompasses all. Below, on the Earth, He is witness to the natural evolution of human life. It begins, in the green oval, with the first guna—*tamas*—the spectrum of darkness and chaos. Here humans are in the instinctive phase. Clockwise from the right is an amorous couple, a businessman/farmer, two men fighting with poles, a married couple in conflict and a confused man. In the yellow oval, we have *rajas* guna—activity, passion and outward striving—shown through a children’s classroom, a man studying sacred texts, a teacher offering instruction, and a pundit chanting shlokas. In the lavender oval are the ways people express spirituality—*sattva* guna, the sphere of harmony and light. Here are an artist, a man helping a beggar, a meditator, yoga practitioners, and a woman worshipping Ganesha. Significantly, Siva’s face is composed of the same colors and energies, implying that He is not simply witnessing the three phases of energy (instinctive, intellectual and spiritual). He is them. He is His creation.

The Eightfold Path of Yoga

योगाङ्गानुष्ठानादशुद्धिक्षये ज्ञानदीप्तिराविवेकख्यातेः ॥ २८ ॥

2.28 yogāṅgānuṣṭhānād asuddhi-kṣaye
jñāna-dīptir-āvivekakhyāteḥ

yogāṅgaanuṣṭhānāt (from practice, *anuṣṭhāna*; of the limbs, *aṅga*; of yoga),
asuddhi-kṣaye (upon destruction, *kṣaye*; of impurities, *asuddhi*),
jñāna-dīptiḥ (radiance, *dīptiḥ*; of wisdom, *jñāna*), *āviveka-*
khyāteḥ (up to, *ā*; discriminative, *viveka*; realization, *khyāteḥ*)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

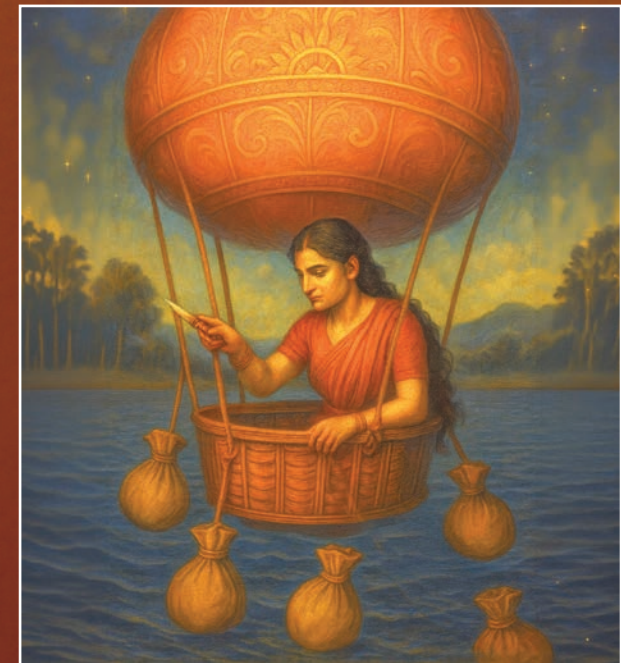
By practicing the limbs of yoga, impurities are destroyed and radiant wisdom leads to discriminative realization.

Commentary

This begins the section on the eight limbs of *yoga*. Practice causes three events to happen: First, impurities dwindle. Second, with the grosser impediments removed, the radiance of the soul, *jñāna dipti*, always there but hidden, is revealed. Third, the ability to discriminate between the seer and the seen becomes possible.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

To the meditating *yogī*, *darśana* is more than a communication radiating out to him from an external God or Mahādeva. It is a radiant light shining from the sanctum sanctorum of his own *sahasrāra chakra*. Worship for him becomes completely internal as he follows that light, that *darśana*, seeking to know its source. In *yoga*, the devotee worships the transcendent aspect of God. He strengthens his body and nerve system. He disciplines the energies of mind and body. He learns to regulate his breath and to control the *prāṇas* that flow as life’s force through his nerve system.



Clearing the Subconscious

Changing the subconscious mind, a requisite for success in yoga, is a profound transformation. It can only be remolded gradually over time through sustained yogic practice. Patanjali’s Sutas explain this process through *samskaras*, the imprints left on the subconscious by experiences from this and previous lives. These deep-seated impressions shape our thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

Gurudeva explained, “All actions, reactions and pranic patterns from one life carry forward into the next but in condensed or seed form as tendencies.” Swami Sivananda made a similar point, saying that all *samskaras* lie dormant in the mind as latent activities from this and past lives.

Samskaras are not merely passive memories. They are activators, constantly propelling consciousness into action. Patanjali describes how, when restraint is employed, outward-moving *samskaras* are subdued and new *samskaras* of restraint arise in the mind. These restraint *samskaras* help free the mind from mental activity and allow it to remain tranquil.

A second source of transformation is mystical insight arising from deep meditation. The *samskaras* produced by such insight obstruct other *samskaras*. Through this steady remolding, externalizing and worldly tendencies are gradually replaced by internalizing and spiritual ones, preparing the seeker for deeper meditation and a contemplative life.



In this process, the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* is lifted and the multi-petaled *chakras* unfold in all their splendor. The subtle realms within the devotee are revealed layer by layer as he methodically perfects attention, concentration, meditation and contemplation. (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 364: “The Journey Called Yoga”)

Karma and Rebirth

ते ह्लादपरितापफलाः पुण्यापुण्यहेतुत्वात् ॥ १४ ॥

2.14 te hlādaparitāpaphalāḥ puṇyāpuṇyahetutvāt

te (these), hlāda-paritāpa-phalāḥ (fruits, phalāḥ; of pleasure, hlāda; pain, paritāpa), puṇyāpuṇya-hetutvāt (from causality, hetutvāt; virtue, puṇya; vice, apuṇya)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

These bear fruits of pleasure or pain, depending on virtue or vice.

Commentary

“These” is a reference to the three topics in the last *sūtra*: condition of life, length of life and life experience. Condition of life, *jāti*, here refers to species, social class, etc. These can be full of joy or sorrow, depending on the good or not-so-good actions of the past, commonly called good and bad *karma*. Thus, even a short life can be full of pleasure, and a long life filled with anguish. A lowly farmer can be happy while the king may be miserable. Vyāsa summarizes: “The *kleśas* provoke *karma*, and *karma*, depending on its nature, produces different qualities of births, life spans and life experiences, and these, in turn, produce corresponding pleasure and pain.” (Vyāsa on 2.23, quoted in Bryant trans.)

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

One of the major keys to understanding the importance of good conduct relates to the release of seed *karmas*. Performing *dharma*—acting with correct thought, word and deed—siphons the results of previous patterns of behavior from the past and causes those seeds to sprout in this life. Like attracts like. These patterns then aid the individual by bestowing clarity of mind and a life in which *yoga* can be performed and truth sought. In the practice of *yoga*, the negative seed *karmas* can actually be



Five kleshas: The artist places Śiva’s sacred golden Mount Kailash at the center of the canvas, symbolizing that all existence—the cosmic, starry sky—revolves around the Divine. Below stand five icy peaks, representing the five kleshas, or obstacles on the spiritual path: ignorance, egoity, attraction, repulsion and clinging to life. A serene yogi hovers above these mountainous barriers, having freed himself from the five burdens that keep the mind earthbound. Vayu, God of Wind, riding upon a deer, creates a powerful gust that holds the magic carpet aloft.

burned up without ever having to be lived through. Conversely, *adharma*—wrong thought, word and deed—siphons the results of past misdeeds, like attracting like. These seed *karmas* begin to bear bitter fruit, resulting in a miserable life and state of mind. The individual is immersed in confusion, wrong patterns of thought and is, of course, in no position to practice *yoga*, follow *dharma* or realize truth. He is simply immersed in *saṁsāra*. (*Living with Śiva*, Lesson 264: “Good and Bad; Like Attracts Like”)

परिणामतापसंस्कारदुःखैर्गुणवृत्तिविरोधाच्च
दुःखमेव सर्वं विवेकिनः ॥ १५ ॥

2.15 pariṇāma-tāpa-saṁskāra-duḥkhaḥ-guṇa-vṛtti-virodhāc-ca duḥkham-eva sarvaṁ vivekinaḥ

vivekinaḥ (discerning ones), duḥkham (sorrow), sarvaṁ (all), eva (indeed), pariṇāma-tāpa-saṁskāra-duḥkhaiḥ (from sufferings, duḥkhaiḥ; of change, pariṇāma; affliction, tāpa; latent impressions, saṁskāra), ca (and), guṇa-vṛtti-virodhāt (from conflict, virodhāt; in the activity, vṛtti; of the qualities, guṇa)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

To the discerning ones, all is indeed sorrow, whether from the suffering caused by impermanence, affliction, saṁskāras or the turmoil of the guṇas’ activities.

Commentary

An ordinary person focuses on the transient enjoyments that come from experience. A wise man, however, looks beyond the moment, knowing that all experience is impermanent and thus cannot bring lasting joy. While this somewhat radical statement echoes the philosophy of the Buddhists, the final *sūtra* in the *Yoga Sūtras* talks about the ultimate liberation (*kaivalya*), where the *yogī* is liberated from all suffering, leading to a state of true freedom and enduring bliss. In Śaiva Siddhānta, even suffering has a spiritual purpose, for it brings the soul through necessary, albeit painful, experiences that are required for growth and spiritual evolution. Thus the Śaiva Siddhāntin embraces all human experience, even suffering, knowing it is Śiva’s concealing grace, *tirodhana śakti*, leading to Self Realization and liberation.

Bryant notes that “This *sūtra* is actually the pivot of this chapter, which, in turn, is the heart of the entire text. *Sūtras* II.1–14 discuss the causes, the *kleśas*, that produce *duḥkha*; and *sūtras* 16 onward focus on the path to remove *duḥkha* as well as the state beyond. The chapter thus echoes the Four Noble Truths.”



Foundations in Sankhya

The *Yoga Sūtras* rest on the metaphysical foundation of Sankhya, one of Hinduism’s classical systems of philosophy. Sankhya provides the framework through which Patanjali explains bondage, practice and liberation.

At the heart of Sankhya is the distinction between *purusha* and *prakriti*. *Purusha* is the witness-self, pure consciousness, distinct from *prakriti*, the evolving realm of nature and mind. *Prakriti* is singular and universal, functioning for the experience and liberation of all *purushas*. *Purushas* are many, each undergoing its own journey of bondage and release.

Liberation, in this system, is not a merging into universal oneness. It is the isolation of *purusha* from *prakriti*, attained when awareness ceases to identify with nature, mind and their activities. This distinction between *purusha* and *prakriti* remains fundamental throughout the *Yoga Sūtras*.

Yoga and Sankhya share this metaphysical structure and the same goal: freeing *purusha* from its entanglement with *prakriti*. Their methods differ. Sankhya emphasizes reasoning and analysis; *Yoga* emphasizes meditation, concentration and the disciplined restraint of the mind.

Patanjali’s *Yoga*, however, adds something not found in classical Sankhya: *Ishvara*, God, described as a special *purusha*. This introduces a theistic dimension into an otherwise non-theistic philosophical framework.



Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

There is a divine purpose even in the existence of suffering in the world. Suffering cannot be totally avoided. It is a natural part of human life and the impetus for much spiritual growth for the soul. Knowing this, the wise accept suffering from any source, be it hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, famine, wars, disease or inexplicable tragedies. Just as the intense fire of the furnace purifies gold, so does suffering purify the soul to resplendence. So also does suffering offer us the important realization that true happiness and freedom cannot be found in the world, for earthly joy is inextricably bound to sorrow, and worldly freedom to bondage. Having learned this, devotees seek a *satguru* who teaches them to understand suffering, and brings them into the intentional hardships of *sādhana* and *tapas* leading to liberation from the cycles of experience in the realm of duality. (*Dancing with Śiva*, Śloka 51: “Why Is There Suffering in the World?”)

Final Liberation

पुरुषार्थशून्यानां गुणानां प्रतिप्रसवः कैवल्यं
स्वरूपप्रतिष्ठा वा चितिशक्तिरिति ॥ ३४ ॥

4.34 puruṣārthaśūnyānāṃ guṇānāṃ pratiprasavaḥ kaivalyaṃ svarūpapratīṣṭhā vā citiśaktirīti

kaivalyam (liberation), **guṇānām** (of the *guṇas*), **puruṣa-artha-**
śūnyānām (devoid, *śūnyānām*; of purpose, *artha*; for Self, *puruṣa*),
pratiprasavaḥ (involution/return to the origin), **vā** (or), **iti** (thus), **citi-**
śaktiḥ (the power, *śaktiḥ*; of consciousness, *citi*), **svarūpa-pratīṣṭhā**
(established, *pratīṣṭhā*; in one's essential nature, *svarūpa*),

ॐ ॐ ॐ

**Liberation occurs when the power of pure
consciousness abides in its essential
nature, as the *guṇas* return to their source,
now devoid of purpose for the *puruṣa*.**

Commentary

As stated at the beginning of chapter one, when mental activity is restrained, the soul's faculty that witnesses thoughts, naturally turns in on itself. However, this is temporary and only lasts until thoughts again arise, whereas in *kaivalya*, the power of awareness is permanently established in itself.

Kaivalya, or liberation, the ultimate goal of *yoga*, is defined as the complete disconnection of *puruṣa* (the seer) from *prakṛti* (the seen). It signifies a state of complete isolation in which the *puruṣa*, the true self, recognizes its nature as entirely separate from everything else, including the mind (*citta*) in its three



Merging with God: The artist portrays the attainment of *kaivalya*, ultimate liberation. *Dharma Megha*, a cloud of virtue raining goodness, fills the cosmos as a symbol of *Siva's* grace and love, shown through blessings from the *devas*—flowers, bilva leaves, light, music and water. Above is *Siva* as the fierce *Bhairava* with His *vahana*, a dog. *Siva's* ten strands of hair flail across the sky, each bearing a *devata* showering goodness and benediction. *Bhairava* holds a *trishula* and a sword with which He has just severed the *yogi's* bonds. *Siva's* outstretched hands welcome the *yogi*. Above *Bhairava*, the blazing Central Sun represents *Savikalpa Samadhi*, and at the center is the Great Nothingness—*Sunya*, *Parasiva*, beyond the beyond—the source and final destiny of all form. The *yogi* is seen merging into this timeless, formless, causeless Self, propelled by the power of the *Siva* temples below, north and south. *Dharma Megha Samadhi* arises when one has lost even the desire for enlightenment. It comes not by effort but as a divine gift from *Siva* when all effort has subsided.

aspects—*manas*, *ahaṅkāra* and *buddhi*. At this point, the *guṇas* (the fundamental qualities of nature) have completed their purpose, leading *puruṣa* to liberation, and are no longer active. The *puruṣa* (which was never truly bound) is now fully detached from *prakṛti* and abides in its pure, unchanging essence.

At the end of his life, the *yogī*, having completed the journey through the cycle of life and death (*samsāra*), releases the physical body and mind, allowing them to dissolve back into the elements, reversing the process of creation.

Patañjali does not explore the specifics of what final liberation feels like, nor does he address the relationship between the liberated *puruṣa* and *Īśvara* (God), inner worlds of being or the nature of existence after *kaivalya*. His focus remains strictly on the path to achieving liberation, offering no description of the state of being liberated or any divine connections. He may be following the *guru* tradition in which the disciple is not told what to expect, for that would constrain his search. By not having a concept in mind, his possibilities are limitless.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

After realization of the Self, to attain actual liberation from rebirth requires the willful and deliberate act of the adept at the point of death to direct the course. If he feels and knows that he has yet to perform actions of service on this planet, once the physical body has been parted from, he will find himself on an inner plane in which he can prepare to return at the proper place and proper time to fulfill his desire. However, should he have felt well satisfied with his many lives, as they play before his vision during his transition from his physical body, now ready to go on in this liberated state, he would find himself on an inner plane whence it would be impossible to reenter flesh. Thus, *mokṣa*, *kaivalya*, liberation from earthly birth has been attained, and the way is open to further evolution on the subtle planes.

In the inner worlds, one who has transcended the need for a physical birth is there like he is here. He has a 24-hour consciousness. He does not have to eat unless he wants to, and he doesn't have to sleep, so he has a total continuity of consciousness. He has *Paraśiva* at will and is all-pervasive all of the time. (*Merging with Śiva*, Lesson 332: “Realization and Evolution



Karma, Rebirth & Inner Worlds

One striking aspect of the *Yoga Sutras* is its relative silence on the inner worlds of existence, an important part of Hindu mythology, mysticism and scripture. Unlike the *Puranas*, *Upanishads* or *Saiva Agamas*, Patanjali does not elaborate on the *lokas*, *devas* or subtle realms. A few sutras imply awareness of such worlds, especially in references to *prakṛtilayas*, beings absorbed in nature, and *videhas*, bodiless beings.

His silence does not necessarily indicate rejection. More likely, Patanjali keeps the text pragmatic, addressing only what is immediately relevant to meditation. This approach aligns with Sankhya's cosmology, which explains how mind, senses and intellect arise from *prakṛti*, but does not present a structured account of *lokas* and Deities.

At the same time, the *Yoga Sutras* strongly affirm karma and reincarnation. Patanjali explains how past actions generate *samskaras*, latent impressions, and *vasanas*, deep-seated tendencies, which persist across lifetimes. Sutra 4.9 states, “Because memory and *samskaras* are of one form, there is continuity even though separated by birth, place and time.” These impressions, together with the *kleshas*, shape present experience and future births.

The practice of *yoga* is therefore a systematic deconstruction of these karmic imprints. Through restraint, dispassion and *samadhi*, the seeds of past karma are gradually weakened and burned away, leading the *puruṣa* toward freedom from bondage and ultimate liberation.



Conclusion

The book *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* provide a meticulously structured path of spiritual unfoldment, guiding the seeker from ethical discipline to the attainment of kaivalya. This progression closely parallels the monistic Saiva Siddhanta teachings of Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva), though important differences exist. While both emphasize ethical restraints and religious observances (yama and niyama), disciplined sadhana and progressive withdrawal from external distractions, Gurudeva's path places greater emphasis on devotion (bhakti), the inner worlds, connections with the Deities and the grace of the guru—elements that are either de-emphasized or all but absent in Patanjali's work. Furthermore, while the *Yoga Sutras* present kaivalya as an isolated state of pure awareness beyond the influence of prakriti, in Gurudeva's Siddhanta, liberation (moksha) is not merely the end of karma but the conscious merger of the individual soul (jiva) with Siva, an aspect completely outside the scope of Patanjali's text.

The *Yoga Sutras* remain a cornerstone of Hindu thought, providing a universal methodology for spiritual seekers across traditions. Patanjali's genius lies in his laser-like focus on practice, offering a system that transcends sectarian boundaries. Whether one follows a path of devotion, self-inquiry or mystical union, the insights of the *Sutras* serve as a timeless guide for inner transformation.

The Nature of Liberation

While kaivalya in the *Yoga Sutras* is described as the yogi's final state, other Hindu traditions, including monistic Saiva Siddhanta, extend the vision of liberation beyond purusha's separation from prakriti. Instead of an individual awareness permanently disengaged, moksha in Saivism is the realization of one's unity with Siva, the Absolute Reality. Advaita Vedantins and monistic Saiva Siddhantins alike will be critical of the lack of a universal absolute in the *Yoga Sutras*, where the final attainment is not oneness but eternal individuality—each purusha existing separately, never merging into a greater whole.

At a close reading, yoga students may be surprised by the eternal duality that is the final conclusion of their cherished yoga scripture. The path Patanjali outlined is profound and enduring, even though the final goal he presents appears to stand apart from the unitive vision embraced by the *Agamas* and *Upanishads*.

In the Beholder's Eye

As with any arcane and profound text, the *Yoga Sutras* are infinitely discoverable. The dualist will see dualism, and the advaitin will see oneness, proving once again the inherent subjectivity of the cosmos. Strictly speaking, the *Yoga Sutras* appear to be dualistic. The evidence is strong, especially since their roots are deeply woven into Sankhya philosophy, which is undeniably dualistic.

Why then, one might ask, was this book an important bedrock text in the early life of such great nondualistic luminaries as Swami Vivekananda, Yogaswami and Gurudeva, among many others? The

Kaivalya: Here a yogi is dancing in joy and wild abandon. Siva dances nearby, rejoicing in the yogi's attainment of kaivalya, absolute freedom. Below Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami witnesses his disciple's achievement. Above, the devas form a celestial ensemble, providing music for the dancers. Left to right, they play the kanjira, mridangam, vina, ghatam, flute, tambura and cymbals.

young Vivekananda made it the centerpiece of his yoga teachings, translating and discussing 116 sutras in his seminal book *Raja Yoga*, related to mind control, meditation and higher states of consciousness. Gurudeva studied the *Yoga Sutras* as a young man, and Yogaswami, his guru, questioned him on it during their first encounter. Perhaps they were unconvinced that Sankhya is the root philosophy underlying Rishi Patanjali's work. Perhaps they intuited that Patanjali's vision, while rooted in Sankhya, reached beyond it. In any case, they found ways to interpret Patanjali's kaivalya, liberation, as a merger in a divine oneness rather than a state of eternal isolation from prakriti, absolutely separate from all other souls, and from God.

The God Factor

Patanjali's inclusion of Ishvara in his great work sets it apart from the atheistic dualism of Sankhya, implying a yogic form of monistic theism. Commentators through history have posited that the description of Ishvara's pure, untouched consciousness is indicative of the ultimate reality that individual souls (purushas) are inherently part of and aspire to realize their unity with.

Consider sutra 1.23, "Or, this [samadhi] is gained through devotion to Ishvara" is another gateway for monistic insight, implying that the fruits of yoga practice can indeed be achieved by the grace of God, leading to direct knowledge of reality.

What could be further from Sankhyan doctrine? The following seven sutras on God point to an overarching Divinity that is easily seen as a universal reality encompassing everything. "Ishvara is a special purusha, untouched by afflictions, actions, their results and stored impressions. In Him is the peerless source of omniscience. Unbounded by time, He is also the guru of the ancients. Aum is His signifying sound. Repeat it while contemplating its meaning. Then follows the attainment of inner consciousness and also the elimination of obstacles. The attainment of samadhi comes from surrender to Ishvara." (1.24-1.29, 2.45)

Further, in sutra 2.44, Patanjali writes: "Self-study brings communion with one's chosen Deity." This inclusion of the





DIASPORA

India's Imprint on Tanzanian Shores

The small Hindu community harmoniously integrates with local Tanzanians while clinging tightly to their ancestral heritage and culture

BY MOSHE ADAR
PHOTOS BY ANNE PETRY

FOR A LONG TIME, A TRIP TO THE AFRICAN continent had been tickling me. One day, it was clear, and the decision was made: I am going to Africa! I chose to explore the great country of Tanzania, hoping to see wild animals, swim with whale sharks and blend in with the local population, including the famous Maasai tribe. While I was looking for a place to stay in the big city of Dar es Salaam, I came across an unexpected finding. The map showed an area with three Hindu temples, one next to the other. A closer look revealed an ashram and a few Indian restaurants. "Indians in Africa?" I wondered as my curiosity skyrocketed.

The First Indian Crossing

We've all heard of the famous Silk Road—that ancient overland network of trade connecting China and Central Asia with the Middle East and the Mediterranean—but

another significant path was the Spice Route, a network of sea and land trade routes linking Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, Europe and Africa, where spices and other goods were transported for centuries. Historical evidence suggests that Indian sailors visited Africa almost 3,000 years ago. They used sailboats and hand-drawn maps, harnessing the monsoon winds to cross the Indian Ocean.

Trade between India and Tanzania presumably became more significant 1,500 years ago. The pioneers were merchants of the Malabar Coast (Kerala) and Gujarat (Kutch and Kathiawar regions), who were seafaring traders and shipbuilders.

Zanzibar—The Gate to Africa

Zanzibar Island, today a part of Tanzania, is located close to the eastern coast of Africa, which explains why it was probably one of the first lands that sailors encountered. Indians have had a presence in Zanzibar for

centuries. Merchants settled there as traders and financiers. They brought spices like pepper, cinnamon and cloves, textiles and beads, metals and minerals, horses and camels. In exchange, they returned with goods like gold, ivory, sugar, animal skins and timber.

Past patterns show that central trade hubs usually gave rise to small settlements of foreign traders, and this was also the case with Indians in Zanzibar. Their influence grew significantly in the 1840s, when the Omani Sultan moved his capital to Zanzibar and—due to longstanding relationships with Indian merchants and their expertise—encouraged them to settle. They brought capital, commercial knowledge and connections to broader Indian Ocean trade networks stretching from Mumbai to the Persian Gulf. Permanent Hindu communities in Zanzibar included Gujarati merchants, and their families established temples and institutions.

While walking through the narrow alleys of Stone Town in Zanzibar, I turned a corner,



ALL PHOTOS BY ANNE PETRY

looked up and there it was—a sign reading Arya Samaj—Vedic Temple, in English and in Hindi. A playful feeling went through me: "Here I am in Africa and I'm standing in front of a Hindu temple." The temple was inaugurated in 1901 and is one of two active temples in Zanzibar, alongside the Shree Shiva Shakti Temple, established in 1958.

The Big Wave

Major growth of the Indian presence in East Africa is related to Britain, which colonized Kenya and Uganda in 1894 and brought around 30,000 Indian indentured laborers, mainly from Punjab and Gujarat, to build a railway network. After World War I, Britain took control of the territory of Tanganyika (today Tanzania) and the work continued there. At that time, many more Indians—educated, literate in English and already experienced in the British administrative systems—were brought to East Africa to work as clerks, accountants, postal workers, police officers and junior administrators.

As Tanganyika opened up, Indian merchants saw new business opportunities in trade and commerce. Akash Barmeda, a dive master I met on the beach, related: "My great-grandfather arrived at Zanzibar Island on a sailboat more than 100 years ago. He manufactured wooden doors. At the beginning, he received orders from customers and sailed back to India to make them. Eventually, he began to produce doors in Zanzibar itself, and our family has been here in Tanzania ever since." Today, four generations later, the family is fully integrated in Tanzanian life: the children were born here, they hold Tanzanian passports and they speak Swahili (the local language).

Dar es Salaam, City of Opportunity

But things weren't all sunshine and roses. 60 years ago, a dramatic event shook the lives of Indians in Tanzania—a violent revolution broke out in Zanzibar, where Africans fought



Community: (clockwise from far left) ladies chant together; local students pass by the Shree Shiva Shakti Temple in Zanzibar; an altar is draped in the Tanzanian flag; a temple nestled among Dar es Salaam's high-rises; priest Lakshmi Narasimha Rajagopal Iragavarapu serves at the Shree Sanatan Dharma Sabha



against the Arab sultan. Indians were not the primary target, but they were caught up in the violence due to their position in society. The Indian community, which had dominated trade for over a century, was largely destroyed within a decade, first by the 1964 revolution and then by socialist economic policies that stripped away their businesses and properties in the early 1970s. As a result, many migrated to the mainland, to the city of Dar es Salaam.

Beliefs, Practices in Modern Tanzania

Tanzania's Indian-origin community, once numbering over 150,000 at its colonial-era peak, has since declined through emigration



to roughly 60,000 today. Hindus number in the tens of thousands, most of Gujarati ancestry and speaking Gujarati, concentrated in Dar es Salaam. "Our city of Dar es Salaam has at least seven active Hindu temples," explained Mrs. Janki Sinha, the president of the Hindu Council of Tanzania and the fourth generation of her family to be born here. For my conversation, it was only natural to meet in an Indian restaurant, located in the heart of the city, an area that had become something of a spiritual and cultural center for the Indian-Tanzanian community.

I asked Janki if the descendants of Hindu families who were born in Africa and speak fluent Swahili have kept the Hindu tradition, what their relationship to the religion is and if they practice it on a regular basis. "Probably all people here have a small shrine at home," Janki stated. "Though I was not born in India, I feel blessed to have this Hindu origin. The culture remains with me. Also, I cannot ask my children to perform rituals if I personally don't do them, so the way to teach children is by setting an example—they watch us and copy."

"My in-laws used to sit every morning after bathing and read one or two pages from the *Ramayana* before breakfast. Nowadays parents are very busy in their daily lives, yet we try to make family time and use modern tools like Netflix to watch the series about the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* along with the children and explain when needed. One could carefully call these children 'hybrids'—culturally and religiously Indians, yet practically and socially fully integrated Tanzanians."

Chowpatty Restaurant, where we met, is owned by a Hindu family. The father, Jayen Chandarana, was born in Tanzania, while his family is originally from Gujarat. Jayen shared, "At home we perform morning and evening pujas while our children watch and take part. I know the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Mahabharata* and now I'm more in-



terested in the *Puranas* and the *Vedas*.” His son, 29-year-old Raj Chandarana, was born in Tanzania and has been to India multiple times. “My parents were able to transmit culture to me and I feel Hindu. My knowledge is not as wide as my dad’s but I do participate in all the rituals.” When I carefully dared to ask if his parents would mind if he married a non-Hindu woman, Raj made things clear: “It is my wish to marry a Hindu woman. The caste thing doesn’t really matter; what does matter is that it would be easier, our culture and tradition are similar and there’s going to be less confusion for our children.” While on the topic of marriage, Raj added, “We make use of birth charts (Vedic astrology). We follow it also when it comes to marriage and we ask the priest, in whom we trust, whether the potential partner is a good match or not.”

Matters of Language

It was fascinating to watch Hindus communicating with local Tanzanians in Swahili. It took my brain a few moments to grasp the phenomenon, but for many, it is actually their native tongue, since they were born here and went to school where they learned Swahili as well as English. Nevertheless, a lot of parents want their children to learn their ancestral language, and the task of teaching it is left to the family and the community. Gujaratis form the largest component of the Indian-origin community, and many still speak Gujarati. Janki Sinha emphasized: “At home, I converse with my children in Hindi and Gujarati.”

After those few encounters, it seemed like everyone I talked to had a strong sense of their Hindu identity and a deep connection to Hinduism and to India in general.

Harmonious integration: (above) Flower garland vendors at a temple in Dar es Salaam; (opposite) the T.B. Sheth Library houses 7,000 books in Gujarati; (below) a young local vendor proudly displays savory snacks in a Dar es Salaam Indian food shop

Institutional Support and Guidance

In matters of language and in many other areas concerning religion, tradition and community life, special institutions play a role and were established in part for this very purpose. “The Hindu Council’s job is to serve as a bridge between the community and the government. We have several congregations and various institutions,” pointed out Sinha. “Shree Hindu Mandal is one institution that has a school, a hospital and welfare services that benefit the Hindu community and others, since most services offered are for all people regardless of caste, race or religion and thereby keep Hindu values such as fairness, honesty, truthfulness and service to others.



“Similarly, for cultural activities we have the SSDS—Shree Sanatan Dharma Sabha. The Apex Body also supports religion, culture and sports and additionally provides business and employment support. As security is a serious need, there’s a team of volunteers who come together to provide security assistance during the time of holy festivals.”

Visiting the SSDS complex was a lot of fun. Every early evening, you find many members of the Hindu community gathering around. A lot of them join the religious rituals. Women sit together and chant the holy scriptures; outside, old men gather in a “parliament” and discuss the day’s events. Under the same roof you get a chance to see various well-equipped Hindu shrines run by Hindu priests. One such priest is Lakshmi Narasimha Rajagopal Iragavarapu. “I was sent here from India by my guru. When this Balaji Temple was built, the swamis, priests and Deities were all brought from Tirupati, India.” When I asked whether worship here differs from practice in India, he replied, “We are the ones performing the pujas and therefore there is no difference between the way the rituals are performed in Tanzania and in India.” “We also have shrines for Lakshminarayana, Shiva, Jalaram, Sai Baba and Krishna. We all come under Sanatan Dharma.”

Rajagopal, who arrived in Tanzania in 2017, offered a fresher outsider’s perspective on the life of the community. “The Hindu Tanzanians who have been here for three or four generations are still very much connected to our



Sanatan Dharma and follow all the traditions: Ganapati puja, Dandiya, Garba Navaratri and more.” Rajagopal said he felt at home in Tanzania and observed that the smaller community size seemed to work in its favor: “I sense they receive the transmission in a very good way.”

When I asked about the country’s religious tolerance and his personal integration, he replied: “The locals are very polite and soft people. There is acceptance and tolerance toward other religions. Some are curious about our temples and holy figures and ask me questions. We also respect others. Our Christian and Muslim workers are free to do their own prayers undisturbed, and sometimes they even come and receive prasad. Our guru says: ‘The goal of reaching God is always the same, while the ways to get there may differ. Yet one God is there, and getting the blessings is the same.’”

“Are you also teaching Hinduism to the children?” I asked. “Yes. We have classes here—Saraswati Pathshala—where we teach basic shlokas (sacred verses) in the Sanskrit language.” As Janki Sinha confirmed: “We bring the children to the temple to listen to readings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu content. In the past, it was even compulsory to memorize and learn shlokas by heart.”

Indian traditions are also maintained in family structure. Many Hindus follow the cultural practice in which elderly parents live in the same home as their children and grandchildren, provided the house is large enough.

Death, too, reveals the depth of this connection to religion. Once a person dies, some rituals are carried out in Tanzania. People may first take the body home, perform the

customary rituals, and later bring it for cremation on a wooden pyre or in a gas crematorium. Some may then have the ashes transported back to India for the final rites. The Shree Hindu Mandal supports and subsidizes this process, requiring people to pay only minimal fees.

A clear picture emerged from different sources: Hindus in Tanzania are strongly connected to their roots. Those who were born here see themselves as Tanzanian, but more specifically as Indo-Tanzanians. It is not a personal effort by individuals alone, but a joint effort by a well-united community that preserves their culture and traditions. The willingness of parents to send their children beyond official school time to study the holy texts and scriptures is unmistakable—this is their dharma.

Expressions of Cultural Heritage

Walking through the “Indian quarter” of Dar es Salaam felt surreal. I had arrived in Tanzania directly from India and suddenly I felt as though I was back in the Indian subcontinent! Besides Indian restaurants serving amazingly tasty food, there were shops for Indian snacks and treats, men sitting on the ground outside a temple selling flowers for offerings and women in kurtas browsing fruits and vegetables at a street stall. Not far away stands the T.B. Sheth Public Library, a prime expression of Indian culture and history. Founded in 1938, it houses 7,000 books in Gujarati. In this small Indian neighborhood, the only thing that brought me “back to reality” was an occasional local Tanzanian passing through the street.

People meet in restaurants to dine on their favorite traditional foods made by chefs from

India. Anyone unfamiliar with Indian food traveling through Tanzania could easily conclude that samosa, chapati, biryani and chai are African dishes, since they appear on almost every menu, not only in Indian restaurants. I heard that the early Indian settlers taught African ladies the intricacies of Indian cuisine, and that some learned to cook “almost” as well as Gujarati women. Food is a central part of culture, a living expression of tradition, and the Hindu diaspora offers a powerful example of how a community can maintain its heritage while living far from its homeland. In fact, when traditional cuisine is preserved abroad, it is almost always a sign that religion and other customs are being kept alive as well.

A Faith Far from Home

During my trip through Tanzania, I hoped to meet Hindus descended from people who settled in East Africa before British rule began in 1920, to explore whether their perception of and relationship with religion differed from that of Hindus whose families arrived during the colonial period. Unfortunately, I was unable to do so, since it appears that the early settlers from India were mostly Muslims. But I did observe how living far from one’s homeland strengthens collective, national and religious identity. The heightened sense of belonging draws people of shared backgrounds closer together, making such communities remarkably unified, marked by fewer internal disputes and a strong spirit of solidarity.

In most interviews, one theme kept recurring whenever I asked whether there was any desire to move to India. People said they enjoy their peaceful life in Tanzania and feared that India might be more crowded, noisy and hectic. They do love India and visit their family there often, yet Tanzania is home. “It is a peaceful country; we do not feel discrimination or racism, and we contribute greatly to the local economy,” said Bharat Gopal, an expatriate originally from Bengaluru. “I feel that Indians here preserve their culture and religion even more strongly because life in Tanzania is less intense and gives us more time. We also do it to show our families back home that our traditions are kept alive rather than neglected.”

It’s safe to say that some degree of generational erosion of religious practice is seen everywhere, and Hinduism in Tanzania is likely no exception. Nevertheless, the overall situation appears stable, and Hinduism is here to stay. It was beautiful to witness how the people I met throughout my research were flourishing. They did not seem torn between two cultures or caught between two worlds. Quite the contrary, there was a profound sense of harmony and peace in being Hindu in Tanzania.



COURTESY BHAJJU SHYAM

ART

Modern Strides in Storytelling Through Signature Styles

As Gond painting gains global acclaim, its artists bring mythology, memory and identity vividly into the present

BY GAURI GHARPURE, INDIA

IMAGINE A PEACOCK—ITS MAGNIFICENT feathers fanned out as a spectacle of blues, greens and yellows—dominating the canvas. Or picture intertwined fish, their scales colored in shades of sea green, frolicking in an ocean whose waves are intricately

outlined in gentle, repetitive strokes. There are turtles and deer, lions and elegant trees in intricate shapes and forms, big cats and monkeys and an occasional depiction of human life. Gond art is difficult to forget once seen because of its deceptively effortless, highly distinct style that thrives on graceful repetitive patterns and an evolved eclectic color sensibility.

Over the last four decades, the art form has entered the mainstream and is now celebrated by museums, government initiatives and art curators around the world. Almost 250 artists in Patangarh, a village in Madhya Pradesh's Dindori district, earn their livelihoods from Gond painting. A smaller number of Gond artists are based in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

A Language of Lines & Symbols

At first glance, the Gond style looks deceptively simple, with the repetitive use of basic forms and shapes such as lines, dots and circles. The Gond concept of *andaj* (egg) and *pindaj* (sperm) symbolizes cosmic creation. This belief is reflected in Gond art, where artists combine egg-shaped forms to create animals and birds. It is the meditative detail that goes into the paintings, the choice of colors and the skillful superimposition of shapes which create varied figures with a dexterity that makes this form eye-catching and appealing to the common person browsing through stalls at exhibitions in India.

"In cases of Madhubani or Warli art, we can only know the art, not the artist. But in Gond painting, each artist has their signature style. We can identify the artist through their art," says Padma Shri awardee Bhajju Shyam, whose distinctive motifs have be-



GAURI GHARPURE

Art: (left) Padma Shri awardee Bhajju Shyam adds fine details and patterns to a Gond painting; (above left) Venkat Singh Shyam with a large textile work; (above right) Gond art by Venkat rendered in Chamba Rumal embroidery by Padma Shri Lalita Vakil for a Bridge Bharat collaboration.

come his signature style.

He depicts leaves, branches bereft of trees and tribal tattoos. He also depicts the dance of men and women holding hands with a repetitive chain-like pattern. "Today, even non-tribal people are taking to Gond art, copying designs, printing them on bags, bedsheets and curtains. Only 15 or 16 original artists with distinct signature styles remain," Bhajju notes.

When asked about stylistic innovations he has successfully experimented with, Bhajju shares how he mixed black and white painting with colors to create a distinct effect; the resultant exhibition was hugely successful, with many sales. He also uses a combination of brushes and pens. "When I was in Paris, I saw artists painting white on white. That seemed very intriguing. When I came back, I tried working with white on white and eventually narrowed it down to a gray-over-white style. The series made this way was displayed in exhibitions in Cochin, Delhi and

Mumbai."

Another Gond artist, Gariba Singh Tekam, is known for the big cats that predominate in his work. They are usually depicted with a conspicuous cotton-candy-like mane inspired by a Gond legend. Tekam explains, "One story says a spider was asked to weave a web on a lotus leaf to make the first layer of earth. The lion's mane is visualized after the spider's web." He also uses swatches of three vertical lines: "In tribal culture, God is not worshiped as an ideal but rather as a variety of symbols, such as a flag, a wooden post, a trident and so on. I use the three lines to represent the top of the trident. They can also signify the earth, sky and the netherworld."

The Crow Was Once White

During a workshop at the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa in December 2024, Gond artist Venkat Singh Shyam traced the art form's rich history of cosmic creation, Deities and spiri-



GAURI GHARPURE

tual symbolism. Though standalone Gond paintings are now popular commercially, they were originally created as thematic series narrating episodes from Gond mythology.

The paintings were an avenue to keep the legends of the community alive and revolved around stories of Deities and provided a unique peek into evolutionary tales as passed on by their ancestors. Most of these Deities have local references and do not fully correspond to Hindu Deities, though there are some similarities, Venkat Singh Shyam explains. "Without *akaar* and *prakar*, that is, without shape and form, these are symbolic representations that one may encounter during a walk through the village or the jungle areas. For example, one may see a trident resting by a tree, a stone or a mud platform—with offerings whose nature indicates the Deity that is being prayed to.

"Each Deity has a different offering, be it chicken, goat or boar. Even the color of the animals offered used to be specific to the Deities being placated. For example, a white chicken would be offered to Mahadev, a brown one to Badadev and a black fowl to Kali. Some Deities took the offering of *ganja* (marijuana) while some were pleased with jaggery and ghee. A particular resin, called *raal* that is typically used only at the time of cremation, was used for Bhairav puja," he continues.

With such a well-codified form of symbols and colors, Gond paintings almost served as open books for the community to quickly gauge the legends that the artists were portraying.

Pointing to a painting in a book, Venkat recounted a Gond myth that crows were not always black: Mahadev created a white crow from the mud on his body and sent it in search of earth. When the crow rested on a serpent's head, the serpent spat venom and turned the crow black. The crow and a giant crab coaxed a pair of earthworms into giving them earth and made five balls. The crow carried one ball of earth in his beak and one in each claw while the crab took the rest in its pincers. While speaking, the crow dropped one ball into a dirty place called *melagarh*. Mahadev sent a wild boar to retrieve it, then created the nine planets from the five balls. Innumerable such stories are



embedded in Gond culture but have increasingly taken a back seat in recent times. "The younger generation of painters does not necessarily know the symbolism deeply rooted in Gond culture—and therefore in Gond paintings—rather, they could be called accomplished artists who know well how to play with colors," Venkat observes.

At 16, Venkat Singh Shyam created his first drawing on brown paper, dedicated to the Devi, using his signature dot-and-semicircle motif. The dot, he notes, represents the "Paramatman" or the "Infinite," and the five semi-circles represent the five elements. Together they form the community that is the basis of life. Each Gond artist develops a distinctive style. Some use dashes, some use wavy patterns, while some intersperse the canvas with a combination of two or more such forms.

Venkat's uncle, Jangarh Singh Shyam, recognized Venkat's innate talent and invited his nephew to Bhopal to study painting under him. Jangarh himself had been discovered in the early 1980s through Bharat Bhavan, a multi-arts complex and museum, funded by the government of Madhya Pradesh. There, under the tutelage of the institution's first director, Jagdish Swaminathan, Jangarh developed the distinctive style now known as Jangarh Kalam. As Jangarh exhibited around the world, his success helped bring Gond art into the mainstream and inspired other members of the community to become professional artists.

These careers form a clear lineage. Swaminathan mentored Jangarh, who in turn mentored his nephew Venkat and helped his maternal relative Ram Singh Urveti establish himself in Bhopal. Venkat and Urveti then developed distinct careers of their own.

Of Memories, Trees and the Third Eye

Urveti began painting alongside Jangarh under Swaminathan's mentorship. Urveti reminisces about time spent with Jangarh and about growing up in a poor family, when he took odd jobs ranging from cutting logs in the jungle to steering bullocks in fields. He recalls a time when Swaminathan threw a party and invited Jangarh to sing tribal songs. "I will sing," Jangarh said, "but who will play the tabla?" he asked me. We always complemented each other on the tabla and the harmonium. Everyone started singing and dancing, even Swaminathanji," Urveti recalls.

After Jangarh moved to Bhopal, he helped Urveti find work in the Forest Department. A year later, Jangarh recommended him for work at the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, or National Museum of Humankind. "I started by tilling and planting saplings. Now, it has been 32 years that I have been employed at the museum," Urveti says.

Trees remain central to Urveti's work. Speaking by phone from Bhopal, he said, "I



PHOTOS COURTESY RAM SINGH URVETI



Ram Singh Urveti and his art: *Three works in which Gond Deities, birds and trees evoke creation and the living world. Urveti has worked at the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (National Museum of Humankind) for 32 years.*

cannot paint without trees. Something seems incomplete." It is fitting, then, that his contribution to the book *The Nightlife of Trees*, published by Tara Books, has gained international acclaim. "The publishers explained the concept to me over the phone and I identified native trees to depict in the book. I painted a lot; it was great fun," he says of the project, which includes works by Bhajju Shyam and Durga Bai. "From stories of jungles, kings and queens, brothers and sisters, I have tried to capture everything I can."



Urveti has also created 100 paintings depicting the Gondi *Ramayana*. The series includes the story of Badadev opening his third eye. (Mahadev is referred to as Badadev in Gond culture.) His signature style for black-and-white work draws on designs of ornaments worn by tribal women. For paintings, he repeats symbols depicting bows and arrows. He notes that many young artists find the style easy to replicate. "Some actually are better at it than us! But they don't know the history, they cannot tell one legend from the



GAURI GHARPURE

Nature alive: (above) Gariba Singh Tekam's deer move through patterned hills, trees and birds; (right) a Gond-style deer and tree by Bhuma Ravindraraaj, done as a project under art teacher Shubha Shetty at the Austin Hindu Temple's Gurukulam.



BHUMA RAVINDRARAJ

other. Copywork is not going to last."

Urveti's 2024 exhibition at Delhi's Ojas Art Gallery was a major success, and his latest book was launched at the Jaipur Literature Festival. "I have made a series of 45 paintings that trace the history and origins of our native place, Patangarh. I was curious how the area became a settlement and why its original name was Patan, not Patangarh. There is information about our community and customs, from birth and marriage to worship and our 17 festivals. I like asking questions. There is so much we don't know. Art comes from there. We try to innovate and go beyond what is seen and what has been done. There is not enough information on the origin of our communities. Even when I see the collections at the museum, I notice many artifacts still don't have names or explanations of their use," Urveti observes.

Moving Away from Deities

"After Jangarh's death, Gond painting almost died," Venkat recalls. The circumstances surrounding Jangarh's suicide remain contested: some accounts cite depression, while some artists point to exploitative conditions at the residency.

Venkat's own career, however, had begun to recover before his uncle's death. After giving up painting, leaving Bhopal and ending up in Delhi, he worked a succession of demanding, low-paying odd jobs. In 1998, Jangarh sent Venkat and Bhajju Shyam to meet Hervé Perdriolle, a French art critic and curator of Outsider Art Gallery. The meeting proved pivotal for Venkat: he began receiving assignments and has not looked back since.

Venkat's art has changed through the years. "I used to draw a lot of our indigenous Deities initially. But no one would buy those paintings. Perhaps the customers used to think, 'Why should I put your Deity in my living room?' So, I moved to depict the more generic birds and animals that hold no deep symbolism or mythology as such," he explains. The shift is ironic, given how animated Venkat becomes when discussing Gond history and the renewed interest in reviving the Gond script. He stresses, "I want the masses to know more about our history beyond our art."

Some may say Gond art has moved from community symbolism toward colors and forms shaped by popular tastes. However, Venkat poses a counter-question: "What exactly do you mean by traditional? We live in contemporary times, working on contemporary themes, using modern material: our art cannot be called traditional." Venkat adds an existential dimension to the debate over how fixed notions can impose unrealistic ideals that may be detrimental to the art and the artist. For example, visual storytelling of tribal legends, while upholding traditions, may unwittingly create a disconnect with a largely modern audience. Depicting flora and fauna with refined techniques and incorporating elements of modern urban life, on the other hand, can bridge that gap and broaden the art form's appeal. Venkat wants the Gond legends to survive in the community and perhaps reach a larger modern audience. However, at this time it appears that restrict-

ing Gond art to traditional subjects may hinder the art form's continued growth.

Venkat Singh Shyam's visual memoir *Finding My Way* features 170 paintings. His 16-painting series on the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks reflects his own experience of surviving the tragedy. He has been commissioned to create a series of paintings for a museum in Mumbai. The works address the dislocation of indigenous people due to mining and dam projects and explore how forced migration creates urban conflict and ecological upheaval. "Imagine there is a sudden shift. You no longer have the fruit trees or the land where you practiced agriculture. It takes immense time to establish a new ecosystem. I want to bring attention to this ongoing problem," Venkat says. He also illustrates children's books and teaches online. Gond art's contemporary success has brought artists opportunities for travel, exhibitions, talks and workshops. "More than financial stability, I would say the benefits have been immense in terms of the exposure we have gained, which has broadened our worldview," Venkat reflects.



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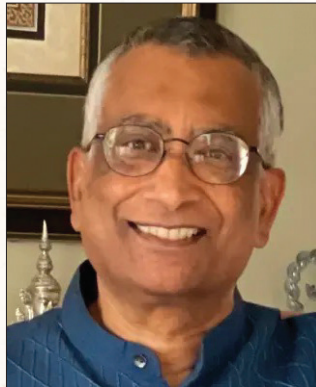
Maintaining Hindu Identity For the Next Generation

How to ensure our children's religious future

BY DR. JAI G. BANSAL

ACROSS THE HINDU DIASPORA IN THE UNITED States, a troubling pattern is emerging. Temples are expanding, festivals draw large crowds and Hindu identity is more publicly visible than in earlier decades. Yet beneath this outward confidence, a quiet erosion is taking place. Many Hindu children raised in the United States grow up with a shallow familiarity with Hindu heritage and a weak connection to dharma as a lived way of life.

This gap is visible in everyday behavior. Children may attend temples for years yet struggle to explain basic rituals. Festivals are experienced as episodic events rather than grounding rhythms. Young adults often identify culturally as Hindu but lack the language, practices or confidence to carry that inheritance forward.



Ambient Dharma and Its Limits in the Diaspora

The upbringing model many Hindu parents reproduce in the United States was shaped in post-1960s urban India, where Hindu dharma functioned less as something deliberately taught and more as an ambient presence woven into everyday life. It was not treated as a subject of instruction but as a background reality. In many middle-class households, there was little structured prayer, regular scriptural study or explicit teaching of our complex Hindu history. Children learned through participation rather than explanation, joining festivals, rituals and life-cycle ceremonies without being clearly taught their meaning.

In India, this posed few problems. Hindu society operated as the majority culture, in which everyday life itself provided constant reinforcement. The calendar followed Hindu rhythms, and public life, language, food habits and social customs carried dharmic references. Understanding could remain implicit because the surrounding environment sustained it. As a result, Hindu dharma appeared self-perpetuating, requiring little intentional transmission.

In the American context, however, this model is often reproduced without adjustment, even though the conditions are entirely different. Assumptions formed in a majority environment continue to guide household life in a minority setting. Hindu dharma in the home, therefore, remains informal and episodic rather than consciously taught and practiced.

Daily routines in many households are not organized around dharmic practice. Images of Deities may be present, but they function largely as markers of identity rather than anchors of habit. Prayer is irregular, engagement with texts is limited, and the deeper roots of Hindu tradition are rarely explored in a sustained way. Hindu culture surfaces mainly during festivals or family ceremonies, instead of shaping everyday language, moral reference points and expectations. Children become familiar with outward forms while lacking a deeper understanding.

Temples often play a similar role. They are respected and valued but treated primarily as devotional or cultural spaces rather than centers of learning. Visits are tied to festivals, milestones and moments of personal need. Even with regular attendance, children are seldom guided through the meaning of rituals or the teachings and tradition behind them. Participation remains largely observational.

In India, these gaps were offset by the wider social environment. In the United States, there is no such reinforcement. Schools, peers, media and public life reflect different norms. When a minimal, non-intentional model of heritage is carried over into this setting, the outcome is predictable. Hindu dharma appears present but peripheral, acknowledged occasionally rather than lived as a shaping framework. This quiet replication sets the stage for erosion long before questions of belief or identity arise, even in households that are sincere and culturally proud.

Suppressing Difference

Alongside inherited habits, another pattern weakens the passing on of Hindu dharma in the United States: the tendency to soften or erase real differences, both within households and across institutions. Phrases such as "all traditions are the same" or "I'm spiritual, not religious" are often presented as

gestures of openness. In practice, they leave children unclear about what their own dharmic inheritance actually consists of.

Traditions endure through clarity. Hindu dharma is not a loose collection of values or sentiments, but a way of life shaped by distinct narratives, ritual systems, ethical duties and the accumulated memory of thousands of years of history. When these features are treated as interchangeable or secondary, inheritance becomes optional. Rituals are practiced selectively, texts reduced to general wisdom and festivals recast as cultural events rather than rhythms that organize family life. Children may recognize symbols, but they are not equipped to understand them.

This flattening of difference does not operate evenly. In a society where Christian-derived norms already shape public life, school calendars and moral language, minimizing distinction does not produce neutrality. The dominant framework continues to provide structure, while minority traditions dissolve into abstraction. Children do not grow up choosing among equal paths; they grow up inside one system, with others appearing supplementary.

These patterns are reinforced institutionally. For many Hindu families, temples and community organizations are the primary, and sometimes only, formal sites of engagement with Hindu dharma. Yet institutional life often mirrors the same reluctance to teach clearly. In an effort to remain inclusive and avoid conflict, programming emphasizes celebration over instruction. Festivals, cultural events and devotional gatherings dominate calendars, while sustained learning, curriculum development and teacher preparation receive far less attention.

Over time, this emphasis reshapes expectations. Temples become places of affirmation rather than deep teaching. Youth programs offer exposure and general values but rarely provide sustained grounding in dharmic ideas or the traditions that shaped them. Children learn how to attend and participate, but not how to understand or explain what they are doing. The result is not inter-tradition harmony but gradual cultural amnesia. Hindu dharma does not disappear



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through rejection but through erosion, when difference is no longer named, explained and lived.

Education System as a Counter-Transmission Force

Even where families and institutions fall short, the consequences might remain limited in a neutral setting. In the American context, however, Hindu children encounter an educational narrative shaped by colonial and missionary frameworks that presents their civilizational inheritance less as a tradition to be understood and more as a social problem to be interpreted and judged.

At the K-12 level, Hindu civilization is commonly introduced through a narrow and reductive lens. Caste, hierarchy and oppression are emphasized as defining features, treated as fixed and timeless realities rather than historically contingent categories shaped by colonial interpretation. This framing marginalizes the philosophical diversity, ethical systems, internal debates and reform traditions within Hindu thought, presenting the tradition as static rather than evolving. At the same time, Hindu contributions to mathematics, astronomy, linguistics and logic are routinely absorbed into the Western intellectual canon without attribution. As controversies surrounding school textbooks in California have shown, Hinduism is often portrayed as a case study in social injustice, while its intellectual legacy is quietly erased, producing a skewed and incomplete account.

At the university level, these patterns intensify. In the humanities and social sciences, critique increasingly displaces comprehension. Caste is frequently treated as a universal explanatory framework, abstracted from historical context and deployed to interpret

Scripture study: Class for teens on Swami Chinmayananda's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita

contemporary politics. The term *Hindutva* has entered academic discourse as a heavily charged category, often treated as inherently suspect rather than as a descriptor of Hindu identity. Hindu traditions are examined primarily through the lenses of power and domination, while their metaphysical, ethical and civilizational dimensions receive limited engagement.

In this environment, Hindu dharma is rarely encountered as a tradition capable of speaking on its own terms. Conferences, syllabi and campus activism often reinforce an orientation of critique that blurs the line between scholarship and advocacy. The effects vary. Students with strong grounding in their heritage can recognize assumptions and distinguish analysis from caricature. Those whose inheritance is already thin often absorb these narratives uncritically, distancing themselves from Hindu identity or adopting the language of critique as a form of moral alignment.

The education system, therefore, does more than fail to support Hindu continuity. It reshapes the conditions under which continuity must be sustained. In such an environment, transmission cannot rely on ambient exposure or goodwill alone. The communities that endure do so not through insulation, but through deliberate preparation.

Why Continuity Endured Elsewhere

The weakening of Hindu dharma in the United States is often attributed to modernity or migration itself. A comparison with other



CHINMAYA MISSION WEST

Hindu diasporas suggests otherwise. In places such as Fiji, South Africa and the Caribbean, Hindu communities preserved cultural continuity across generations despite far harsher economic and political conditions. The difference was not devotion but structure.

In these earlier diasporas, migration occurred largely through indenture or semi-skilled labor and involved entire communities rather than isolated individuals. Survival depended on collective life. Temples, festivals, language, marriage networks and shared customs were not optional expressions of identity, but the foundations of social cohesion. Hindu dharma functioned as an integrated way of life, embedded in everyday routines and reinforced through dense communal interaction.

The American Hindu diaspora is structurally different in a crucial way. Migration to the United States was highly selective, favoring the educated and professionally qualified, often drawn from urban families already less dependent on traditional networks. Migrants arrived primarily as individuals and nuclear families, equipped to succeed through credentials rather than collective support. The same traits that enabled rapid professional integration also encouraged a more individualistic orientation to life.

Education and financial success reduced reliance on community institutions and weakened incentives for long-term collective investment. As families became economically secure, allowing cultural practices to diminish imposed few immediate costs, even as deeper risks accumulated. Professional achievement became the dominant measure of success, while community builders, educators and institutional stewards receded in importance.

This shift also shaped philanthropy. Giving often followed status incentives, flowing toward elite Western institutions that signaled social arrival, while sustained investment in grassroots Hindu

Devotional: *Bala Vihar children chant and perform prayers to Sivalingams in Houston, Texas, one of the largest Chinmaya Mission centers in North America*

infrastructure remained limited. Community life came to depend on volunteer labor and episodic events rather than durable systems to perpetuate culture and religion.

The contrast is instructive. In earlier diasporas, continuity endured because collective survival required it. In the United States, prosperity made continuity optional. Erosion was not inevitable, but where continuity relied on assumption rather than structure, it thinned within a generation.

Lessons from High-Structure Hindu Subcultures

While much of the American Hindu diaspora shows weakening intergenerational transmission, this trend is not universal. A small number of Hindu subcultures demonstrate that sustained dharmic continuity is possible even within a strongly assimilationist society. Organizations such as the Chinmaya Mission, All World Gayatri Parivar and the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha have, to varying degrees, succeeded in transmitting Hindu dharma across generations in the United States.

Among these, BAPS offers a particularly clear illustration of how continuity can be sustained under minority conditions. Its approach is systematic, disciplined and consciously adapted to American social realities. By studying BAPS closely, we can distinguish elements of continuity that are comprehensive rather than sectarian and recognize that many failures elsewhere stem not from modernity itself, but from the absence of intentional structure.

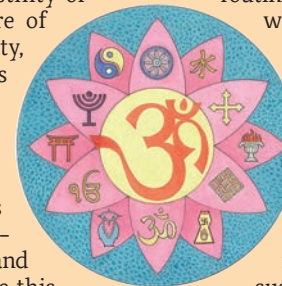
BAPS presents Hindu dharma as a coherent way of life, not as



The Challenge of Interfaith Marriages

INTERFAITH MARRIAGE AFFECTS THE TRANSMISSION OF HINDU dharma in the United States, not through hostility or lack of respect, but by altering the structure of the household itself. In an assimilationist society, interfaith families rarely function as environments in which a minority tradition is passed on without deliberate and sustained effort.

In many such households, children are introduced to two traditions as parallel backgrounds rather than as a shared way of life. The language is typically inclusive and well-intentioned. Both traditions are valued; both belong to the family story, and the child will choose which to follow later. While this approach signals openness, it also frames dharmic inheritance as optional rather than foundational.



Over time, an imbalance emerges. One tradition shapes daily routines, moral language, school calendars and public identity, while the other appears mainly on special occasions. This is rarely a matter of conscious choice. It reflects the surrounding cultural environment. In the United States, Christian-derived norms continue to structure public life, even in secular form, while Hindu dharma receives little external reinforcement. In interfaith homes, the tradition aligned with the broader society often becomes the default.

Interfaith marriage does not make dharmic continuity impossible, but it sharply raises the threshold for sustaining it. Without intentional structure within the household, Hindu dharma tends to recede. Respect alone does not ensure transmission; structure does.

vague spirituality or interchangeable philosophy. Young people are taught what their tradition is, how it is practiced and why it matters. Differences are explained without hostility and without dilution.

Routine is central. Dharmic life is shaped by repeated practice rather than occasional celebration. Daily prayer, regular study, seva and moral discipline are introduced early and sustained consistently. Dharma is lived, not merely observed during festivals.

This seriousness does not isolate BAPS youth from broader society. On the contrary, they are well represented among accomplished professionals across medicine, law, engineering, science, academia and business. Professional excellence is treated not as separate from dharmic life, but as one of its expressions.

The lesson is not theological uniformity, but structural seriousness. When transmission is intentional, consistent and socially reinforced, continuity and modern success reinforce each other.

The Cost of Doing Nothing

Time is not on our side. As members of the first generation of immigrants pass away, lived memory and informal transmission are slipping away with them. What once moved naturally through household practice, language and moral habit is losing its carriers. Over the next one or two generations, Hindu identity risks retreating from a living tradition into cultural memory. Descendants may retain success, visibility and symbolic pride, yet lack the practices, vocabulary and ethical reference points needed to engage dharma as an organizing way of life. In interfaith households, everyday rhythms may settle almost entirely into secular norms, with Hindu practice surviving, if at all, as occasional ritual or distant ancestry.

This is not a hypothetical future. Its structural logic is already visible. When transmission weakens even as prosperity and public visibility increase, continuity does not fade slowly. It collapses inward. Temples may remain prominent and well-funded, yet serve mainly as ceremonial backdrops. Festivals may continue as spectacles, detached from discipline and meaning. Identity shifts from lived inheritance to performance.

This is not a loss imposed from outside. It is dissolution through delay. Every year of inaction narrows the field of recovery, as the generation that carried embodied knowledge quietly disappears. If left unaddressed, the outcome is not gradual diminishment but functional extinction: a tradition preserved in name, memory and architecture but no longer present as a living way of life.

Restoring Civilizational Grounding

This article is meant to clarify a problem that demands collective recognition and response. The Hindu diaspora must come together as a society to reflect on how our historical continuity can be sustained under minority conditions. Any durable solution will have to emerge from shared responsibility and coordinated effort, rather than isolated initiatives. Within that spirit, several broad priorities stand out:

- 1) Build dharmic education programs for young parents and children. Transmission must be intentional and early. Invest in structured learning that equips parents to practice and explain dharma at home, alongside age-appropriate instruction for children in ritual, text, ethics and Hindu history.
- 2) Reorient temples toward sustained education, not only celebration. Mandirs must function as centers of learning, with defined curricula, trained teachers and continuity across age groups. Festivals should reinforce, not substitute for, systematic instruction.
- 3) Redirect philanthropy toward durable Hindu institutions. Prioritize long-term infrastructure such as schools and universities, curriculum development, leadership pipelines and research over episodic programs or status-oriented external giving.
- 4) Organize youth into structured peer cohorts with responsibility. Move beyond exposure-based programming to stable cohorts with regular engagement, progression, mentorship of younger students and real responsibility that reinforces practice socially.
- 5) Prepare the next generation to engage schools and public narratives. Ground children in Hindu philosophy, history and intellectual contributions so they can navigate and respond to reductive portrayals with clarity and confidence.

Taken together, these are not prescriptions but indicators of seriousness. Where continuity is treated as intentional, collective and structurally necessary, erosion slows. Where it is left to assumption, it does not.

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Dr. Jai Bansal is Vice President of Education at the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America and a member of its Governing Council and Executive Board. He has been a Chief Scientific Officer at a petrochemical firm and advisor to the US Department of Energy. Originally published at: stophindudvesha.org/from-living-tradition-to-cultural-residue-the-quiet-erosion-of-hindu-identity-in-america/.



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HEALTH

Ayurvedic Postpartum Wisdom

As maternal health challenges rise worldwide, traditional medicine offers a timeless way to restore the health and well-being of both mother and child

BY KHYATI DESAI-SELTZER

THE FIRST FORTY DAYS DICTATE THE FIRST forty years.” This wisdom comes from ayurvedic teachings on pregnancy and postpartum care. The postpartum period, known as *sutika kala*, is a sacred time dedicated to healing, recovery, rest and the replenishment of energy. Poor outcomes for mothers and babies in countries around the world are evidence that we have become far removed from this timeless wisdom. High cesarean rates, pregnancy complications, birth trauma and postpartum mood disorders run rampant.

Meanwhile, we are losing the indigenous practices passed down from our mothers and grandmothers that teach us how to conceive, carry, birth and recover after having a baby—practices that are good not only for the mother and baby but for humanity at large.

Society has cast the mother-baby dyad aside, often caring only about birth rates but not actual outcomes. The physical, emotional, mental and spiritual states of both mother and baby matter significantly. How babies

are born matters. Medical providers in India and the West discount and minimize the ayurvedic approach from conception to postpartum, but our outcomes don’t paint a positive picture.

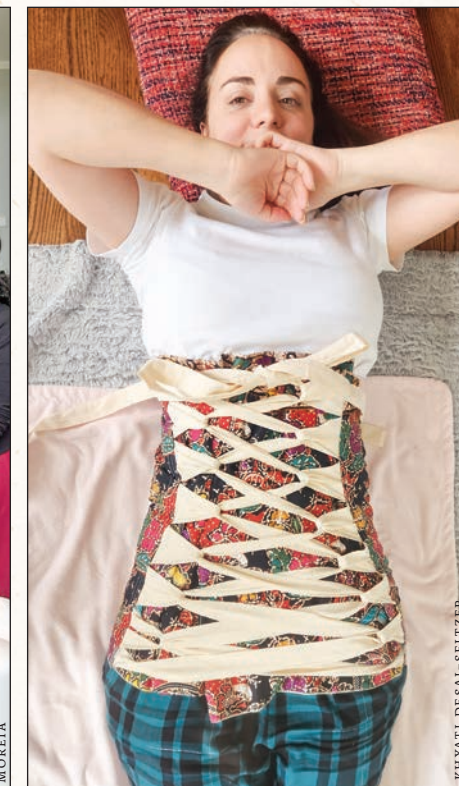
In my ayurvedic course on Pregnancy Care, Postpartum and Baby Massage, I was astounded by the amount of care an expectant mother needs on a daily basis and, after birth, the care she and her baby need for at least 41 days. I realized how little of this is truly practiced today. I have furthered my education to include both Western and ayurvedic practices so that the art and science of these powerful tools can be communicated.

In ayurveda, pregnancy care is called *garbhini paricharya*. *Garbhini*, meaning “pregnant woman,” derives from *garbha*, meaning “womb,” while *paricharya* means “care” or “regimen.” This includes guidance on what to eat, when to receive a massage, how to protect your physical, emotional and mental health, what to do to address or prevent ailments and even what to wear. Your unique *dosha* also impacts your experience from

conception through the postpartum period, but most of us are unaware of how it does so.

Rasayana, which translates as “path of essence,” is a broad ayurvedic approach that includes herbs, formulations and practices intended to nourish the tissues and prevent disease. It offers natural ways to address reflux, constipation, dryness and other common pregnancy symptoms with herbs and medicated oils known as *tailam*. While some of these treatments require consultation with a trained ayurvedic doctor, other practices can be implemented by many expectant mothers.

Ayurveda emphasizes three pillars of a healthy pregnancy: diet, lifestyle and mental well-being. A nourishing, sattvic diet evolves with each stage of pregnancy and is tailored to a woman’s dosha, while physical health is also supported by regular movement, time spent in nature, herbal oil massage and the protection of one’s energy. Equally important is mental well-being, as a mother’s thoughts, emotions and sensory experiences may influence her baby’s development—a relationship being explored through epigenetics.



KHYATI DESAI-SELTZER

Motherhood: (clockwise from far left) Teaching my client how to massage her baby; hosting a Mother’s Blessing for a client; applying the Bengkung Belly Bind on a client

Conscious Pregnancy

When my sister was pregnant, I wanted to have a serious conversation with her about something, but my mom strongly advised me against doing so. At the time, I thought she was overemphasizing my sister’s sensitivity during pregnancy. I was wrong. Having had two babies of my own—one born by cesarean and the other in a vaginal birth at home—and having started, between their births, a business to share the ancient ayurvedic practice of infant massage, I have come to learn much about conscious pregnancy, epigenetics and how a mother’s mental health affects her pregnancy outcomes and her baby’s emotional, physical and mental health. The mother’s energy is transferred to the baby in order to prepare the baby for the world she or he will grow up in. If the mother is sad, angry or lonely, those emotions are telling a story to the baby, especially if left unprocessed. We often hear anxious mothers make anxious babies. This is often

true of our firstborns, as a result of prenatal anxiety and fear.

Providers sometimes belittle mothers by saying, “At least you and the baby are alive.” This is a slap in the face to a mother who has often endured the most traumatic experience of her life and is then expected to recover immediately and care for a human being like she knows what she’s doing. These days, she is no longer surrounded by wise women to guide her through birth and recovery with nourishing foods, herbs and traditional practices. She is left to look to Google—or now AI—for answers and to pay for services that were once part of her community.

Home births are increasing in some developed countries and can have good outcomes for women with low-risk pregnancies when skilled attendants and timely hospital transfer are available. In India, however, access to trained home-birth providers is limited, though home birth may be the only practical option for those who cannot access hospital

care. Mothers should have access to trained home-birth providers rather than be left to choose between unassisted birth when they lack resources and a hospital birth that may include unnecessary interventions and negative outcomes. They then have to cope with the consequences of these outcomes postpartum with little support or few resources. The gifts given during the baby shower do little to support their recovery.

My Postpartum Experience

I was so fortunate to have my mother come to help me after each baby was born. She prepared foods to help me recover, support milk production and keep the baby healthy. She made broths with herbs and spices to help me. She massaged me and my baby, a practice that changed my life trajectory. We observed a 90-day confinement period to protect our baby’s physical, emotional and spiritual health while making sure my mental health was not overlooked.

After the birth of my firstborn, I experienced my mother’s support, grounded in generations and generations of passed-down wisdom. As I observed postpartum outcomes for women in America and many other countries, I realized there is an immense unaddressed need that impacts humanity.

To my parents’ dismay, I left my master’s degree behind to share my heritage and support women through pregnancy and the postpartum period. As they say in our culture, when a baby is born, so is a mother. It has become my passion to support this transition.

Families in America are wholly unprepared for what it takes to support a mother after birth. Few families are taught how to support recovery; too often, support consists of frozen meals and the routine six-week checkup. In fact, everything that could happen happens in those first six weeks.

What Is a Healthy Postpartum?

The ayurvedic *Sutika Upacharam* system describes postnatal care for the mother; *Bala Upacharam* describes care specific to the child; and *Garbocharam* includes care for both. There is an incredible amount of guid-

Modern Birthing Realities

Studies from several countries estimate that 20% to 48% of women experience childbirth as traumatic. In the United States, the official maternal mortality rate was 18.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023, though this measure includes only deaths during pregnancy and within 42 days afterward.

A broader CDC review of pregnancy-related deaths, extending through the first postpartum year, found that 53% occurred from seven days to one year after pregnancy. Mental health conditions, including suicide and fatal drug overdoses, accounted for 23% of the

deaths, and more than 80% were considered preventable. Together, these findings point to serious gaps in medical and emotional support during the first year after birth.

A related concern is the high rate of cesarean delivery. The World Health Organization notes that the international health community has historically regarded 10–15% as an ideal population-level rate. It also reports that rates above approximately 10% have not been associated with further reductions in maternal or newborn mortality. Yet, cesareans accounted for 32.4% of births in the United States in 2024. In India, the birthplace of ayurveda, the rate was 21.5% according to the country’s 2019–21 National Family Health Survey.



Rituals: *Khyati (middle) with her mother, Anjana Desai, during her seemantham ceremony and Gayatri puja with family.*

ance on what to eat, which practices to follow and how to support the physical, emotional and mental health of both mother and baby. Here are a few examples.

Baby Massage: Once the umbilical cord stump has fallen off, the baby should be massaged every day for at least 10–15 minutes. Massage may improve sleep, support immunity, alleviate gas, colic and reflux, decrease maternal symptoms of postpartum depression and anxiety and strengthen bonding and the breastfeeding relationship.

I have seen the results in my own girls and hundreds and hundreds of families who have supported their baby's overall health in natural and effective ways. They were able to decline providers' prescriptions for steroids or antacids or antibiotics when not necessary. One provider questioned a client of mine about the safety of baby massage while simultaneously prescribing a powerful steroid for her six-week-old's eczema.

Belly Binding: I trained in Benglunk belly binding, a Malay practice with ayurvedic roots that uses a long cloth, such as a sari, to support postpartum recovery. This is still practiced in certain parts of India. In Malay culture, someone comes to the home to feed, massage, bathe and bind the birthing woman for 40 days. This personal care alleviates the mother's anxiety and reduces the risk of postpartum depression.

Belly binding helps with pelvic floor recovery and posture, helps the rib cage and organs move back into place, increases confidence and offers many other benefits. The low-grade Velcro binders provided by hospitals after cesarean deliveries can be counterproductive, pushing everything downward rather than providing upward support.

Confinement: Ayurveda recommends

that mother and baby remain at home for the first 40 days. The intention is to protect the health and energy of both mother and baby. From a physical standpoint, leaving home can expose both to more germs and illnesses. The baby's gut microbiome develops rapidly during the first six months and continues to mature for several years. Avoiding unnecessary exposure to illness during early infancy is also ideal. From an energetic standpoint, babies are sponges: their brains are making more than one million new neural connections every second during the first few years of life. So emotions like fear, anxiety, jealousy or sadness in their environment can be absorbed. Babies whose exposure to such emotions is limited may be more settled and calm. Spending time outdoors in the shade and experiencing other aspects of nature, on the other hand, can be beneficial.

For the mother, confinement allows her time and space to heal from the dinner-plate-sized placental wound, recover, connect with her baby and avoid pressure to work, entertain or run errands. Though initially resistant, my husband and I were grateful for that time of rest, recovery and bonding with our baby.

Nourishing Diet: As I shared earlier, my mom stayed with me and made all the necessary healing concoctions to support my recovery. She already knew how to prepare some of them and asked female relatives about others.

This is not a time to eat salads and smoothies to lose weight. It is a time to help the body replenish itself after pregnancy has drawn on the mother's stores of essential vitamins and minerals. Warm and nourishing foods, teas, broths and nutrient-dense snacks are ideal. Ayurveda advises avoiding cold, fried, spicy or raw foods. Fenugreek is traditionally used to support breast milk production. Some American doctors recommend fenugreek supplements. Turmeric is traditionally used to support healing. Essentially, your diet should consist of foods that nourish you, are easy to digest, assist in recovery and do not

deplete you. Other practices include a new mother staying with her own mother for the first three months, *dhupanam* (herbal fumigation), cloth diapering, elimination communication, daily hair and body oiling, herbal baths and, of course, breastfeeding, which is ideal for both mother and baby.

Losing Traditions

For years, I've sought to learn ayurvedic birth practices from birth workers in India but have found surprisingly little knowledge about them. Providers I have spoken with in India talk about the younger generation wanting to copy what is happening in the West and forgetting what lies right beneath them. Tragically, they say "nobody cares" in India.

This loss of knowledge likely extends to the diaspora, which has been further removed from these traditions. At the same time, Westerners are flocking to these traditions and practices. There are relatively few birth centers in India, and most women opt to have hospital births, where interventions and cesarean rates are high. There are not many people like us who are committed to birth work, to teaching it or to practicing it through an ayurvedic lens. I remember when a woman who worked for us in Gujarat asked me to teach her how to massage her baby. I was floored because I had been looking to India for guidance, as I should.

If we lose this knowledge, we'll see more illness, more medication and more unnecessary interventions. The purpose of this article is not to go into capitalism, patriarchy and racism within the birth system. That discussion has its place and warrants its own attention. The purpose here is to question our modern-day norms and return to our ancient roots—to wisdom shaped by generations of careful observation and practice—one mother-baby dyad at a time. And it is high time to restore autonomy and intuition to mothers.

The future of our planet depends on reclaiming our ancient Hindu birth wisdom and passing it on through authentic lineages. Unless we preserve this wisdom, we risk losing it forever as it is increasingly appropriated and commercialized by the West. As our Shastras have taught, wisdom about the womb is eternal. In modern terms, womb ecology is world ecology.

The Author: *Khyati Desai-Seltzer, born in India and raised in America, lives in Portugal with her husband and two daughters. She works in community development and postpartum care, sharing traditional baby massage and belly-binding practices through her business Vyana Infant Massage. Khyati is part of a collective focused on training birthworkers in Ayurvedic traditions. Learn more vyanainfantmassage.com.*

Hindu Heritage Endowment

Estate Planning Balanced Giving: Simple Solutions for Life's Financial Challenges

A will or living trust allows you to protect your loved ones long after your lifetime. These documents can also give you the power to provide the causes you care deeply about with the vital resources they need to thrive. Here are a few basics about using your will or trust to make a lasting connection to Hindu Heritage Endowment:

How to Make Your Gift

Including HHE in your will or trust is incredibly easy. Start by contacting us to request official wording for your gift or download the pdf file at the url below.

Then ask your estate planning attorney to use this language when you create your will or trust. If you already have a will or trust, simply ask your attorney to update the existing document.

Your Benefits

It's worry-free. You won't give anything away until after your passing, so you can keep using your possessions and finances. You have choices. You can specify a certain item, an amount of money, a gift contingent upon certain events or a percentage of your estate.

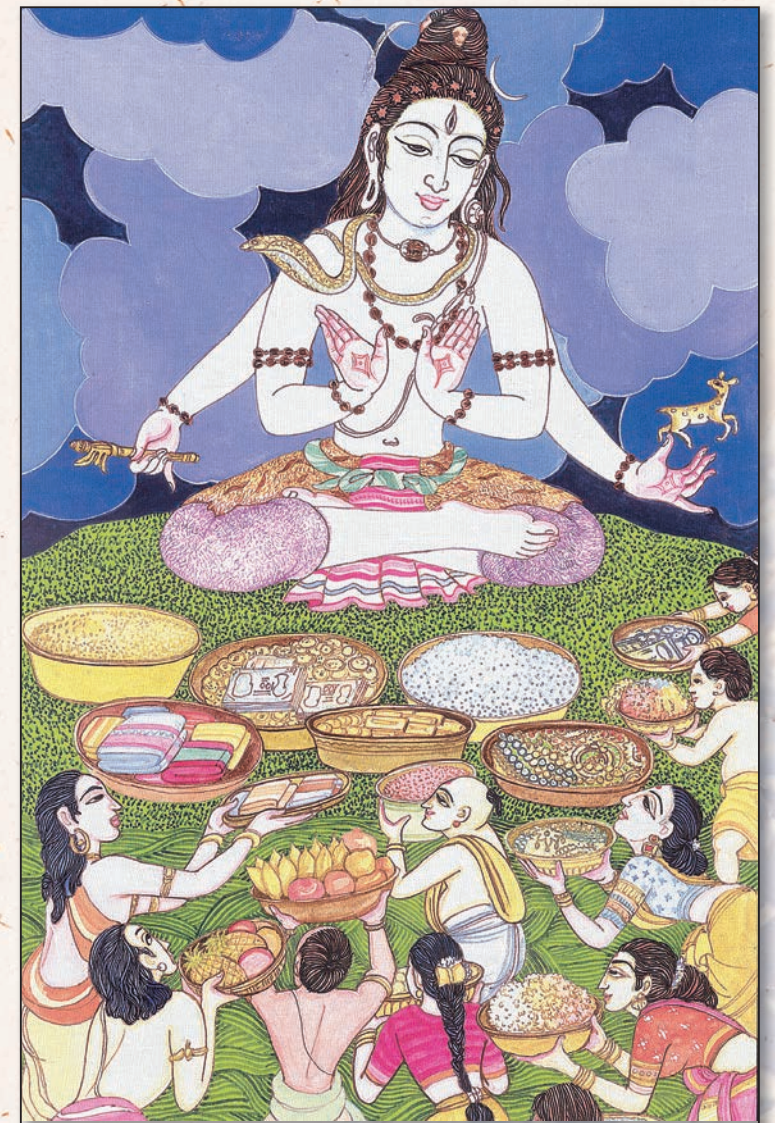
We're Here to Help

If you're ready to make a gift, we're here to help answer any questions. The impact you can have is priceless. We can help you identify a gift to fit your goals.

Strengthen your family's future and continue your support of Kauai's Hindu Monastery by downloading the PDF file at:

www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml

For information on establishing a fund at Hindu Heritage Endowment, contact Shanmuganathaswami at hhe@hindu.org.



APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment		Positive Discipline Endowment	
Fidelity Charitable	US\$54.00	Sumitraben Amin	251.00	Vinaya Alahan	216.00
Mary-Grace Calosso	51.00	Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	11.00		
Rajendra Giri	153.00	Kalpana Devasagayam	146.55	Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund	
Gowri Nadason	131.90	Omayya Devasagayam	36.64	Rogini Shummoogum	600.00
Shamalah Nataraja	2,505.00	Leena Lakshmi Devasagayam			
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	& Anand Kumar Letchuman	73.27	Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00	Yamini Madhavan	216.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00
Nandini Siva	505.00	Umasankaran Mohambourame	153.00	Niroshni Shiyamsunthar	51.00
Homa Sivalingam	21.00	Gowri Nadason	131.90	Total	351.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	84.00	Parimala Selvaraj	93.00		
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.60	Anonymous	690.00	Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Anonymous	122.00	Total	1,802.36	Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00
Total	3,839.84			Debashis Ghosh	300.00
		Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund		Alan Jones	497.37
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Kulagan & Seedhalutchmee		Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Fidelity Charitable	54.00	Moonesawmy	4.09	Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	303.00	Miss Ambika Alageeree	6.17	Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	51.65
Frank Burkhardt	30.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	30.91	Suresh Ramamurthi	108.00
Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	11.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	8.28	Hitesvara Saravan	540.00
Vasaant Krishnan	90.00	Total	49.45	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.60
Gowri Nadason	219.81			Ravi Thaker	66.00
Bhavani Nataraj	15.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		Tara Anjali Veylan	71.69
Gajanan Nataraj	27.00	Anonymous	25.00	Anonymous	1,504.00
Meena Palaniappan	51.00			Total	5,310.06
Eswar Raman	40.00	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Mohan & Rajalakshmi Sabapathy	600.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	Rajendra Giri	75.00
Rajagopala Rao Tripuraneni	1,001.00				
Guhan Yoganathan	216.00	Hinduism Today Endowment		Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Other Donations	83,130.27	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.56	Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00
Anonymous	1,123.00	Kulagan & Seedhalutchmee			
Total	86,911.08	Moonesawmy	4.09	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
		Miss Ambika Alageeree	12.37	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	5.17	Anonymous	25.00
Giradevi Canagasaby	41.08	Rajendra Giri	75.00	Total	35.00
Malvi Gandhi	75.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	30.91		
Balla Krishna	172.06	Sarma R. Kunda	200.00	Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Gayathri Logathanan	24.18	Kulagan Moonesawmy	8.28	Rajiv Verma	150.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Silvarajoo Muniandy	25.43	Anonymous	108.00
Saguna Skanda	29.04	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Total	258.00
Shailes Skanda	14.52	Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	20.54		
Nandi Deva Sundaram	300.00	Niranjana Sandesara	1,000.00	Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment	
Nagarjuna & Padma Yerra	225.00	Bala Soobramanien	7.73	Tejasinha Sivalingam	11.00
Anonymous	105.00	Anonymous	63.00	Anonymous	20.00
Total	1,035.86	Total	1,505.09	Total	31.00
		Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund			
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Fidelity Charitable	162.00	Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment	
Anjali Babat	299.00	Akshay Chavan	11.00	Fidelity Charitable	54.00
Nagaraju Choragudi	249.00	Rajendra Giri	75.00	Vel Mahalingum	12.37
Raj & Emma Gopal	249.00	Tamnash J. Gupta	51.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Kalyana Kothapalli	249.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Nandini Siva	250.00
Vignesh Krishnamoorthy	249.00	Hitesvara Saravan	36.00	Anonymous	207.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.13	Himanshu Vyas	108.00	Total	748.73
Vikram Narayan	249.00	Matthew Wiczork	70.00		
Uponder Nazir	249.00	Anonymous	93.00	Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	
Suraj & Arti Panjwani	249.00	Total	684.75	Fidelity Charitable	51.00
Rajaram R. K.	249.00			Rajendra Giri	153.00
Krishna Rajagopal	249.00	Hindu Education Endowment		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	48.40
John Sands	249.00	Fidelity Charitable	50.00	Anonymous	33.00
Rajendra R. Shroff	299.00	Rajendra Giri	75.00	Total	285.40
Umang Shukla	249.00	Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00		
Anonymous	498.00	Total	200.00	Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	
Total	3,841.13			Menaka Ganesathan	150.00
		Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment			
		Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	20.54		

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Vimala Muniandy	90.00	Digital Dharma Endowment		Jayaram Rajaletchumi	12.25
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.56	Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
Kevina Soobramanien	31.10	Kulagan & Seedhalutchmee		Tarangadeva Sinhaputra	63.00
Maya Spaur	30.00	Moonesawmy	4.09	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	12.15
Piragash Swargaloganathan	108.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	5.17	Tejasinha Sivalingam	21.00
Guhan Yoganathan	204.00	Rajendra Giri	153.00	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	95.40
Anonymous	759.00	Chandrama Mudupadi Pedaddu	13.46	Kuppe & Sarala Srinivas	251.00
Total	1,422.49	Neejane Mudupadi Peddadu	10.27	Vibha Sundaram	303.00
		Tileivanen Seeneevasen Pillay	3.09	Ravi Thaker	18.00
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Other Donations	8,280.00	Saravan Veylan	324.00
Anonymous	75.00	Anonymous	63.00	Anonymous	5,751.00
		Total	8,534.68	Total	12,369.83
		Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund		Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund	
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Fidelity Charitable	324.00	Natraj Narayanswami	33.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.56	Guhan Yoganathan	108.00
		Kulagan & Seedhalutchmee		Total	141.00
Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Moonesawmy	2.04		
Anonymous	25.00	Saraswathi Aianarappan	73.51	Himalayan Acres Endowment	
		Miss Ambika Alageeree	6.17	Pabitra & Manisha Chaudhuri	151.00
Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Anandkumar Ayyachamy	150.00	Alka Patel	15,001.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.56	Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	11.00	Total	15,152.00
Arun Aarooren	75.00	Sharath Chigurupati	105.00		
Miss Ambika Alageeree	6.17	Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	83.84	Antyodoy Anatha Ashram Orphanage Endowment	
Dharam & Madhu Bahl	51.00	Charles Close	216.00	Tamnash J. Gupta	51.00
Will Davis	108.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	5.17		
Shubha Gangal	51.00	Rajendra Giri	153.00		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	5.17	Dinesh Kumar Jayaram	7.35		
Rajendra Giri	153.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	30.91		
Brijianand Jugurnauth	30.91	Umasankaran Mohambourame	153.00		
Natraj Narayanswami	33.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	4.13		
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	Chandrama Mudupadi Pedaddu	5.18		
Vidhushei Yogeswaran	1,001.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00		
Anonymous	376.00	Bhavani Nataraj	15.00		
Total	1,967.90	Shamalah Nataraja	2,505.00		
		Indra & R. Neelameggham	1,000.00		
Panchangam Endowment Fund		Dolly & Asokan Paramanathan	251.00		
Sidharth Sankar	11.00	A. Paranthaman	4.90		
Vijay Srinivasan	11.00	Neejane Mudupadi Peddadu	10.27		
Total	22.00				

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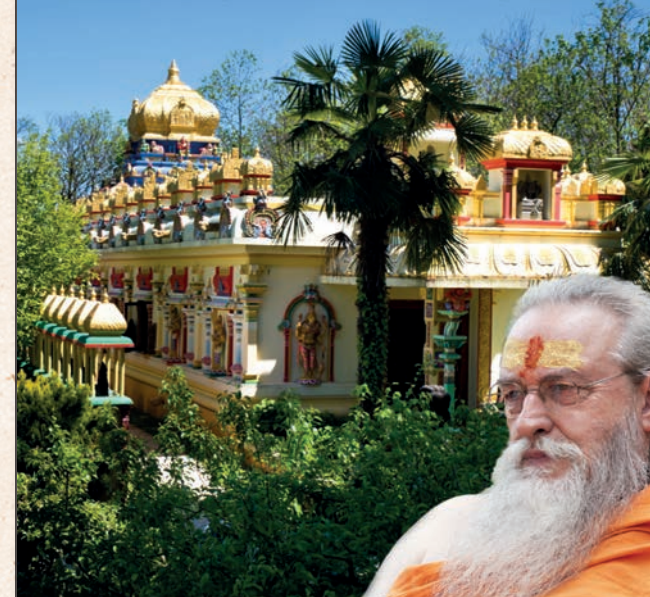
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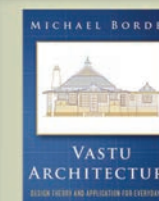
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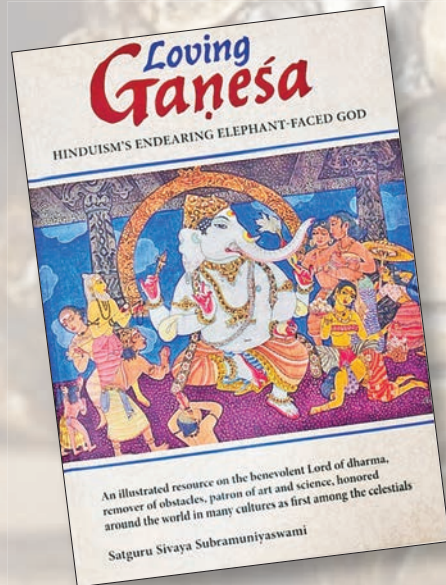


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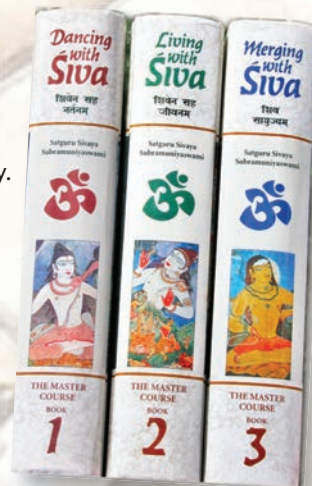
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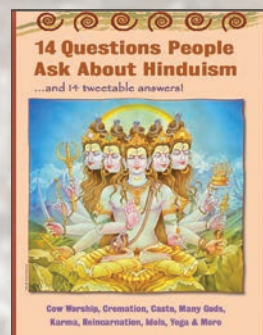
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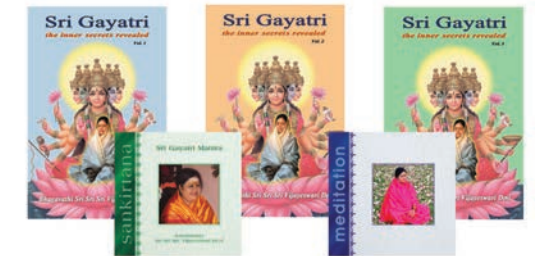


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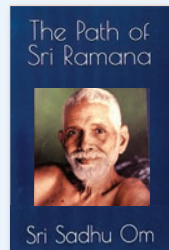


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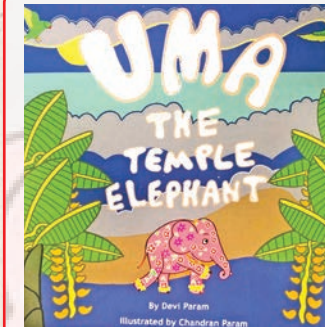
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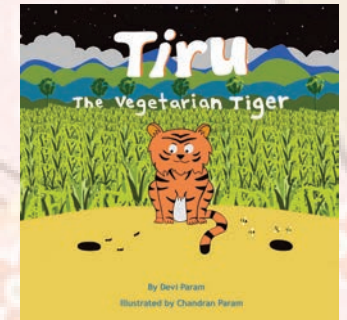
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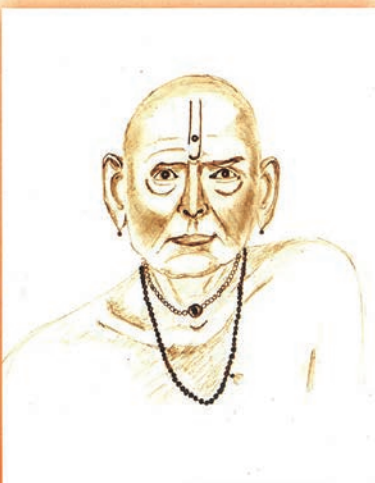


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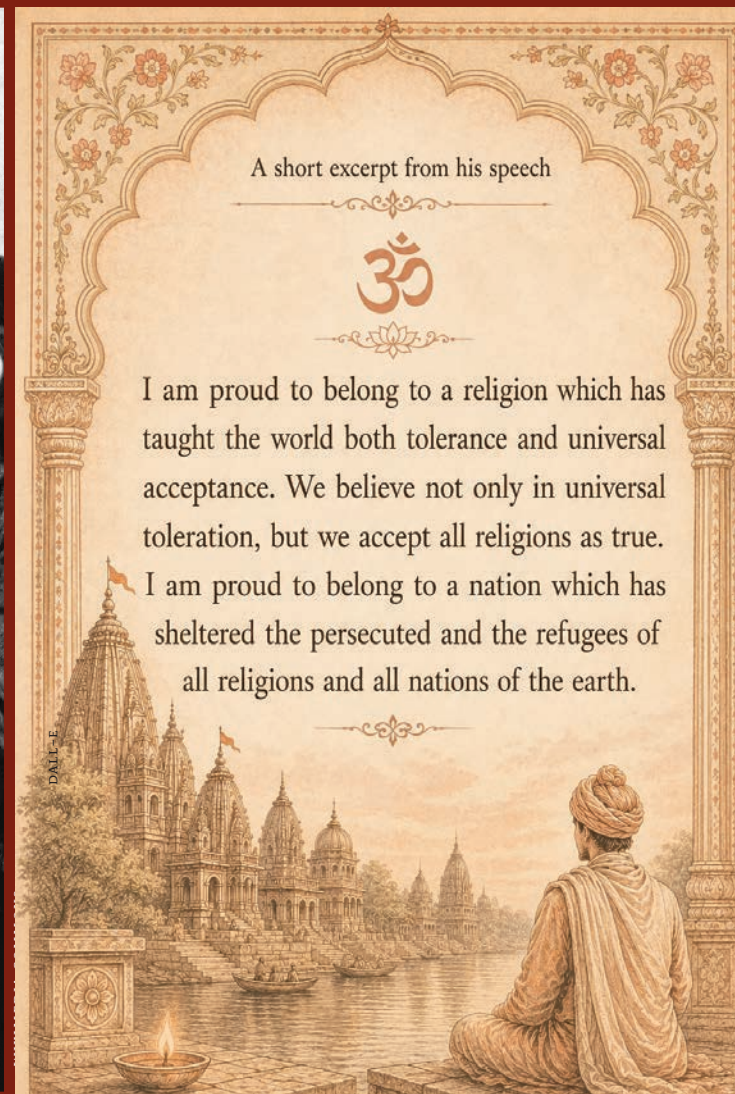
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Historic Hinduism



East to West: Swami Vivekananda (middle) at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago

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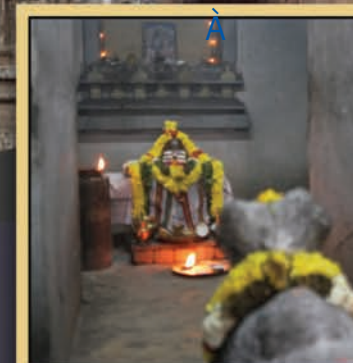
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And how I miss
The shimmering foothills
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Holy and serene Ganga
Gently flowing its way
To the sea.

Yet, more keenly than
Than all of Earth's delights,
Do I miss
My Home.
How deeply
I long
For Home!

My soul, my soul,
Flow gentle
Like Ganga
On your way
To the Sea.

Flow gentle
On your way
To the Sea.

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